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Virtual Studio Practices: Visual Artists, Social Media and Creativity

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ABSTRACT

Artists' practices are varied. Two extremes include the need for complete solitude when working and others who seek social environments such as collaborations in communal studio settings. In addition to these real life studio practices new technologies and social media have made it possible for artists to use virtual studio practices in the process of developing creative work.

Working virtually offers a range of interesting benefits for creative practice. This article explores the author's recent experiences in virtual studio practices in light of the literature on this topic and considers the implications for creativity. It highlights five specific benefits in using virtual studio practices and considers possible limitations of working in such a manner.

In exploring virtual studio practices and arguing the case for such ways of working, this article contributes to research and understandings about creative practice by discussing one artist's reflective experience of using virtual studio practices.

Keywords: *Social Media; Virtual Studio; Art; Creativity; Studio; Blogs; Twitter; Instagram*

1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 ART PRACTICES

Art practices amongst artists vary widely. Henry James in his study of the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne noted the extreme isolation in which he worked over the first 12 years of his writing career (Farrell, 2001). About this style of working, perhaps controversially for those who support it, 'James argues that Hawthorne's isolation delayed his development. He suggests that, without a community of peers, a writer develops with more difficulty' (Farrell, 2001, p. 1). Hawthorne's choice of isolation may represent an extreme example of the solo end of the artist work spectrum. However, it does highlight one preference amongst the many that artists have for their work practices.

Working solo characterises the mainstream population's stereotypical conceptualisation of artists' practice but there are also artists who work in collaborations with others and/or in communal studios. This is certainly the case for visual artists who are the focus of this article. Visual artists choose to work collaboratively for a range of reasons, some related to inspiration, some because of the creative work possible when the meshing together of individuals occurs, and some related to logistics and serendipitous opportunity. Others might choose to work on creating work alone but do so in communal

studio settings. Printmakers often work in this way due to the size and expense of equipment such as printing presses, often not affordable for individual artists. Others, such as painters and sculptors choose to work in communal studio settings with their own discreet space. This kind of work setting allows for a degree of privacy as well as the camaraderie of working near other artists that extends from studios in such situations. Some artists choose to move between all of these variations of art practice depending on the nature of their projects and individual circumstances and needs at any given time.

One of the reasons artists choose to work in the ways that they do is related to creativity. Creativity is stimulated differently for different people, but for some, it is the social aspects of creativity that assist them in feeling inspired and creating new work. Cropley (2006) has researched the social approach to creativity and motivation but in the context of learning environments, while Boden (1994; 2001) has developed extensive ideas about the social-cultural dimension of creativity. In her research she highlights the social and cultural connections to self-confidence and motivation in creative endeavours.

1.2 VIRTUAL STUDIO

The introduction of new technologies and particularly the advent of social media have opened up new ways of working for visual artists. While the art practices as described above are dependent upon real life interactions, new technologies, especially the interactivity possible with Web 2.0 [1] social media platforms has enabled the development of virtual communities and innovative practices for artists. Unlike the earlier version of Internet technology consisting of static, non-interactive individual websites, artists now have the opportunity to interact with Internet applications such as social media in ways that can enhance and supplement their creative practices. Could such a way of working have a positive affect on creativity and motivation for visual artists prepared to work with the technology it affords? Such a question is important to ask but is largely unknown with no research having been conducted to date on this topic.

One description that has been used to encompass the use of interactive technology such as social media in the studio practices of artists is the term *virtual studio*. At present there is a limited understanding of and enactment of this concept. For example, according to Wikipedia, the use of virtual studio as a practice does not appear to have reached much beyond the worlds of television and movie studios (Wikipedia,

Virtual Studio). Early on in Internet history, McNiff (2000) used the term 'virtual studio' in the context of art therapy practice. Often considered a radical experimenter with the form amongst his art therapy peers in the use of such technology, his early pre-Internet ventures into this realm included 'video art therapy' (McNiff, 2000, p. 86). McNiff's writing on the virtual studio occurred before the development of Web 2.0 technologies, particularly social media, thus, his explorations of its potential do not encompass the full range of possibilities opened up by vastly improved technology and interactive social media platforms.

