C o n t e n t s

Introduction

The present paper will focus on a potentially emerging phenomenon within the triangle of new media, art and society: the artblog (art + weblog), perceived as a virtual space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange.

In a time where the *blogosphere*[1] has almost become an institution of the Internet, still an extremely reduced number of artists express themselves, their thoughts and creativity, or seek 'interinspirational' activity through weblogs. Having followed the r-evolution of the weblog phenomenon for about a year concentrating on the professional uses of the media, I find it interesting, that the weblog is not explored more intensely by especially new media artists who, in their daily work, are developing new dimensions in the aesthetics of the Internet and using the medias' networking potential to engage in collaborative art forums. Considering the, historically proved, artist's need for externalisation and sharing of spontaneous inspirational thoughts and ideas through sketching, journaling and correspondence, the weblog would seem to be an obvious tool for artists to explore. Even considered the semi-anonymous (anti-'auteur') new media art projects and the tendency towards a more hacktivist[2] or politically oriented art, the blogosphere would still be an ideal space for exhibiting, exploring and exchanging views. This wondering constitutes the primary motivation behind the present paper.

Problem formulation

The problem that I intend to explore throughout this paper is based on the above stated motivation and can be formulated as follows:

Considering weblogs as a new media ideal for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange, how can we explain that artblogs is such a rare phenomenon? Is it solely a matter of 'adoption' of the innovation, i.e. with time artblogs would eventually become more significant, or can we distinguish a deeper meaning?

Purpose and delimitation

The main purpose of this paper is to create some initial degree of attention to a potentially emerging phenomenon at the cross roads of new media, art and society, where, to my knowledge, there has not been made academic research to this date.

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1 The blogosphere referes to a community of bloggers that read, comment and reference each others' weblogs on a regular basis.

2 Hacktivims stands for activism on the Internet

I don't intend to come up with solid answers, but rather to outline perspectives worth exploring further. As I haven't made a long term empirical field study in relation to the subject of this paper, the outlines made will be stated upon a so called quick-n'-dirty qualitative study build primarily on time based observation of a specific number of artblogs and e-mail exchange with representative 'actors' in the field.

I would like to emphasize the qualitative nature of the research related to this paper. I am primarily interested in ontological questions related to artblogging, in other words, questions exploring how the artists blogging perceive the world that surrounds them. These questions are important in order to understand why they are blogging.

The present paper is organised as follows: First, there will be a brief outline of what an artblog is. Second, some theoretical considerations will be made in relation to the on-going academic debate on the information technologies's effects on human organisation and interaction. Third, extensive attention will be paid to the methodological questions related to the research. Fourth, I will proceed with a thematical analysis of the collected empirical material before arriving at the final conclusion.

The social aesthetic of the artblog

To understand why the weblog is an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange we need to look at a number of aspects defining the media, both technical and human factors. In this paper I will be arguing that the artblog constitutes a sort of social aesthetic, a dynamic montage made up of fragments of discourse coming from the different artists and creating as well an object of artistic exhibition, of exploration and of exchange.

Before getting into the deeper meaning behind this, I will introduce the concept of the artblog.

What is an artblog?

The artblog is primarily a weblog ("blog") held by artists and reflecting artistic content. To understand the basic concept of the artblog, we would therefore need to understand the general instant publishing concept of the weblog and the reason why it has revolutionised traditional media.

Loosely defined, a weblog is a personal and non commercial web page, in the form of a chronologically dated journal or diary that is as easy to manage technically and as inexpensive as it is to write and send an e-mail, which practically makes it possible for anyone with an Internet connection to hold a weblog. That being said, not everyone is gifted with a talent for writing a weblog.

There exist different types of blogging software that allow different levels of personalisation and sophistication, from the standardised, mostly text and image based, to the more advanced blogs allowing interface personalisation and integration of different media such as video and music streaming. The person writing is usually referred to as a *blogger* and the published material as *posts*.

There is an unspoken rule that a weblog should be updated regularly, preferably daily and that it should link to other related weblogs. This would be the minimum (indirect) rule of admission in the blogosphere, which is the definition referring to the community of bloggers who link to, read and comment each others' posts.

The reactive form of communication that characterises blogging seems to engage bloggers in some sort of collective sense of social responsibility and common purpose, which strengthens the community aspect of weblogs, that otherwise could be perceived as a fairly individual (read narcissistic) affair.

The way of communicating is referred to, not as dialogues, but as polylogues because of the associative and idiosyncratic structure that characterises the blogosphere (Torill, Mortensen et al.: 266).

Weblogs create synergy between publication and process, between communicating towards others and some sort of continually materialised self-reflection. The instantaneous and spontaneous nature of blogging (weblogs are written continuously and usually published without being revised) gives a high degree of authenticity and honesty to the expression. The dynamic, non-linear and associative dimension of the hypertext narrative gives the blogs a lively and a playful character. Links are therefore vital elements in a weblog.

We can distinguish three categories of blogs: the personal, the cultural and the professional – artblogs lie somewhere in between the three axes, in a mixture of the personal / private, the cultural and the professional. The weblog permits an ongoing reflexivity that can be exhibited and shared in the blogosphere and this often permits bloggers to advance in their personal and professional projects.

You could imagine that artist could explore the weblog tool in a similar way as for example researchers. A group of Scandinavian researchers explain the value of the weblog in their daily work:

"Most importantly, our web logs became tools with which to think about our research, it's values connections and links to other aspects of the world" (ibid, p. 251).

The artblogs are most often written by artists who are engaged with digital media in their daily work, for example net artists, and consequently early adopters of the medium.

If we state that artistic inspiration arises from the artist's spontaneous experience of synergy between fragments of discourse, the blogosphere seems to reflect a materialization of this process, continually generating sources of inspiration.

Ryan Griffith (Rhizome.org) speaks of a 'social construction of blog space' (www.rhizome.org). The expression you find in an artblog is the space / tension between the blogger and the blogosphere - a mixture of the artists' expression and the reaction from the blogosphere creating a sort of eclectic discursive aesthetic.

It is possible to distinguish two main categories of artblogs: blogs about art and blogs as art, the latter has been defined as blog.art[3] although the two categories often seem to overlap:

"Blog.art utilizes blogging as the medium for web-based artworks [net.art]. In other words, blog.art is not a blog about art, but rather a blog as art, where the blog is the conceptual foundation of the work"[4].

A French site hosting a number of artblogs writes:

"L'esprit blog-Art est simple : réunir les énergies de créatifs "modernes" et "ouverts" sur le monde, soucieux d'un internet accessible à tous, voulant partager pour avancer dans leur passion, leurs travaux, leur vie professionnelle..."[5]

A loose translation of this would be: The spirit of blog-art is simple: to unite the energies floating from modern and open minded artists who are concerned about an Internet, accessible for all and who want to share to develop in their own passion, works and professional life.

Theoretical considerations

Before proceeding further it is important briefly to outline my own theoretical view on the subject matter. This theoretical understanding has evident implications for the way I handle the research question since it not only provides me with a prior framework within which to understand what I am

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3 Apparently Blogart can signify something completely different: "blogart: [blow-gart] to monopolize a blogger's feedback section with multiple or lengthy comments (http://www.blogdictionary.blogspot.com/)

4 http://glowlab.blogs.com/blogart/2003/08/about_blogart_.html

5 http://wiki.blog-art.net/wiki/BlogArt

researching, but also sets some inherent limitations to what actual conclusions I can get to. No one is a blank paper to begin with and it is necessary to be perfectly clear about what theoretical (and normative, for that matter) set-ups that pervades one's thinking.

There does not seem to be any point, considering the relative recent emergence of the blogosphere, in trying to formulate a theoretical understanding of this particular phenomenon. Instead, it is more relevant and much more justified simply to consider the blog phenomenon as just a small part of the wider IT-propagating movement in our contemporary societies. Hence, it is important to position myself within the academic debate that surrounds this development and its consequences for human organisation and interaction.

With the increasing pervasiveness of information technologies in our everyday lives, the debate related to the "Community question" (Wellman & Leighton 1979) is becoming a more and more fundamental source to understanding the tensions that exist between actors and structure in modern society. This is not the place to delve deeper into the actor-structure *problematique* – it has been dealt with extensively elsewhere in the social sciences over the past decades. Suffice it to say that my own understanding of it is primarily inspired by Giddens (1991) and his notion of actor and structure being mutually constitutive and mutually determining (ontological equals), and that the increasing role of information technologies is to be conceived of as having certain implications for *both* the way structure restrains and enables human (inter)action *and* the way humans make sense and meaning out of their lives and the world that surrounds them. Thus, it is not the emergence and spread of information technology *per se* that alters the way we live, work and connect to each other. Rather, it is the way humans appropriate and make sense out of the new possibilities that is important, meaning in the end that there is most often, if not always, a huge gap between a new innovation's change-potential and the actual change produced. I can therefore only agree with a certain number of scholars who argue that the effects of information technologies must essentially be understood in the light of how people interact in the non-IT sphere (see Gotved 2001, Wellman 2001a, Quan-Haase & Wellman 2002).

