Chapter 11
Power to Share:
Facebook and Collaborative Arts Practice

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ABSTRACT

Online social media tools have made it increasingly easy to communicate, cooperate and collaborate with others online, and as such offer new frameworks for making creative work. Facebook claims that it helps members connect and share, but what if the people you want to connect and share with are your artistic collaborators? Can Facebook be used creatively, as a collaborative artistic environment? This article draws on the practical research projects 'Feedback', carried out by the author, exploring new methodologies for collaborative creation supported by online social media. The project focused on the creative use of Facebook as a tool for creative collaboration, establishing a possible working model of artistic collaboration using the social media tool.

INTRODUCTION

Online social technologies offer exciting possibilities around the development of art practice, particularly in terms of collaboration. Currently, the majority of artists using online social media continue with their existing working practices, but share this in a new environment. However, these new online social environments offer exciting possibilities to change the nature of the practice itself, offering artists a new domain in which to collaborate, experiment and create. Since its foundation in 2004, Facebook has become a major force in social networking, claiming to give people"…the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2015). Its success has been unprecedented, allowing millions of members to upload photos, and share links and videos as well as personal information about themselves and their lifestyle preferences. How can these tools be used by artists to connect and share with collaborators? Can Facebook be used creatively, as a collaborative artistic tool or environment?

In *Creative Collaboration,* John-Steiner cites the work of L.S. Vygotsky (2000), who suggests that any construction of knowledge is rooted in the cultural environment from which it develops. For Michael Schrage in *Shared Minds* (2000), the quality and quantity of collaboration often depends on the tools used

to facilitate it. So, what new knowledge can grow from using online social networks such as Facebook and how can these social networks affect the nature of artistic collaboration? Online social networking has revolutionised the way we interact and participate in society (Fraser and Dutta, 2008), Warschauer reflecting how "The Internet is not so much a tool as a new social space…" (Warschauer 2003, p.215) Communications technology has developed from a one-to one model (one sender to one receiver, for example the communications media such as the telephone), to a one-to-many model (one sender to many receivers, for example broadcast media such as the television) and now to a many-to-many model enabled by the new communications technologies such as the internet and mobile telephones (Shirky, 2009). Working together, and then sharing that work has become easier, enabled by these new technologies. Social media has changed old models of computer-based interaction. Web 2.0 creates an "architecture of participation… to deliver rich user experiences" (O'Reilly, 2005) and the social tools available offer to be "powerful platforms for cooperation, collaboration and creativity" [Fraser and Dutta]. Online social tools such as Facebook are becoming increasingly integral in our lives. Whilst the authors cited in this paper question what effect the use of these new online social technologies will have on society as a whole, my question is much more specific – what impact can these new technologies and social spaces they create have on artistic collaborative practice?

This article follows a practical research project, 'Feedback', carried out by the author with the live art company Assault Events. The Feedback project explored the potential of online social media to create and develop collaborative artistic content, exploring new methodologies for collaborative creation supported by online social media. The project focused on the creative use of Facebook as a tool for creative collaboration, exploring a number of unique and innovative collaborative approaches to the collective creation of artistic work using the Facebook environment. Through this research we hoped to establish a working model for creative collaboration utilising existing online social tools where participants can develop creative work in ways that are both informal and structured.

CREATIVE COLLABORATION 2.0

Fraser and Dutta (2008) describe how in the new century, power has shifted from "top down vertical forms of *coercion* to horizontal systems of *cooperation* and *collaboration*" (p.206). Similarly, Tapscott (2009) refers to the Net Generation (the first generation to be "growing up digital" (p.2) as, "the collaboration and relationship generation" (p.35), bringing collaboration to the workplace, marketplace and social spaces. For the Net Generation he states, the Internet is no longer another information repository but is somewhere for sharing and collaboration. With computers becoming both faster and cheaper, financial and technological barriers have been lowered and more and more people are accessing and participating in social networking. Shirky (2009) reflects that now large-scale coordination is achievable at a low cost (both in terms of time and money), the cost of co-operation and collective action as also fallen, making it easier for people to take part in group activities online. For Sporton (2009), the use of Web 2.0 technologies shifts creative practice from the individual to the 'dynamic interplay' between communities of users (p.70). In his book *We-Think*, Charles Leadbeater (2008) reflects how whilst creativity has often been an essentially collaborative activity, the web provides new ways to organise and develop this creative work, on a previously unimaginable scale. Online social media can support this process by facilitating collaboration between artists, and perhaps, other contributors or collaborators.

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