Brown (2012) and Gauntlett (2011) have researched in the area of Web 2.0, Gauntlett specifically in relation to creative contexts, and both argue that these technologies have enabled the development of new engaging forms of social interaction. For artists, as McNiff's (2000) early work in virtual studio practices hinted at, this means the potential for exciting collaborations and communication. My previous research (Budge, 2012) into artists and designers who maintain blogs supports this notion. Further, Papacharissi argues that the Internet has revitalized social relations and highlights blogs as a means 'to create online network social contact' (2007, p. 21). While her research is broadly based and does not focus on artists and their use of Web 2.0 technology such as social media, there is much that can be translated from this observation into the creative practice worlds in which artists inhabit.

Three specific social media tools that visual artists are now using in their virtual studio practices include blogs, micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter, and Instagram — an appealing photography based smart phone application, used by designers and makers of all descriptions. There are other social media applications in use too, including Pinterest, an image-sharing device that allows users to pin visuals to their own digital boards. Indeed, new tools that engage artists, allowing them to interact with others, are being developed constantly and others will probably have been developed by the time this article is published.

For the purposes of this article three tools: blogs, Twitter and Instagram will be the focus of exploration. In the context of these specific forms of Web 2.0 social media technology, I ask how might artists use virtual studio practices to stimulate and enhance studio creativity? From a personal perspective I ask how have I used virtual studio practices over the last six years in my art practices? What have I drawn from this experience? Does it enhance creativity and motivation? These are the questions that framed and underpinned the research articulated here.

It is important to clarify two terms used in this article: *studio practice* and *virtual studio practices* (such as the use of social media tools). *Studio practice* will be referred to in relation to the wider practice that artists participate in. Traditionally, studio practice has been a real time, face-to-face (or face-to-materials) experience in tangible, physical spaces. Contemporary studio practice may include *virtual studio practices* such as those afforded through the use of social media tools, thus augmenting studio practice in the traditional sense. Of course, virtual studio practices may also include areas such as webcam technologies and other applications not addressed in this article.

My position as researcher and author require some explanation. I am a printmaker and have worked in a number of solo and communal studio environments with a range of print mediums across two countries: Japan and Australia. I have used blogs to document practice and interact with other artists since 2007. For the same purposes, I have actively used Twitter since 2011 and began using Instagram in 2012. I am also an academic who has worked in universities for many years researching art and design studio practices and education. I bring both of these identities and experiences to this research into virtual studio practices with a reflexive focus on my own interaction and use of social media tools to inform my analysis. Virtual studio practice in relation to the use of social media tools is currently un-researched and requires exploration. Understanding this topic can begin to scaffold a better understanding of technology, the studio practices of artists and creativity.

2 | RESEARCH PROCESS

The methodological framework for this study is framed by, ethnomethodology, a reflexive research approach advocated by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). Ethnomethodology is a form of qualitative research informed by the principles of ethnography and phenomenology, and embodies reflexivity on the part of the researcher at its core. Ethnomethodology emphasises the experience of the researcher as participant and pays particular attention to their understandings of behaviour and the nuances of practice due to their embedded location within communities. In this sense, ethnomethodology privileges the researcher's understanding of the 'lifeworld' of particular communities of practice (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

Such a methodological approach to research about visual artists, virtual studio practices and social media

is particularly well suited to this study because I am a participant or member of the lifeworld of artists who engage with social media. Therefore, this allows me to know and understand intimately the practices, beliefs, values, and what Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) refer to as the 'scenic display' and 'social order' inherent in its make-up.