The above statement gives a somewhat clear hint at where I stand in relation to the "Community question". Simply put, this question encapsulates the rift between, on the one hand, the people who think that the characteristics of modernity (industrialisation, bureaucratisation, urbanisation etc.) have led to a progressive alienation of Man, and on the other, those who claim that communities still exist, albeit in other forms, while keeping their full importance and relevance (e.g. neighbourhood studies). It is, in other words, the question of whether modernity has led to a loss of some original and authentic form of community (*Gemeinschaft*) or if there are in fact simply new kinds of communities in this modern world based on contract and *Gesellschaft*.

This debate seems to have found a natural extension in the domain of information technologies, which, more than anything else, has come to embody the hopes and fears of the future. Sociologists studying the community question in relation to the Internet seem split between those who claim that the Internet is an ideal space for developing social relationships (e.g. Nancy Baym) and consistent social networks (Wellman, Rheingold) and those (dystopians, e.g. Putnam in relation to civic engagement) who maintain that the virtual / dehumanised nature of the Internet makes it near impossible for a genuine social relationship to develop. Other detractors simply point to the time-consuming character of Internet use in order to prove that "real community" necessarily suffers from contemporary developments (Wellman 2001a).

I believe that very few people are blind to the dangers of excessive use of the Internet (just like watching television all day is obviously detrimental to the human mind) and I fully agree with Barry Wellman when he critically points out that some of the debate smacks of unnecessary retrenching behind extreme and untenable positions (Wellman 2001a). The Internet is indeed neither heaven nor hell but, in my view, it does offer some distinctly positive advantages, notably its relative low cost and democratic structure, that by far outweigh the negative aspects.

One of the most poignant observations by Wellman is that much of the debate has been both parochial and presentist in the sense that many participants have treated the Internet as an entity in itself and ignored what long-term social developments were in motion before the rise of the Internet (ibid.). It is here that the early notion of *liberated* communities, defined as sparsely knit and territorially unbound communities based on individual choice, gains such a powerful force (Wellman & Leighton 1979). The compelling argument is that traditional densely knit and locally grounded communities have given way to other sorts of community in the form of geographically dispersed social networks. The latter are not less valuable than the former, they are just different in form, and one could even make the opposite argument by saying that whereas in the old (often wrongly idealised) local community social relationships and interaction were to a large extent *givens*, modern social networks are much more an expression of emancipation in the sense that who you see and communicate with (and how often) is essentially a matter of individual choice. Visiting your parents, for example, may still partly be a cultural imperative to most people but when you live far apart, sometimes in a different country, actually visiting them often pertains much more to your own willingness and genuine desire to see them than it does to culturally embedded expectations.

The above helps to underscore the fact that I completely side with those scholars who are neither dystopians nor utopians (as Rheingold can sometimes be criticised for being) but are rather calm observers who recognise the historical contingency and longer-term social trends within which the rise of the Internet is taking place. Despite its groundbreaking change-potential and rapid development, the Internet thus becomes a much less dramatic factor than initially expected (and feared by some)

and this constitutes in fact an important reason for striving to understand and analyse online communities as essentially an extension of already existing offline social networks. We have not entered a new post-modern world and I therefore tend to agree with Thompson when he criticises the so-called post-modern scholars for not trying to grasp the full implications of modernity by simply positing the existence of something new and radically different (Thompson 1995) – though I do recognise that some interesting insights have been fostered by constructivists (discourse analysts etc.) and that some unfortunate labelling within the world of academia is sometimes simply imposed by opponents and not initially phrased by the "incriminated" scholars themselves.

Having positioned myself within the "Community question" debate I will conclude by relating some of these theoretical considerations to the specific issue of this paper.

First, one evident implication is that when researching the domain of artblogs it is of primary importance that consideration be given to the well-established offline world of art. As will be apparent later, this aspect is very important in understanding and explaining the relative timid emergence of the phenomenon.

Second, one of the central tenets of the above stated theoretical approach seems to be that Internet use and the formation of online communities are only imperfectly understood if not proper attention is given to the fact that people have only a limited capacity for change in the way they live, work and interact. The effects of technological change are thus incremental in nature in the sense that people first have to appropriate the new inventions and that this appropriation is naturally constrained by the mental filters that are rather fixed in our minds (the way we have been brought up to be thinking, cultural embeddedness and so on). Here the notion of space would seem to be of some interest in relation to artists who, mostly, deal precisely in the realm of space and configuration of space (be it in paintings, sculptures or art installations). Stine Gotved speaks of a double notion of space at work in online communities in the sense that the definition of space is related both to the visible space on the screen and to the social space that is created through the natural human tendency to imagine who the others are (Gotved 2001). One could thus assume that artists, as "space sensitive beings", would be attracted by the new possibilities of creation of visible space on the Internet and / or, on the contrary, be repelled by the lack of visual aspects in the social space.

Last, and in direct line with what has just been said, social space created through online communities (just as in the offline equivalents) is as much about who the participants are as about who they are not. In other words, it is about self-definition and about inclusion and exclusion (ibid.). Here it is interesting to see whether this aspect is apparent in the way artbloggers perceive themselves and whether the *distinctively others* are clearly defined and presented as such.

Researching artblogs – outlines for a methodology

Introduction and epistemological considerations

Researching the freshly emerging field of artblogs it is of primary importance that we define a methodological framework that can qualify the scientific level of the study.

Before outlining a methodology for approaching the research questions related to this paper, it is important to frame basic epistemological premises. This implies positioning my self as a researcher vis-à-vis the subject that I'm researching. The essential value of this lies in the researcher's consciousness of not being caught up in, for example, a blind enthusiasm that a total immersion in the subject could easily cause.

Considering the value of the Internet as a research tool, I must be aware that the direct relationship that the Internet allows between my self as a researcher and the subject I'm researching implies the risk of consciousness misguidance. Being a part of a new media academic environment online as well as offline and having a particular interest in the arts emerging in the 'digital sphere', I must keep a strong awareness of my subjectivity in the field, keeping the necessary objective distance.

Before planning the methodological elements in my research, I was inspired by a couple of basic research questions presented by Nancy Baym at a seminar at the University of Copenhagen this spring. These basic questions were invaluable in preparing the kind of research I have done for his paper:

Why research artblogs – is it relevant, practicable, engaging?

- This is a basic question that needs to be answered before we go anywhere in our research. My answer was intuitively affirmative but needed confirmation later on in the research process due to the novelty of the field.

What are the aims, objectives and key concepts?

- This question has helped me to give substance to and delimit an otherwise rather floating field of research. Issues and contexts could only be more clearly defined later in the research process.

What kind of research am I planning to do – what reading, which information gathering techniques?

- This question is of primary importance – and complexity! - considered the (academically) untouched nature of the subject. On the other hand, I discovered that it can be difficult to plan this in advance:

In fact, it was only gradually through my 'investigation' of artblogs that I became aware of the type of research material relevant for this kind of study. Therefore the first long period of my research (the research period has been of three months (April-June 2004)) was of explorative nature.

The three research phases that structured my study were:
Exploration of the field
Observation and e-mails
Analysis of blogs and e-mails

In the following pages I will introduce and argument for the methods used in these three phases.

Explorative phase

I found that an important first approach was to explore the field with an open mind, letting the research questions uncover themselves, instead of having a series of predefined questions that would lead - and potentially mislead - the initial research phase.

The explorative nature of this first approach allowed a further delimitation of the field or what N. Baym would define as the knowable space[6] and the contexts within which we can study the artblogs.

A basic premise in order to justify researching artblogs was to get a fair impression of the extent to which I could speak of an emerging phenomenon. This implied balancing quantity and general quality of the artblogs. My research has been limited to Scandinavian, English and French language blogs[7], and consequently it has not taken into consideration the local impact that the phenomenon could have in for example the Asian countries, where artistic uses of new media are also emerging.

The initial explorative phase was characterized by general research on the Internet using search engines ('Googling'), which allowed me to coin and identify the term artblog by pointing to a number of artblogs and related art projects.