I conducted my research by observing and reflecting on my participation in the community of artists who use three specific and popular forms of social media: blogs, Twitter and Instagram. As researcher, I was also a participant in the world being studied. Thus, in Agar's view, I was 'directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people' and I 'learn[t] from them their view of reality' (1996, p. 163) in an online context as an artist engaging with social media. This approach to research required a deep capacity for reflexivity, that is, being able to step back from my fully immersed state as participant to reflect on what it is I have learned from my engagement in the use of these three forms of social media.

My research methods involved a reflection on my use of blogs, Twitter and Instagram to document practice, interact with other artists, and to push my practice forward. In total, my reflection on the use of social media in studio practice encompassed what occurred over a six-year period (2007-2012) and this is the period I draw upon for the purposes of this study.

3 | VIRTUAL STUDIO PRACTICES

3.1 BACKGROUND OBSERVATIONS

Before proceeding to an analysis of my reflections on the use of social media as a part of my virtual studio practice, some background information about how I work and have worked as a printmaker is necessary.

My printmaking practice has consisted of a range of ways of working in a number of settings. Studio practice, for me, has evolved organically and changed over time. In the past, my practice was mostly a solitary one based in my home. This was mostly a decision based on practical, logistical and financial reasons. This was sometimes interspersed with working in a communal printmaking studio, however mostly my practice has involved working alone. This solitary studio practice may have been the instigating factor that led to my initial use of blogs, firstly as a reader and then also as a blogger, to document, communicate my studio practice with others, and to develop the work. Thus, I was drawn into the world of virtual studio practice unconsciously

and organically in an attempt to fulfil a social need to reach out to other artists/designers/makers and creative people generally.

In more recent times, I have been working in a communal printmaking studio with a range of other printmakers using a variety of print mediums. This change was driven by practical considerations, for example, my desire to use etching presses. The studio I use is also easily accessible and affordable. It attracts a very social community of people who engage with each other, provide support and encouragement, and share practice information willingly.

Interestingly, what I have observed is that I began to use blogging as a means to interact with others while working in a solo studio capacity but this did not stop once I began to use communal studio spaces. My use of Twitter began during a solo studio period and extended my capacity to interact with others quickly, in short bursts, with visuals and, in many cases, due to the way in which Twitter works, with instant feedback from other artists and creative people. I started using Instagram during a transition period where I was working solo and then moved across into the communal print studio. My current studio practice consists of working primarily in communal print studios with some solo practice on occasion, depending on the print medium I am using to create work.

Therefore, my studio practice has changed over time but has comprised solo periods of work and communal studio experiences. It continues to move back and forth between the two depending on my practice needs. I introduced social media tools primarily during an initial solo studio period as a means to connecting with other creative people but have continued to use these tools, in fact, extending the ways in which I do so, during communal studio practice as well.

3.2 USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The ways in which I have used social media tools have been mostly about communicating and documenting practice, interaction with other artists and designers, self-education, and as a means for inspiration and motivation. In this section, I will briefly explain how blogs, Twitter and Instagram work and then how I have used (and still use) each specific social media tool as examples of virtual studio practices.

Firstly, over the past six years I have used blogs and blogging to document practice, communicate with other artists and designers, and push my practice

forward. I have also used blogging as a platform for reflecting on my own practice and the art world more broadly and for promoting the work of artists who inspire my work. A large part of my blogging experience has been a visual one as I have posted images of my work and the work of others.

I have shared my art practices through my blog posts and have read with interest the practices shared by others, particularly through printmakers' blogs. This has been deeply inspiring and motivating for me as a printmaker, who until relatively recently, worked primarily alone from a home studio. Blogging has been a way to connect with other printmakers across the globe. Being part of this virtual community of practice has been a positive and enriching experience. Blogging amongst creative people such as artists and designers enables a sense of community, a sharing of creative practice, and support for the creative work of others to develop and flourish (Budge, 2012).

Twitter, the second form of social media I developed a use for in my practice has been greatly enhanced, as with many other applications, through the development of smart phone technology. Accessing Twitter through one's phone, rather than a computer, has meant that such an application has become extremely portable thus, enabling it to be taken into the studio with relative ease. Wikipedia describes Twitter as 'an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets"' (Wikipedia, Twitter). Twitter, while primarily a text based application, also allows for links to photos, videos and other images, as well as links to longer text-based sources such as newspaper and magazine articles, blog posts, and any other digital link. Those with smart phones can use Twitter by an accessible application that enables quick and easy 'tweeting' in short bursts of 140 characters about any number of topics to followers of one's Twitter account.

In the studio, Twitter has become a quick way for me to document practice in progress and seek feedback and clarification from others about any number of printmaking or art related topics without having to devote the kind of time required to writing a full blog post. As I work in the studio (be it at home or in a communal setting) I have my smart phone placed near my work area. I photograph work including inspiration for artwork I am developing, early sketches to inform a print idea, the various stages of the printmaking process, and the final outcome. I photograph and tweet about practice issues such as colour, composition, materials,

problems, questions, inspirations, subject matter, and conceptual ideas. This is relatively easy to do via smart phone technology. The only challenge can be in keeping the phone clean from printmaking inks if I am photographing work while in the process of printing. After photographing, I link images to a tweet and I send it accompanied by images of work in progress or work completed to other subscribers who follow my Twitter account. Most of those who follow my account (and who I follow) are other artists, including printmakers located all over the world.

Feedback and communication about work in progress or completed work from others using Twitter can be instant, but is dependent on which followers are using Twitter at the same time as I am due to Twitter being an application that allows for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. For artists using Twitter as a form of virtual studio practice, this form of quick and easy communication with other artists across the world can be especially encouraging and motivating. Questions are answered. Responses and opinions are offered and information is shared. I follow and interact with my Twitter timeline (list of tweets from people I follow) and respond similarly to others as they work. As a result, I might be working alone at home but I am connected to others in the printmaking and broader art world. Working in this way greatly adds to and extends my practice.

There are also other ways that artists can use Twitter that does not rely solely on synchronous or real time use. The use of *hash tags* allows for artists to search out others with a specific area of interest and Twitter organises them into a group or list to be viewed called *back channels*. Back channels that I engage with frequently include: printmaking; art; print; etchings; exhibitions; design and studio. By accessing a back channel on, for example, printmaking, I can view others who have tweeted information about printmaking, including images they may have linked to tweets. Knowing that they are printmakers or people interested in printmaking enables me to follow and communicate with them via Twitter. Therefore, such a way of working enables me to develop and extend my community of practice beyond what is possible in face-to-face interactions.

The third social media tool, Instagram, works in a similar way to Twitter in that the user has an account to follow others and that other people can choose to follow. The main difference between Instagram and Twitter is that the former is a visual based application where text is optional and if used, serves a subsidiary descriptive or contextual function. The image is the primary interaction for users. Artists are drawn to

Instagram for this very reason. Being visually minded and driven, artists have adopted Instagram with enthusiasm and have become avid users of this social media application in recent years.

Instagram gained immense popularity amongst the general population in April 2012 (Wikipedia, Instagram), around the time that I first began engaging with it. At that time I noticed a slight decrease in blog and Twitter activity amongst other creative people and was aware that artists were linking Instagram images to their tweets on Twitter. I was drawn to the beautiful visual potential of Instagram due to the range of interesting photographic lenses it allows users to access through a simple smart phone application. I immediately started to experiment with it and found I wanted to engage with it in studio practice. Interestingly, I have observed my desire to use Instagram in both solo and communal studio contexts. Even though I am with people as I work in a communal printmaking studio, I still retain the desire to reach out through Instagram to a broader virtual community of practice as I work.