This research method is not without challenge. The number of blogs referred to as having artistic content is way beyond the number of actual artblogs and some artists define their blog by something more original than artblog. Furthermore, they don't find a particular interest in being top ten in the 'Google chart'.

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6 N. Baym used this term to describe the "what is there that can be known" at a seminar on Internet use in Interpersonal relationships held at the University of Copenhagen in May 2004.

7 This of course does not necessarily mean that the bloggers are physically situated in countries where you speak these languages, allthough the Scandinavian and French language blogs would most certainly be written by bloggers living in the Scandinavian or French speaking countries.

Additionally, this first exploration allowed me to get an uncorrupted impression of the characteristics of a weblog held by one or several artists – an initial impression which of course was developed in the following research phases.

Having obtained this first idea of the field's scope, I researched published material and so-called metablogs (blogs about blogs), trying to find out whether there had been done any previous research on the subject. Due to the novelty of the subject, very little published material exists on the specific phenomenon of artblogs. In fact, it can be reduced to a couple of articles in Flash Art Magazine (prominent Italo – American art magazine) and El Pais (Spanish national newspaper).

But of course the weblog phenomenon viewed from a general perspective has been subject to academic research for a number of years now. In spite of this, there seems only to exist a reduced amount of academic published material. Articles and a few books (primarily non-academic) can be found and these constitute important sources in a research like this. In addition to this, the studies of identity and interpersonal networks on the Internet are of great importance to the subject, as already mentioned at the end of my theoretical considerations.

To supplement this research phase, I chose to e-mail to a number of people whom I thought could have some degree of knowledge and interest in the field. I got a couple of short answers of varying relevance. I also posted a demand on Rhizome.org's news list and got a fair amount of answers (six answers) considered the specific nature of the subject. All the answers contained links to weblogs by artists or containing some kind of artistic content, but didn't comment further on the subject.

This first contact helped me identify some important artblogs, but it also confirmed that there actually existed a number of 'living' artblogs and that there was an interest in the Rhizome community for the subject. I knew that I would have to follow up on the subject by e-mailing a number of bloggers, but thought it necessary to do some preliminary observation, to get to know the blogs and to secure the relevance of my questions.

Observation and e-mails

Having done the initial exploration of the field and identified a knowable space, I found that the most natural way to get to the heart of the subject, was to read and observe the blogs more systematically. The observation phase had to be systematic to be able to get some usable results from the study. I first set up some basic parameters that I could base my choice of blogs on. These were:

The blog has to be written by an artist – in his / her role of an artist
The blog has to have artistic content
The blog has to be up-dated daily

According to these parameters, I chose a small number blogs to follow regularly for a specific period of time.

These were:

The T.Whid and M.River Artblog (http://www.mteww.com/mtaaRR)

Tom Moody's Artblog (http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody/)

Newsgrist - Joy Garnett's Artblog (http://newsgrist.typepad.com/)

Hereafter I elaborated a series of specific questions to explore while observing. The questions guiding this research perspective were:

- Differences and similarities between the artblog and other personal and professional uses of the weblog
- Who are the bloggers?
- What characterises the objects of interest?
- What characterises the points of view?
- What characterises the way of expressing these?
- Is it possible to know who are reading the blogs – and if I could answer positively to this question how could one characterise this public?
- Can we identity an artblogosphere and / or other social space related to the artblog phenomenon

After a rather long period of observation, I found that it was time to get closer to the artists blogging, to hear their opinion on the questions. I chose to send an email to three blogging artists (annex) with the following questions:

1. After having done research on the artblog phenomenon for a couple of months now, I'm surprised to find that not many artists use this media. Personally I would find it an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange. Do you have an explanation to this?

2. What made you start blogging?

3. What keeps you blogging?

4. Do you perceive your blog primarily as a personal or as a professional project?

5. Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?

6. Do you know of other artists blogging (besides M. River)?

7. Do you know of artists reading your blog?

8. Do you feel part of the blogosphere? I mean do you feel part of a community of (art)bloggers?

9. Have you met any problems being a blogger?

Having sent out these three e-mails, I waited less than 24h before receiving five e-mails back with long and engaging answers to my questions. In fact, one of the bloggers I sent an e-mail to, M. T Whid, had forwarded my e-mail and his own answers to five other artbloggers and soon almost every one engaged in an e-mail circuit sending their Q&As to each other. And not more than a couple of hours after this, I could see my subject of research being an issue in the artblogosphere and being commented upon by others.

Analysing empirical material

The following analysis of the empirical material gathered in relation to my research through observation and e-mails will be in line with the theoretical approach presented above and I will consequently proceed with an operationalisation of some of the basic terms related to the online community.

I found that N. Baym's (Tune in, Log on) five variables for defining the online community were useful in organising the empirical material. Following the position of Stine Gotved I added a sixth dimension, the spatial dimension which constitutes an important factor in studying the online community.

- External context
- Temporal structure
- System infra structure
- Group purposes
- Participant and group characteristics
- Spatial dimensions

I will be approaching these general variables systematically through the following analysis, though some overlaps may occur. I will be considering both the potential and the lack of potential for a community. The artists who have answered the questions have opinions on both the potential of the blog media for artists and the reasons why artists don't blog.

Analysis

The community aspect is a relatively complex issue since we are not speaking of a well-established community with a capital C, but rather questioning if we can identify elements that point towards the existence of a community or the potential for a community of artbloggers.

Following Wellman's definition of a community as being "networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity" (Wellmann 2001b), it is

clear that the blogosphere, as described above, shares many of the same qualities as the community Wellman describes. The question should then be: Does there exist a particular artblogosphere proving the characteristics of an online community?

External context

When analysing the external content, we question who are behind the artblogs, their social class, gender, cultural capital, experience with and way of using the media, etc..

Who are the artists blogging and how can this help us to understand the motivation (or lack of motivation) that drives (or hinders) artblogging? Identity and representation are central issues in defining external content and could *per se* be fields of exploration for a thesis. These axes are both central and extremely complex issues in artblogging, because of its semi-public semi-private nature. The work and identity of an artist is mostly one and the same thing, which necessarily gives both a professional and a private aspect to the artblogs. As Sally Mckay expresses it, when answering whether she sees her blog as a professional or a personal project:

"It's a lovely hybrid. The unique private/public dynamic is really satisfying. As Mr. Wilson said recently on his Arboretum (http://www.digitalmediatree.com/arboretum/?27996), "The discipline of online authorship does not favour either public or private faces, but allows the self to emerge in the dialectic between the two".

Answering the same question M. River explains that his blog "is an art project. But adds "that it's hard to say what the stance makes a blog - personal / professional / or something else".

Franklin Einspruch says: "My blog is a personal project but it relates to what I do professionally. As an artist, there is not a sharp line between the professional and personal".

The personal identity of the artist is closely linked with representational aspects. The identity of an artist is sacred and the naked exhibition of identity that we can find in weblogs can hence become an affair of both fatal and vital importance for the art and career of an artist. In relation to this, Dyske Suematsu writes that: "Blatant self-promotion is looked down on in fine arts. Although the success in fine arts is largely defined by your skills for self-promotion, you must do so covertly. The Web in general is now seen as a marketing tool, and because of this, many artists, especially famous ones, do not bother building websites, much less Weblogs".

The artists responding to the e-mail generally agree that the weblog constitutes an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange but they also confirm that not many artists are using this media. A general explanation to this is, as T. Whid writes, "that artists who don't use technology in their work (are often) fairly computer-phobic". Whereas designers and photographs use the weblog at

a whole different level: "There is a huge design blog world, with some of the biggees being k10k.org, zeldman.com, www.mezzoblue.com, stopdesign.com, and whatdoiknow.org".

Tom Moody, agreeing with T. Whid, writes that "many artists are quite simply tech-phobic and/or uninclined to check in on a blog. Some are excited by the idea of jpegs of their work being viewable all over the world and the subject of ad hoc critical dialogue *while their shows are still up*; others don't give a hoot and would rather avoid the computer and wait 9 months for an Artforum review to (possibly) come out".

In this same thread, Dyske Suematsu stresses that "many fine artists are not so computer savvy, and many among them are deliberately that way in order to distinguish themselves from the ordinary people who have to sit in front of computers all day at work. Artists need to keep the facade of being special and exceptional. They can't be doing what everyone else is doing".

The question of cultural capital is of central value for the success of an artblogger. Sally Mckay sees the weblog primarily as a media for verbal expression and that artists not necessarily are gifted with a talent of writing: "Constant verbal/written articulation is not for everyone", she writes.