Therefore, in the past year I have used Instagram in similar ways to how I use Twitter but more so in the studio as it is so deeply visual. Like Twitter, I use Instagram to document, communicate and develop my practice but involve more visuals. Like Twitter, back channels can also be accessed via hash tags so that artists can connect and interact about their specific interest areas. Instagram's visual appeal makes it a natural platform for virtual studio practice. This unique aspect gives it the capacity to inspire and motivate artists. As a result, many artists have crossed over to this popular application enabling communication and feedback from and to a broader base. The capacity to develop a virtual community of practice has expanded with the development of Instagram. This has meant that while I still use Twitter and blogging in my studio practice, Instagram is quickly becoming the predominant platform I choose to engage with.

3.3 OBSERVATIONS

I have described each of the three social media tools I engage with through my personal studio practice as printmaker. In this section I will focus on my observations and reflections of this practice, to highlight the benefits and limitations of these virtual studio practices. In doing so, I will try to resist constructing a dualistic way of understanding that neatly and simplistically categorises the 'good' and 'bad' possible from using social media tools in studio practice. Such a way of understanding what is

possible runs the risk of reducing and oversimplifying the interconnected and ever changing reality of using social media in the world of art practice.

I have observed five specific benefits in using blogs, Twitter and Instagram as virtual studio practices. Firstly, these three social media tools, as might be expected, add a distinct *social dimension* to practice. When working solo, this social dimension can enhance studio practice for those seeking feedback or clarification regarding aesthetic decisions, conceptual development, art materials and tool usage. In this way, the three social media tools enable the process of practice to be visually communicated in a social dimension that reaches well beyond what is possible through face-to-face networks.

Communicating this way opens up the world of art and art making encouraging an inclusivity that serves as a means to, if only partially, demystifying art, art making and the artist's creative world. Thus, social media in studio practice creates an accessible avenue for the public to engage with artists and art.

The social dimension is enhanced through back channels in Twitter and Instagram because artists working in isolation can seek each other out through social media networks. This was a revelation to me when I first started using the photo-sharing site, Flickr, and found an enormous number of artists using Flickr groups to share and communicate images of practice and completed works. This is further confirmed by Pengelly and Thompson's research into the role that Flickr plays for printmakers (2012).

This social dimension is enhanced even when I work in communal printmaking studios as I do currently. Face-to-face interaction with other artists is important to me and diversifies my experience and understanding of practice by being able to observe and work alongside others as they create art. However, interestingly, social media tools such as Instagram and Twitter are not made redundant in those real life communal studio settings. Rather, they have proven to enhance my experience of art making because of the possibility of including and interacting with more people from a diverse range of practice backgrounds and experiences. What has become clear is that social media tools play a significant role in reducing the isolation factor for me as an artist.

The second benefit of using social media tools as a form of virtual studio practice I have observed is due to the *visual stimulation* they provide. There is immense visual capacity in tools such as blogs and Instagram and to a slightly lesser degree, Twitter.

Visual stimulation is important for artists and assists in the generation of creative ideas and inspiration. Instagram, in particular, has a very strong visual component and plays a critical part in providing this visual stimulation in my own practice.

Thirdly, I have observed that using social media tools to extend studio practice into the virtual realm broadens the possibility of *understanding artists' practices*. That is, by sharing my own practice and observing others' practices via blogs, Twitter and Instagram I am more aware of how other artists work, and such awareness is not bound by the geographical limits of face-to-face communication. Therefore, the act of artists using social media tools as part of their studio process enables an understanding of artists' practices on a global level, contributing to the process of identity development.

Fourthly, my observations have revealed the way in which the use of social media tools in studio practice opens up the possibilities for *collaborations* between artists. While I personally have not begun art collaborations as a result of using social media, I have met with artists face-to-face having initially 'met' them online through blogs, Twitter and Instagram. I have also worked alongside another artist in her studio as she taught me printmaking techniques, and this connection was possible due to our communication and sharing of practice via blogging.

Furthermore, I have witnessed art and design collaborations being initiated and developed through social media. Recently, I witnessed two textile designers collaborate as a result of finding each other and observing each other's practice on Instagram. They live in the same city and so this led them to meet and discuss collaborative possibilities. I have also witnessed, via blogs, the development of successful collaborations between artists who live in separate countries. Social media and technology generally has helped to initiate and enable these collaborations.

The fifth observation I have made is in relation to *motivation*. This final observation relates to the four previous ones: the social dimension, visual stimulation, understanding of artists' practices, and collaborations between artists that are possible due to the use of social media tools as part of studio practice. These four aspects contribute to the overall motivation that is generated as a result of engaging with tools such as blogs, Twitter and Instagram. For artists working alone, maintaining motivation for practice is crucial. It is very easy to feel demoralised and uncertain about one's work: doubt is the constant enemy of creative people

everywhere. I have observed how encouraging it is to see others work and voice their own doubts, issues and uncertainties about practice via social media tools. This normalizes the behaviour and means I feel less alone. I know that other users of these tools also experience this sense of motivation as I have witnessed artists express such sentiments in blog comments, tweets and in Instagram messages.

Even for artists working in communal studio settings, the added benefit of using social media tools to supplement and extend studio practice is the motivating effects possible from extending into a global network of artists. This is particularly so if an artist engages in a practice that is not common in their own city. For example, while I live in a large Australian city, the local printmaking community is relatively small. However, social media tools enable me to access the global printmaking community, which is vast, knowledgeable, experienced and stimulating. Therefore, the motivating role that social media tools play when used in studio practice is beneficial for artists because it can be difficult to sustain an art practice over time.

3.4 LIMITATIONS

In addition to these observations about the benefits of using social media tools to generate a virtual studio practice, I have also observed some limitations. It is important to acknowledge these in the spirit of honesty and transparency as these observations surfaced in my reflections as part of this ethnomethodological study.

Specifically, I observed that for me, the use of social media tools does not replace studio practice in the real lived sense. That is, I have found it is not possible to experience the full effects of studio, including the subtle nuances of interacting with other artists face-to-face about their practice, their materials, their tools, their connections and involvement in the art world. To spend a day working with or alongside someone in their studio or in a communal studio setting involves a range of tacit and nuanced observations and exchanges that is difficult to replicate to the same extent in an online form via social media tools such as blogging, Twitter and Instagram. For example, touching and handling materials, including those of other artists, is not possible via virtual studio tools. Observing someone move around a studio and work on developing their art over many hours is also not possible. Watching someone add aquatint to a plate in the process room with the full encounter of the senses this entails as they

hold the blowtorch to melt the rosin is only really possible to experience in a real, physical studio. A webcam may be able to replicate this experience of observation to a certain extent, but it would be hard to imagine how this might be practical over long periods of time.

Furthermore, through his research into the lives and influences of artists Mishler (1999) argues that spending time and being with other artists assists in the identity formation of oneself as an artist. My experience to date in the use of social media tools as a part of studio practice is that while they are able to assist in looking into the lives of other artists, they do not replicate the act of really *being with* another artist, and all the tacit and nuanced behaviour and exchanges that are communicated through this act.

However, social media tools such as the three I have focused on in this article have many strengths and benefits in the studio practice of artists, but also some limitations. The benefits, from my observations and reflections, certainly outweigh the limitations, and therefore place them in a role that can *supplement and extend* the studio practices that artists already maintain.

4 | DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATIVITY

What are the implications for creativity in using social media tools as part of studio practice for artists? The following is a consideration of this question in light of my observations and reflections as an artist using social media tools in studio practice.

Rhodes (1961) developed four broad areas for understanding creativity. He argued that creativity encompasses the person, process, product, and press (or the environment in which creativity is contextualised). One way to consider the implications for creativity in the use of virtual studio practices like the ones I have described here is to use Rhodes' four areas as a starting point for analysis.