Dyske Suematsu says in relation to this that "artists could devalue their own work by speaking or verbalizing. Good artists are not necessarily good critical thinkers. If they were good at writing, and if writing is conducive to what they want to say, they probably would just write, instead of making something visual".

It is clear to me that many of these artists are gifted with critical writing skills. Franklin Einspruch seems to be as much an art critic as an artist whereas the other artists seem to engage in some sort of critical thinkers' community. None of these artists perceive their blog as pure art, but the idea seems to interest them.

The question of identity is linked to some of the first questions I ask the bloggers: *What made you start blogging?* and *What keeps you blogging?* Explaining why they started blogging the two collaborating artbloggers T.Whid and M. River, write that they initially saw it as "an easier way of maintaining a mailing list: At first I wanted to separate MTAA's art site (mteww.com) from documentation of the art (resume, texts etc) so I set-up what we call the MTAA Reference Resource (mteww.com/mtaaRR) which eventually morphed into a blog-like web site. I added the blog so we could easily post updated news to the site. At first I thought it would just be upcoming shows, events and etc. I was sick of maintaining a mailing list so I thought it would be easier".

Where as Sally Mckay saw it as a way of exploring and experimenting with a new model of publishing: "I'm interested in publishing models, so I started it as an experiment after publishing an art magazine for 7 years".

When asking the question: *Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?* Sally Mckay answers very positively that: "Yes. It makes me a better artist. I am bolder and I am less concerned with projects finishing, but rather staying fresh and generative".

The problems that blogging can cause for the artist is also an issue that can hold artists from blogging. When asking the question *Have you met any problems being a blogger?* T. Whid answers: "Being so outspoken on the blog could lead to problems professionally. But I'm not aware of any specific issue to date; the fear lurks in the back of my mind sometimes, but I don't worry about it much".

Sally Mckay answers to the same question that: "I don't get enough sleep and sometimes I worry too much about encapsulating my thoughts/experiences instead of just enjoying them. Also I embarrass myself constantly". But she perceives these as "minor problems".

Temporal structure

In analysing temporal structure we look at time as a social factor. In the blogosphere it is of crucial importance that you write regularly and frequency in writing can be a truly vital element for the community feeling. This of course is related to the spatial aspect, that I will be looking at next. If you have the feeling that a person is there behind his/her computer writing on his/her blog at the moment you read it will most likely make you feel the presence of this person in some way. This impression of social presence can only be maintained if people post / comment often, or at a particular time of day.

Time has an irreversible character in blogging as in real time communication: just as you cannot take back a word spoken, you cannot deny a post published in your blog, though you can effectively delete it (or some of its content) after having published it. The way of writing is instant and spontaneous and therefore you can easily end up writing something you regret the moment later. T. Whid for example first published my questions with my name figuring in the post, but after having seen that Tom Moody referred to me with my initials, he came to think that it would be more ethical to not to mention my name and republished the questions with "Nice Danish student" instead. This example also gives associations to the central issue of ethics and the so-called netiquette of more or less outspoken rules of conduct in the blogosphere. This is something I will take a closer look at in the following section.

Spatial dimensions

In relation to other forms of art community like for example Rhizome.org, the artblog constitutes a more private space where being more polite and respectful is expected from the participants. When

we attend a public meeting we would tend be more aggressive towards a person than if we were dining at this person's private place. In a blog you have this feeling of being a guest and there is a set of unspoken moral and ethical guidelines to keep in mind when posting.

In relation to this T. Whid writes that "discussions started on the blog are less likely to devolve into flame wars and it's less aggressive" (compared to the Rhizome.org community).

This is important to artists, I believe, both due to the difference in how artists act in their role as artists (at for example a vernissage) and the way they act when together with near friends. When 'going public' the artist is somehow expected to be an extravagant 'enfant terrible' which I believe to be a highly unsocial quality, where as in the private sphere he/she can be 'him/her self'. The blogoshere constitutes a private space that is open to the public. The blogoshere has been related to the renaissance closed gardens and to the 19th century intellectual / literary salon (Torill, Mortensen et al.: 257). In this sense (which one should not exaggerate) one could compare the artblogosphere to the Montparnasse artists' café meetings in early 20th century Paris. This space constituted a private and yet public space, and the same spontaneous coming and going and sharing of both everyday inspirational thoughts, sketches and highly polemical opinions that characterised these meetings can be found in the artblogosphere.

The public - private issue is important especially when we are speaking of artists. In relation to this M.River writes: "I think of the Blog as a shared (with T.Whid) and open (with anyone) sketch book. This is something odd. I know when I'm jotting down thoughts that other might read them. So, that state of being observed does change the information that I send out"

System infra structure

How does system infra structure have significance for the community aspect in blogging? All blogging software is build in a way that makes it possible for others to comment on what your are writing, to link to others and to let others link to you. This, of course, is a basic premise for creating a dynamic social space.

In the world of artblogging the browser and the connection you use can be of great importance for your inclusion in the 'community' as many artblogs contain heavy amounts of graphics and photographs (moblogs and photoblog only contain photos), sometimes even video sequences (vlog is an artblog only containing small video sequences) and sound streaming (musicblogs). Some bloggers make their own blog (don't use standard blogging software) and here it can be of importance which browser you use. These would be likely to make a blog for Modzilla and Safari (browsers) and not for Internet Explorer (browser used by around 90% of all Internet users) as a statement against Microsoft. This though, I would assume, would be more of an exclusion factor for the blogger.

M.River questions the limits of the weblog form for artistic expression and stresses that it is a media especially for net artists: "Blogs have certain limits. One of which is the question: Is your blog art or is it information about your art. I would guess that for most artist information sites have no appeal. For computer artist, under the stance of open source and all that goes with it, information is interesting".

T.Whid stresses the technical simplicity of blogging and it's inexpensiveness that makes it an ideal tool for sharing instant thoughts and ideas within the art community: "Since it's very easy to update the site I just post things there all the time that I might email to either my collaborator M.River or post to a discussion list like Rhizome. I was very active on the Rhizome list for many years but I like the blog better. (…) If people want to read my opinions and thoughts the site is passively waiting for them to visit, my ideas don't wind up in people's in-boxes. Plus, after Rhizome switched to a fee-based membership I decided that any extended writings of mine needed to be freely accessible via the Internet".

Chris Ashley (commenting on Tom Moody's artblog) whose weblog is more Blog Art than artblog writes that: "my weblog is a studio, a gallery, and an archive. My weblog gives me a regular deadline. I must produce. The work gets shown. It accumulates. I can easily look back at what I've done, pull it out and reuse or remake it. In my case, in particular, the drawings I make in HTML are embedded in each post, there are no other files. The page is the image. The material of my art is HTML, that of the web (well, somewhat; I don't bother with XHTML, CSS, layers, Javascript, etc., but you get the idea). I like HTML because it's simple, and easy to learn. It feels democratic, like basic literacy".

Another question that is highly relevant in the artblogging world is the openness allowing everybody to share and exhibit his or her works. Sally Mckay stresses this point: "Unfortunately, I think that the inherent openness of the medium (i.e.; people share/steal ideas all the time, self-definition as "artist" carries little to no weight) is antithetical to a mainstream art world mindset which is still dependent on rarified spaces and outdated notions of genius".

Group purposes

The purpose of the group in the artblogs is not well defined. The debating and sharing of ideas seems to be a main purpose. As Sally Mckay writes: I love the debates and dialogue. I'm addicted to art talk and blogging provides a self-selecting group of people who are into it too.

T. Whid and M. River have a particular collaboration blog which at least originally had a specific purpose, but we can se that in fact the collaboration goes beyond this original purpose.

As T. Whid writes: "Sometimes I'll post thoughts and ideas regarding current projects and will get feedback via the comments. Sometimes I use it as a way to communicate with M.River without having to use email if I think some folks might find that communication interesting".

Chris Ashley writes that "Having even a small audience for the weblog makes me productive in a way that sitting in my studio making things on paper or whatever just doesn't inspire. My weblog has acquainted me with artists with whom I engage in regular dialogue in ways that just wouldn't have been possible before. My weblog puts my production totally under my own control. I make it, I show it, I give it away, it has a public life".

Participant and group characteristics

In characterizing the individual participant and the group as a whole, we come to take a closer look at the question of whether it is possible to distinguish a particular artblogosphere and relating to this, how can we characterise this 'community' and it's individuals?

Feeling part of a community is also taking on the identity of this community. Identity is also what delimits a community. A basic parameter in this definition becomes inclusion / exclusion (Gotved 2001). The artbloggers that answered and commented my questions all seem to be fierce critics of the fine art society, of the art market, the prominent (New York) galleries, etc. This somewhat gives them a feeling of belonging to the same group of artists rejecting (or at least not acknowledging) the rules of this high-end art world.

Dyske Suematsu stresses the point that "a Blog is s a product of popular culture, and fine art is a product of high culture. And that using blogs would devalue or take away this mystique of fine arts".

There seems to be a wall between on the one side the fine art world and on the other the world of the blogging artists and the new media artists. These worlds seem to be as separated as possible: in the fine arts society technology, new media, the Internet, etc, are taboo words and artists working within these fields are not acknowledged as real artists, but rather as amateurs trying the last possible way to get their name out in the public or graphic designers pretending to be artists or just computer nerds nerding with code and saying it's art. Maybe the most common view, and the most "artly" snobbish one, would be a total non-consideration of net artists and especially the artblogging community. Tom Moody writes that "the non-responsiveness of the art world to blogging is a recurring theme".

In the new media art world the Internet is fully acknowledged as a media containing an undefinable number of possibilities for creative expression, exploration, inspiration, collaboration, exchange, etc and net artists are perceived as the artists of today – the real artists, because with the profession of artist comes a unspoken responsibility of reacting to the context that defines your life world that goes far beyond any other aspect of being an artist. Therefore the media will never become the message, but if art is a message and a message is to be shared (and I assume that's what a message's purpose

is unless your writing your intimate journal) the Internet seems at least as fit for the purpose than is a piece of canvas in a high-end gallery.

The non-responsiveness that Tom Moody writes about is therefore certainly a question of snobbishness, which is something Dyske Suematsu agrees with: "Fine art mainly caters to the taste of the upper class. The people of the upper class do not read weblogs. They are not so computer savvy either, because they can afford not to learn anything about computers; they just hire people to take care of computer-related tasks. In their homes, they often hide computers using elaborate pieces of furniture. They find them distasteful".

She (or he?) further writes that "Fine arts is an interest of the privileged upper class. The rich and powerful do not like anything in which money cannot give them an advantage. Even for something as common as movies, they can arrange private, advanced screenings. For music, they can get prime seats at live concerts. Purchasing fine arts is the ultimate exercise of their privileges. For web-based art, however, they have no advantage. Absolutely anyone can view Net art from any computers. Digital art does not allow them to feel special and privileged, which is the main reason why they buy art in the first place. So, if you want to be a successful gallery-based artist, you need to address these upper-class concerns, and stay away from the interests of Philistines".

But Tom Moody also sees it as a consequence of the fact that "the art world never really adopted the media and that art galleries (and artists who produce for them) (therefore) still are stuck in the era of steam trains and butter churns". As he writes: "In this world, it's all about print—hard copy reviews from recognized institutional authorities that can be sent to collectors and curators. Ethereal pixeled criticism is regarded as too impermanent and likely the work of lone cranks."

The fine art world seems to be an unbreakable institutional structure that is highly marked by a conservative and old-fashioned way of thinking. Tom Moody writes that "institutions like the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council perpetuate the divisions between gallery art and new media art by requiring painters to send in slides for fellowships, residencies, etc., whereas a new media artist can just send a URL. This idea that a photo emulsion glimpsed through a Magic Lantern contraption on a metallic screen in a dark room is the "best" or "most accurate" way to judge physical work is tres 19th Century. Once the medium of information exchange changes (to URLs, etc) then metacriticism linked or patched into those resources will seem more natural".

Tom Moody writes "that the somewhat rapid change in tech--just as the galleries are getting all their fancy dot-com era Flash sites up and running, this thing called blogging comes along. Worse, some bloggers make fun of the Flash sites! Galleries and artists tend to rely more on tech experts to do

their updating and even if they know about blogs, not everyone has (or should have) the personality for daily ranting".

Another point made by Tom Moody is "that the economic (collector/donor) base of the art world includes many tech-savvy people, who stare at computer screens all day for a living and by dawn, when they want to relax they don't want more screen stuff, they want to immerse themselves in the healing balm of the "old ways"--viewing pigment-impregnated vegetable oil smeared on coarse cloth; standing in a clean quiet room having elevated discourse about exquisite, handmade objects; reading elegantly typeset reviews on solid paper stock with good offset printing (see (b) above). Dealers and artists tend to follow the collectors' preferences".

Although the community of artbloggers seems to be rather small, the community seems to be quite well defined. When asking if the artist's know of other artists blogging they mention a list of different artists and I see the same names being mentioned several times. The fact that T.Whid sent my questions to a number of other artists blogging and that they in return answered me putting the others on CC witnesses the relevance of and the level of interest for the subject. This is also stressed by the fact that my questions were soon posted on the T.Whid and M. River artblog, on Tom Moody's artblog and on Eyebeam Reblog (which is a highly referenced weblog in the creative cypersphere) and further mentioned on Sally Mckay's blog as being an "interesting survey on artbloging". Tom Moody takes the issue further (annex) and makes a real statement in "What is an Artblog 2" (annex).

A basic premise for knowing whether we can speak of an artblogosphere is of course the aspect of reading, referencing and posting within a defined circle of blogs. Therefore an important part of my questions were whether the bloggers new other blogging artists, whether they new of artists reading their blogs and whether they felt part of an artblogosphere.

T. Whid writes that the MTAA blog doesn't get a lot of comments, but "that the folks who read it tend to be personal friends, and MTAA know lots of artists". After my questions had been posted on the MTAA artblog and on the Tom Moody artblog I witnessed how in fact there was a very rapid and engaged reaction in the circle of artbloggers (within few hours there were already a relatively high number of comments on the issue, 6 on the MTAA blog and 21 on the Tom Moody blog). That gave me the impression that there was a community out there, maybe not quantitatively very important, but qualitatively, I think that these posts represented important opinions within the art world of today.

Asking the question: *Do you feel part of the blogosphere? I mean do you feel part of a community of (art)bloggers?* The general answer is both yes and no. The artists don't feel part of the blogosphere *per se*, but rather of a small specialised community of artists blogging or just reading each others

blogs.

As T.Whid puts it: "I don't really feel part of the larger blog community as I don't include typically 'bloggy' things like link lists and trackbacks. The mtaaRR blog is really specialized. And it's supposed to be about the art collaboration, MTAA, so I many times I'll twist a post back to why it relates to MTAA. I think people can find this narcissistic. Which it is I suppose".

Sally Mckay writes that she has "a fairly close-knit community at Digital Media Tree (http://www.digitalmediatree.com) that (she is) digging like crazy. And (that) there's a budding little local Toronto art blog scene which has some cross-blog dialogue going on".

Tom Moody writes that "there is an emerging community of art blogs out there (modern art notes, artblog, etc) that tends to draw its lines of subject matter narrowly, chewing over news of museums, auction sales, gallery gossip, old school art appreciation... I'm more interested in the crossover of visual art, tech, electronic music, film, science fiction, and politics than just replicating the art world online. I sometimes get linkage from the pure art sites when I do something "out there" like criticize the Whitney, or one of the major magazines, but rarely when I just talk about shows (in Williamsburg or wherever), and never when I stray outside their specialized field of interest. I'm happy for the traffic, of course, those are just some patterns I've noticed. I do link to a few of those blogs. As for your question about blogs damaging your art career, I was a print critic for years so I'm already screwed. Actually the blog has been quite helpful in clarifying that my art practice and thoughts about other artists are intertwined--it was a way *voluntarily* to take the institutional edge off my writing".

Conclusion

The interest that my questions on art blogging found within the circle of artbloggers mentioned in this study clearly, I allow myself to say, prove that these people find the subject to be of relevance, but it also re-actualises a problem that has continually been subject to debate through the history of art: the schism between the avant garde artists living on the edge and never being acknowledged by their time and the Fine Arts institution ruling the art world and making it difficult for these artists to make a living, with out selling their soul.

It is evident that there exits two extreme positions in the profession of artist today: one embracing the present, the immediate, the new with a critical and yet humoristic eye and one severely holding on to a long gone past, praising ancient techniques, actively ignoring the existence of a digital aesthetic as if the 'intrusion' of technology in the arts constituted pure and evil blasphemy .

So one thing is for sure, the Fine Arts world is as long from the blogosphere as the sun from the stratosphere, but what about the New Media artists? What can we conclude there? A number of reasons seem possible and it's probably a constellation of these that explain why we don't find more artists in the blogosphere as the world looks today.