In relation to the artist, or in Rhodes' terms, the person, my observations and reflections strongly suggest that virtual studio practices extend the creative capacities of the artist due to the social dimension they encompass. The motivation that ensues as a result of this would seem to support this notion. Secondly, the creative process appears to benefit from the opening up and sharing of process. Peer learning between artists is the most obvious outcome of this aspect. The ability to understand process through the eyes of other artists via virtual studio practices also appears to

be a positive contribution to creativity. In relation to product, Rhodes' third area, where artists have practices that include a product outcome, virtual studio practices would appear to enhance the creative potential of such developments, including the product outcomes of creative collaborations between groups of artists. Finally, with regards to the environment (or press as Rhodes termed it) and virtual studio practices this appears to be the area with the greatest capacity for enhancing creativity. The creative environment is enhanced due to the social dimension and visual stimulation possible through virtual studio practices.

When virtual studio practices are considered in the context of the four areas of creativity as defined by Rhodes, the person, process, product and press, analysis indicates that creativity is greatly enhanced by using social media tools, such as blogs, Twitter and Instagram. What is implied then, is that artists' practice may change as an indirect result of being motivated, being able to communicate widely and collaborate with others and through sharing of practice in the use of social media tools. While it is unclear, at this stage, whether artistic creation *specifically* is altered as a result of using social media in studio practice, this article has revealed how the *orbit* of creativity is enhanced by social media in studio practice.

5 | CONCLUSION

This article contributes to research and understandings about creative practice by discussing one artist's reflective experience of using three specific tools of virtual studio practice. Researching this area is important because understanding the way in which creativity is generated and experienced by those in creative fields assists them and others in developing, adapting and fine-tuning their own practices. Sharing such understandings provides insight into how technology, in particular social media, can enhance the practices of artists in ways which were previously limited to face-to-face interactions. Such research, due to the newness of the technology involved, has not been conducted to date.

Specifically, this article has argued that there are enormous benefits to be gained from artists using virtual studio practices. Analysis from observations and reflections of my own virtual studio practices suggests that there are five main benefits related to their capacity to generate the social dimension, visual stimulation, understanding of artists' practices, artist collaborations and creative motivation. Such benefits are experienced not only

on an individual level, but have a broader collective benefit to communities of practitioners and those connected to such communities.

There are also some limitations to the way in which virtual studio practices work, the primary one being that they cannot replicate face-to-face studio interactions with other artists and the materials of art making and creating. Rather, at this point in time they serve to supplement and extend the studio practices that artists already enact. However, virtual studio practices incorporating social media tools offer benefits that enhance those experienced in studio generally, whether they are experienced in solo or communal settings.

There are some important implications for creativity in the use of social media tools as part of studio practice. In this article I have argued that creativity is enhanced by the positive benefits that flow from the use of virtual studio practices. The benefits are particularly positive in relation to the influences on the artist and the environment in which they create.

Studio practice and virtual studio practices offer different benefits and strengths. Indeed, virtual studio practices may not be for everyone. Artists who work in solitary environments may find them over-stimulating and invasive. However, those seeking interaction with other artists and motivation to maintain their art practices will gain enormously from using social media tools such as blogs, Twitter and Instagram. It is hoped that this ethnomethodological focus on the virtual studio practices of one artist will open a dialogue for further research and conversations about such ways of working on a larger scale, thereby enabling a fuller exploration of their potential in the realm of art making and creativity.

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ENDNOTE

[1] According to Wikipedia, '[t]he term Web 2.0 was coined in 1999 to describe web sites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier web sites.' Wikipedia, (Retrieved 9 May 2013 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0)

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Kylie Budge is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne in creative practice and the teaching of art and design in higher education and Senior Advisor Learning and Teaching at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. She has worked in the education sector for more than twenty years. Kylie's research traverses learning, teaching and assessing in the creative disciplines; creativity and blogging; conceptions of teaching and its impact on practice; feedback and assessment; and academic development. She previously taught in the higher education sector in Japan where she also studied printmaking.