My first conclusion to this is that blogging is an art in it self and not all artists – not even New Media Artists - are gifted with the talent and discipline you need to keep a blog 'alive and kicking'. I've seen quite a few artblogs that very quickly stopped being updated, which of course is fatal to any blog. The problem seems to be that even though the weblog form allows you to post photos and computer graphics, sound, video sequences, etc., what you have to show really has to be interesting if you want the blogosphere to react to it. I guess this is the reason why so few purely visual artblogs exist and the few I know of get very few comments. Another point related to this, is that many artists have a codex of not commenting each others art[8], which of course makes it even more difficult. The mixture of high quality writing, photos and graphics, etc is obviously more easily communicated to a larger scale of people. Not that the posts have to be highly intellectual all the time - in fact they rather not be and the tone generally seems quite easy and unpretentious - but you can easily identify that many of these artists blogging are also excellent writers and some of them probably write for journals as a side occupation.

Another problem for the artists is that self promotion is rarely a respected thing, and a blog can easily be taken for being self pretentious, a fake construction of "star identity", or the like. I've seen at least one example of this and it is clear that it seems very unblog like, because its form and content seems made to please a public and not coming from the heart and soul of the artist. In the artblogs mostly referred to in this paper you feel the honesty and light heartedness of the artists behind, they really have something to say and to share and that's why they use the blog.

Another conclusion must be that many of the artists have to earn their living working in front of a computer and would therefore prefer other ways of sharing thoughts and ideas. In addition to this, many new media artists today simply don't have the time for keeping a blog – journalists and researchers can blog at work, but an artist is mostly an artist in his free time, and if he blogged at his work he would probably be fired. A comment on Tom Moodys blog says that "even once you get the tech stuff up and running blogging takes a lot of time (underline for emphasis - not a link). A lot of artists can't afford to make work, work work, and blog - especially if their work and make work are away from the home computer". So it may finally be a structural thing. If society acknowledged these artists so they could earn from their art a much larger number of artists would potentially find the weblog to be a media through which they could keep their work process going, express themselves and interact with fellow artists.

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[8] I grew up surrounded by artists and draw on personal experience.

Finally it could be a matter of time, of adoption of the media by a critical mass of artists. Tom Moody helps me with a conclusion when writing that "Maybe, as with previous emerging media, we're still in the stage of figuring out what a so-called art blog is going to be best and worst at [….] Blogs aren't art magazines; they have their own life and logic. For one thing, they don't have the same high production costs; you can post more text and pictures. If you can put up a music file, why shouldn't you? As for journalistic objectivity--maintaining a firewall between your creative and critical thoughts (this is assuming you're an artist)--forget about it! The print magazines are stifled by fake objectivity (like we don't know who pays the bills); people look to bloggers mainly for honesty".

If Rheingold is right when stating that "Any time you have a competition between something that requires a top-down infrastructure and between something that can grow virally from lots of individuals, the viral will win every time" (http://radio.weblogs.com/0113598/2002/09/19.html). Maybe in a more or less distant future, if the independent artists adopt the media, they will come to constitute a real counterpart to the Fine Arts world. I would like to believe in a Rheingoldian future, though my conviction still is that the power will continue to exist where the money is and that money is probably not likely to come to independent media artists any time soon.

As a conclusive statement it is important to stress that while the observed artbloggers do indeed seem to qualify as a community on several accounts, in spite of how some of them may actually feel, it is most notably the offline opposition between the traditional Fine Art world and the New Media Artists that seems constitutive of this community-like character of the world of artblogging. The most important reason for there not being more artbloggers than is the case today seems therefore to be found in the existing structure of the contemporary art world.

But if "Art is changing into something more collective, fluid, and hybrid" and that "blogs have a role to play in this" (Tom Moody) the artists of today are maybe heading towards what a comment on Tom Moodys artblog refers to as "Post studio liberation". If a Rheingoldian future isn't utopian thinking in relation to the above, the artblog phenomenon could hold the potential of revolutionising art history - and that has happened before, but unfortunately not during the living time of many of those artists who were unacknowledged by their peers.

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Annexes

E-mail from T.Whid

Hi Marie,
I'm CC'ing a few other art bloggers, maybe they can help you out too :-)
below:

Dear T. Whid,
After having done research on the artblog phenomenon for a couple of months now, I'm surprised to find that not many
artists use this media. Personally I would find it an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange. Do you have an
explanation to this?

I agree with you (which is obvious as I'm a fairly avid blogger). I'm not sure why more artists don't maintain blog-like web sites.
Those artists who don't use technology in their work I've found to be fairly computer-phobic. You find many more
photographers and designers in the 'blogosphere' then your average fine artist. There is a huge design blog world, with some of
the biggees being k10k.org, zeldman.com, www.mezzoblue.com, stopdesign.com, and whatdoiknow.org.

What made you start blogging?

At first I wanted to separate MTAA's art site (mteww.com) from documentation of the art (resume, texts etc) so I set-up what
we call the MTAA Reference Resource (mteww.com/mtaaRR) which eventually morphed into a blog-like web site. I added the
blog so we could easily post
updated news to the site. At first I thought it would just be upcoming shows, events and etc. I was sick of maintaining a
mailing list so I thought it would be easier.

What keeps you blogging?

Since it's very easy to update the site I just post things there all the time that I might email to either my collaborator M.River or
post to a discussion list like Rhizome. I was very active on the Rhizome
list for many years but I like the blog better. Discussions started on the blog are less likely to devolve into flame wars and it's
less aggressive. If people want to read my opinions and thoughts the site is
passively waiting for them to visit, my ideas don't wind up in people's in-boxes. Plus, after Rhizome switched to a fee-based
membership I decided that any extended writings of mine needed to be freely
accessible via the Internet. Do you perceive your blog primarily as a personal or as a professional
project?

Hmmm. Good question. I have two professions, designer and artist. The blog is about the art aspect of my career. I treat it
very personally: I use slang, curse, swear, and don't check my spelling. But it has all of MTAA's professional artist info as well
(resume, documentation, etc) so it is a professional site. I guess I assume that folks will cut me some slack on the sometimes
highly opinionated and bawdy posts that find their way to the blog section.

Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?

Sometimes I'll post thoughts and ideas regarding current projects and will get feedback via the omments. Sometimes I use it as
a way to communicate with M.River without having to use email if I think some folks might find that communication interesting.

Do you know of other artists blogging (besides M. River)?

Joy Garnett (newsgrist.typepad.com), Tom Moody (http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody/), Jonah Peretti set-up reBlog
(eyebeam.org/reblog), Jonah Brucker-Cohen (coin-operated.com). jimpunk keeps one that is art:
http://544x378.free.fr/(WebTV)/

Do you know of artists reading your blog?

I'm not sure.. We don't get tons of comments. But folks who read it tend to be personal friends, and MTAA know lots of artists.

Do you feel part of the blogosphere? I mean do you feel part of a community of (art)bloggers?

Yes and no. There isn't a huge community of art bloggers. And I don't really feel part of the larger blog community as I don't
include typically 'bloggy' things like link lists and trackbacks. The mtaaRR
blog is really specialized. And it's supposed to be about the art collaboration, MTAA, so I many times I'll twist a post back to
why it relates to MTAA. I think people can find this narcissistic. Which it is
I suppose.

Have you met any problems being a blogger?

Being so outspoken on the blog could lead to problems professionally. But I'm not aware of any specific issue to date; the fear
lurks in the back of my mind sometimes, but I don't worry about it much.

If you have additional thoughts that you would like to share, they are of course more than welcome!
Thank you very much in advance!
 Marie Omann

E-mail from M.River

Personally I would find it an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange. Do you have an explanation to this?

I agree with you (which is obvious as I'm a fairly avid blogger). I'm not sure why more artists don't maintain blog-like web sites.

I'm not to sure about this. Blogs have certain limits. One of which is the question: Is your blog art or is it information about your art. I would guess that for most artist information sites have no appeal. For computer artist, under the stance of open source and all that goes with it, information is interesting

What made you start blogging?

T.Whid forced me at gun point

What keeps you blogging?

See above

Do you perceive your blog primarily as a personal or as a professional project?

It's an art project. So again, it's hard to say what the stance makes a blog - personal / professional / or something else

Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?

Yes, but it's hard to pin as to how. I think of the Blog as a shared (with T.Whid) and open (with anyone) sketch book. This is something odd. I know when I'm jotting down thoughts that other might read them. So, that state of being observed does change the information that I send out. Perhapsh
more so than if I just kept some private notes on my work.

E-mail from Tom Moody

Dear Marie Omann,

T. Whid cc'd your Q&A to me; I've kept a weblog at http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody/ since Feb. '01.

The non-responsiveness of the art world to blogging is a recurring theme with me. I write from New York but the syndrome is widespread. I attribute it to several factors:

(a) somewhat rapid change in tech--just as the galleries are getting all their fancy dot-com era Flash sites up and running, this thing called blogging comes along. Worse, some bloggers make fun of the Flash sites! Galleries and artists tend to rely more on tech experts to do their updating
and even if they know about blogs, not everyone has (or should have) the personality for daily ranting.

(b) art galleries (and artists who produce for them) are still stuck in the era of steam trains and butter churns. In this world, it's all about print—hard copy reviews from recognized institutional authorities that can be sent to collectors and curators. Ethereal pixeled criticism is regarded as too
impermanent and likely the work of lone cranks.

(c) institutions like the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council perpetuate the divisions between gallery art and new media art by requiring painters to send in slides for fellowships, residencies, etc., whereas a new media artist can just send a URL. This idea that a photo emulsion glimpsed through a Magic Lantern contraption on a metallic screen in a dark room is the "best" or "most accurate" way to judge physical work is tres 19th Century. Once the medium of information exchange changes (to URLs, etc) then metacriticism linked or patched into those resources will seem more natural.

(d) the economic (collector/donor) base of the art world includes many tech-savvy people, who stare at computer screens all day for a living and by damn, when they want to relax they don't want more screen stuff, they want to immerse themselves in the healing balm of the "old ways"--viewing pigment-impregnated vegetable oil smeared on coarse cloth; standing in a clean quiet room having elevated discourse about exquisite, handmade objects; reading elegantly typeset reviews on
solid paper stock with good offset printing (see (b) above). Dealers and artists tend to follow the
collectors' preferences.

(e) as T. Whid mentioned, many artists are quite simply tech-phobic and/or uninclined to check in on a blog. Some are excited by the idea of jpegs of their work being viewable all over the world and the subject of ad hoc critical dialogue *while their shows are still up*; others don't give a hoot and would rather avoid the computer and wait 9 months for an Artforum review to (possibly) come out.

Tom Moody

PS There is an emerging community of art blogs out there (modern art notes, artblog, etc) that tends to draw its lines of subject matter narrowly, chewing over news of museums, auction sales,
gallery gossip, old school art appreciation... I'm more interested in the crossover of visual art, tech,
electronic music, film, science fiction, and politics than just replicating the art world online. I sometimes get linkage from the pure art sites when I do something "out there" like criticize the Whitney, or one of the major magazines, but rarely when I just talk about shows (in Williamsburg or wherever), and never when I stray outside their specialized field of interest. I'm happy for the traffic, of course, those are just some patterns I've noticed. I do link to a few of those blogs. As for your question about blogs damaging your art career, I was a print critic for years so I'm already screwed. Actually the blog has been quite helpful in clarifying that my art practice and thoughts about
other artists are intertwined--it was a way *voluntarily* to take the institutional edge off my writing.

PPS T. Whid, I didn't send this to the ccs on your email; please forward to anyone you think might be interested.

E-mail from Dyske Suematsu

There are probably many reasons contributing to the lack of interest in blogs in the art world. Here are some I can think of.

1. Blog is a product of popular culture, and fine art is a product of high culture. Using blogs would devalue or take away this mystique of fine arts.

2. Many fine artists are not so computer savvy, and many among them are deliberately that way in order to distinguish themselves from the ordinary people who have to sit in front of computers all day at work. Artists need to keep the facade of being special and exceptional. They can't be doing
what everyone else is doing.

3. Blatant self-promotion is looked down on in fine arts. Although the success in fine arts is largely defined by your skills for self-promotion, you must do so covertly. The Web in general is now seen as a marketing tool, and because of this, many artists, especially famous ones, do not bother
building websites, much less Weblogs.

4. Artists could devalue their own work by speaking or verbalizing. Good artists are not necessarily good critical thinkers. If they were good at writing, and if writing is conducive to what they want to say, they probably would just write, instead of making something visual.

5. Fine art mainly caters to the taste of the upper class. The people of the upper class do not read weblogs. They are not so computer savvy either, because they can afford not to learn anything about computers; they just hire people to take care of computer-related tasks. In their homes, they
often hide computers using elaborate pieces of furniture. They find them distasteful.

Best,
Dyske
--
Dyske Suematsu
http://www.dyske.com

E-mail from Franklin Einspruch

Marie,

I apologize for not getting back to you on this sooner. I hope it's still of use to you.

I started blogging because I wasn't publishing my work in print anywhere and I wanted to get my writing out. I was also attracted to the format and its interactivity.

I keep blogging because I continue to like the format. In many ways it is preferable to print.
My blog is a personal project but it relates to what I do professionally. As an artist, there is not a sharp line between the professional and personal.

My blog doesn't affect my art process.

I know of several local artists who read the blog with some regularity, but not of anyone outside of Miami.

I feel that I am a part of the art blogosphere. One can tell such things by how many people link their site to yours; I know of about a dozen.

I have encountered no problems as a blogger, although it is sometimes strange when people already know what's going on in my professional life and sometimes my head before I speak to them.

Good luck.
Franklin

Posts and comments from Tom Moody's artblog

A woman in Europe named M_____ 0_____ (name permission pending) is researching "artblogs" and sent these questions to artist & blogger T.Whid. He forwarded the list and my slightly edited response is below. All this stuff vomited out, probably, because it was so shocking to see this level of interest about something American galleries usually say "huh?" about:

• After having done research on the artblog phenomenon for a couple of months now, I'm surprised to find that not many artists use this media. Personally I would find it an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange. Do you have an explanation to this?
• What made you start blogging?
• What keeps you blogging?
• Do you perceive your blog primarily as a personal or as a professional project?
• Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?
• Do you know of other artists blogging (besides M.River)?
• Do you know of artists reading your blog?
• Do you feel part of the blogosphere? I mean do you feel part of a community of (art)bloggers?
• Have you met any problems being a blogger?

HERE TOM MOODY POSTS THE CONTENT FROM THE E-MAIL HE SENT ME (SEE ABOVE)

THERE ARE 25 COMMENTS TO THE ABOVE POST – I HAVE CHOSEN A COUPLE OF THE MOST RELEVANT:

1:
Even once you get the tech stuff up and running blogging takes a lot of time (underline for emphasis - not a link). A lot of artists can't aford to make work, work work, and blog - especially if thier work work and make work are away from the home computer.

2:
I follow a blog only because I can get more info than if I sat by the coffee table, as it is where I research online, or side table-- in my case, to get a wider view of what is going on. If collectors are, and I don't personally know that they are, hunting the pulse through, and only through, regimented matter, it tells something--there is more room for collectors.
But there always is. With a very small group of thinkers and collectors in my circle I am more likely to send an email with a link with something I found through a blog=the rest they already know from other sources. 10% I get a reply with a thanks--that's a good percentage in my books.

3:
I think its post studio liberation for the artist. as stated, no 2"x2" slides that never see the light of a slide projector. no editors. no "we dont like that one, tom. lets leave that out." i think it provides truer access to the artist. done properly, no trips to pearl paint, the framer, no art movers, no storage units, anyone price an artists garrett in the village or a soho (or even redhook) loft lately ? none of that. direct access to the artist is better economics.

4:
It's a fun survey and it's made me very late for work. I put my answers here at MTAA.

Just some background: twhid sent the survey around to a handful of people, some of whom cc'd him their emailed responses to the Danish student. I read some of them and they were pretty good. He is inviting those (lurking) folks to post their previously emailed answers--it is not an open call. Your responses are fine but I just want to clarify what he's asking.

5:
Not so much on artblogging per se, but reading this tread I found some overlap with issues I'd recently touched on regarding the nature of the web as a meeting point of public and private discourse. I see that Sally picked up on that in her comments at MTAA, which is gratifying.

My thinking in this direction has generally been more from what I'd call (for want of a better term) a spiritual viewpoint. If we have any access to spirituality, it's not so much about another world as it is about the remoter possibilities of this one. At this time the web seems to offer a vision of hope for our communications, and artblogging, I suppose, offers hope for improving the status of art-related discourse, which many of us think needs some sort of kick in the butt.

As far as actual art goes, it's harder to say. Bill gets to it with the idea of "post studio liberation" which borders on spiritual talk. The spiritual problem is always that it turns out to be a sort of shell game, with each level of attainment leading to a new level of ignorance. It can turn into a hall of mirrors, like Tom making fun of the old slides while worshiping at the altar of old-tech high-tech like MS Paint. The problem is that we continue to have to work through *some* sort of medium, whether it's ocher in oil or code composed of symbolic digits. Psychedelicist [Terence McKenna](#) used to talk about the possibilities of visual language, but even that only leads to another vision: of visible thought. In heaven there is total transparency; everyone knows everything about everyone; ideas play out without the messy resistance of a medium, and things become so obvious that we all end up in agreement.

But it looks like it's going to take an awful lot of messy talking and making to get to that point. Should be fun.

6:
Visa vi the web, I suppose there's quite a gap between artists working in "old fashioned" media and those working in digital media that are at home here. There's a big difference between having your work online or having pictures of it online. Talking about slides and such reminds me of how much of my experience (especially my introductory experience) with art has been through reproductions; I've never really seen many of my favorite paintings. Being in NY and looking at stuff like Minimalism (which had a certain resistance to reproduction) served as a sort of "reality therapy." Time and distance change art, though I don't think they disable it. Our experience of an ancient carving in a museum is certainly different than the original audience's, but we are still engaged. The web is changing our experience of time and distance, and who can guess at all the possibilities in that?

7: (http://chrisashley.net/weblog)
Now, I wish I had something smart to say besides marketing myself, but it's late and I'm tired. So I'll say something I've been saying for the last couple of years: my weblog is a studio, a gallery, and an archive. My weblog gives me a regular deadline. I must produce. The work gets shown. It accumulates. I can easily look back at what I've done, pull it out and reuse or remake it. In my case, in particular, the drawings I make in HTML are embedded in each post, there are no other files. The page is the image. The material of my art is HTML, that of the web (well, somewhat; I don't bother with XHTML, CSS, layers, Javascript, etc., but you get the idea). I like HTML because it's simple, and easy to learn. It feels democratic, like basic literacy.

Having even a small audience for the weblog makes me productive in a way that sitting in my studio making things on paper or whatever just doesn't inspire. My weblog has acquainted me with artists with whom I engage in regular dialogue in ways that just wouldn't have been possible before. My weblog puts my production totally under my own control. I make it, I show it, I give it away, it has a public life.

I am surprised that I don't see more artists treating the weblog as an art medium, rather than as a more standard medium for writing in a journalistic, critical, or organizational mode. Am I missing them? And, I have to say, most photoblogs don't count for me as a use of the weblog as an art medium.

What Is An Art Blog? (2)

The "what is an art blog?" discussion continues in the [comments](#) to the previous post, and [Cinque Hicks](#) also has some thoughts on the subject. While some webjournals focus on work exhibited in museums and galleries (news and criticism) he kindly cites my page as a counter-example--in that it strays, and then strays from the straying, and maybe that's not so terrible. He has some good observations about *art changing* (horrors) into something more collective, fluid, and hybrid, and suggests that maybe blogs have a role to play in this. And he considers whether blogging can be an art, as opposed to just documentation.

Maybe, as with previous emerging media, we're still in the stage of figuring out what a so-called art blog is going to be best and worst at. Photography started out copying the formal strategies of painting until practitioners got a grip on its own unique properties; ditto film with stage plays. Blogs aren't art magazines; they have their own life and logic. For one thing, they don't have the same high production costs; you can post more text and pictures. If you can put up a music file, why shouldn't you? As for journalistic objectivity--maintaining a firewall between your creative and critical thoughts (this is assuming you're an artist)--forget about it! The print magazines are stifled by fake objectivity (like we don't know who pays the bills); people look to bloggers mainly for honesty. Also, thanks to Google, people do non-categorical searches, why should any blogger care about maintaining "evenness" or predictability? If anything the personal, diaristic nature of blogs makes random eclecticism the norm and tight, self-imposed parameters, well, not the norm.

This sounds like an argument for the (pretentious reference alert!) [fox who knows many things over the hedgehog who knows one big thing](#), but reading a blog over time can also bring a "big thing" into clearer relief. I do believe, with the evil Greenberg, that visual art ought to remain entrenched in its area of greatest competence (as he once said about painting), that is, that there's something about the purely visual worth preserving and doing well, but to deny technology and where it might take the visual experience (via imaging software, Internet exchange, cross-pollination with other media) by replicating print magazine approaches to reviewing art-gallery art is pretty hard to defend at this point.

Sally Mckay's Comment (on the MTRR Artblog)

sally mckay says,

www.digitalmediatree.com/sallymckay...
After having done research on the artblog phenomenon for a couple of months now, I'm surprised to find that not many artists use this media. Personally I would find it an ideal space for artistic exhibition, exploration and exchange. Do you have an explanation to this?

Constant verbal/written articulation is not for everyone. That said, I am surprised more artists don't use the internet as an integrated part of their work. Canadian artists seem to have been particularly slow to come online, even for self-promotion purposes. Unfortunately, I think that the inherent openness of the medium (ie; people share/steal ideas all the time, self-definition as "artist" carries little to no weight) is antithetical to a mainstream artworld mindset which is still dependent on rarified spaces and outdated notions of genius.

What made you start blogging?

I had a friend blogging and it looked like tons of fun. I'm interested in publishing models, so I started it as an experiment after publishing an art magazine for 7 years.

What keeps you blogging?

I love the debates and dialogue. I'm addicted to art talk and blogging provides a self-selecting group of people who are into it too.

Do you perceive your blog primarily as a personal or as a professional project?

It's a lovely hybrid. The unique private/public dynamic is really satisfying. As Mr. Wilson said recently on his Arboretum (http://www.digitalmediatree.com/arboretum/?27996) , "The discipline of online authorship does not favor either public or private faces, but allows the self to emerge in the dialectic between the two."

Does your blog affect your work process as an artist?

Yes. It makes me a better artist. I am bolder and I am less concerned with projects finishing, but rather staying fresh and generative.

Do you know of other artists blogging (besides M.River)?

(http://www.robcruickshank.net) Endless Parade of Excellence / (http://www.goodreads.ca/) Goodreads / (http://www.iconoduel.org/main/index.php) Iconoduel / (http://ionarts.blogspot.com/) ionarts / (http://michelle.kasprzak.ca/blog/) Michelle Kasprzak / (http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody) Tom Moody / (http://jennifermcmackon.tripod.com/simpleposie/) simpleposie / (http://zekesgallery.blogspot.com/) zeke's gallery / and more....

Do you know of artists reading your blog?

yes, quite a few.

Do you feel part of the blogosphere? I mean do you feel part of a community of (art)bloggers?

Yes and no. There is a fairly close-knit community at Digital Media Tree (http://www.digitalmediatree.com) that I'm digging like crazy. And there's a budding little local Toronto art blog scene which has some cross-blog dialogue going on. However, I've been writing my blog pretty seriously since December and I still feel very much like a newbie, feeling my way around and trying to read as much as I can. I keep finding great art blogs by other people that put mine to shame. Which is fun. I like the tinge of competition.

Have you met any problems being a blogger?
I don't get enough sleep and sometimes I worry too much about encapsulating my thoughts/experiences instead of just enjoying them. Also I embarrass myself constantly. But these are minor problems.

Post + comments on Rhizome.org

http://rhizome.org/thread.rhiz?thread=12375&text=23900#23900

Hi!
I'm a student in Media and Communication at the University of Copenhagen. I'm doing research for a paper on contemporary artists' weblogs and would be extremely thankful if someone could provide me with links to the subject!

Rachel Greene
Message 2 of 4 in thread
3.12.2004

Marie -- I am very interested in this topic myself. Are you looking for writing about art, or art? I am thinking of the latter. Don't know that many in this mode but check out Adrian Miles vlog.... it's a video art blog.

http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/vog/vlog/
I think his desktop experiments are pretty rad...
There is also --http://www.geuzen.org/swap/
- Rachel

M. River
Message 3 of 4 in thread
3.12.2004

here are 3 that I'm somehow a small part of:
http://544x378.free.fr/(WebTV)/

Jimpunk's very cool visual blog that he gave me posting rights, although I'm bad at doing so.
http://www.mteww.com/mtaaRR

MTAA's blog. some art, some rants, some rants about art. (search under AIOTD for some art thoughts)
http://www.eyebeam.org/reblog/

Eyebeam's fun meta-blog that picks up other blog's RSS feeds, MTAA's included.
enjoy

Ivan Pope
Message 4 of 4 in thread
3.13.2004

Then there's little me, attempting a full on artists blog:

Absent WithOut Leave: My life as an artist
http://blog.ivanpope.com