Finding the Edge: Online persona creation by fringe artists

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MA (1st Div), BCS (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

August, 2014
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For Abigail
Acknowledgments

It is a truism in academia that doctoral research is isolating. Yet, at no point in the three and a half years that I have spent on this project have I felt alone and unsupported. Those who have stood by me, cheered me on and up, provided feedback, critique, a sounding board, commiserations, coffee dates, glasses of wine, or on more serious occasions, a wee dram, I thank you. Of particular note:

To my wonderful research participants, thank you for sharing your work, your experiences, and your time with me. It has been an honour thinking about such talented, amazing artists every day.

To David Marshall: Your unwavering attention and support have been invaluable. You have been challenging, encouraging, present, helpful, and willing to let me run with an idea even when you were not fully convinced at first. I am a better researcher, a better thinker, and a better academic for your input.

To Chris Moore: Your enthusiasm for knowledge, for teaching, and for research is contagious. Your feedback was invaluable, and your attention to detail incomparable. Thank you!

Sean Redmond, thanks for pushing me through the first half of my candidature, and Deb Verhoeven, thanks for cheering me on at the end.

To the wonderful community of scholars in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, thanks for welcoming me into your ranks.
To those who gave me work: Toija, Tony, Katja, Kim—thanks for saving me from having to drink instant coffee, and for understanding when my research took priority over my work for you.

Robyn Ficnersky, thanks for saying yes every time I asked if I was eligible for funding, and thank you to Deakin University for providing the scholarship that allowed me to commit to this project.

Thanks to my colleagues and friends in the School of Communication and Creative Arts for all your support and encouragement.

Trent, thanks for listening to me whinge, and for providing elegant turns of phrase when my own words failed me.

To the larger community of doctoral students with whom I shared excitement and commiseration, particularly Jenny, Brianna, Grady, Alison, Steph, Emma, Lara, Megan, and John: it can be done.

To my family: Dad, Karen, Margaret, & Julie, thanks for doing this first, and setting such wonderful examples as scholars and people in the world. Knowing it has been done makes it so much easier to do. Here's to number five.

Mom, thanks for demonstrating so clearly that you don't need a Ph.D. to be the smartest person in the room, and for teaching me to be strong and clever and independent and curious. Thanks also for proofreading this document so carefully and quickly. Your help and encouragement means the world.
Most importantly: Richard, your support and belief in me has been unwavering and unselfishly given. Thanks for picking up after me, doing my share of the cooking and cleaning when I fell short, for marrying me, for accepting my logic that having a baby before I finish was a perfectly sensible thing to do, for being a welcome distraction, and for pointedly asking 'are you working?' when it was obvious that I was not, and should have been. x
Publications


*This paper won the Australia and New Zealand Communication Association 2014 Grant Noble Award.*


Barbour, Kim, 2013, “‘It can be difficult to have your creativity on tap”: Balancing client expectations and artistic practice in the tattoo industry’, Proceedings of *WCCA ’2013 – VI World Congress on Communication and Arts*, April 4-6, Geelong, Australia.
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Abstract

Self-presentation through the creation of profiles and pages on digitally networked spaces is becoming ever more ubiquitous. This dissertation investigates the experiences of online persona creation by eight artists in order to develop understanding of the role of social media in our self-identification practice. Drawing on sociological and cultural studies approaches to examine identity as performance, I reveal current artists’ presentational and representational practices within historically grounded, socio-culturally constructed discourses of ‘artistness’. Through this connection, I argue that the creation of online persona has not radically changed notions of what it means to be an artist, or how artistness is represented and understood by audiences of fans or followers, but rather that digital technology has allowed for renegotiation of the boundaries of artistness that draws from historical understandings of the role and persona of the artist. This shifting of boundaries, allowing for more inclusivity within the traditional art world, is demonstrated by my focus on ‘fringe’ artists: those whose creative practice places them outside of the traditional art world of galleries, publishers, distributors, and agents, and its existing structures of representation, distribution and consumption. The eight fringe artists who participated in this study are drawn from street art, performance poetry, craftivism and tattoo.

The focus of this research on the experiences of the artists is driven by the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Rather than a consideration of behaviour and habit, or what the artists do, this phenomenological approach allowed me to instead focus on what it is like for the artists to create persona, what drives particular types of representational practices and strategies. Using unstructured interviews, and online listening as an extension of participant observation, the artists’ narratives of experience
are expressed through transcript extracts and screenshots: both are necessary to fully explore the nature of online persona creation.

My analysis of the artists’ experiences has demonstrated that there are three distinct registers of performance with which an artist’s persona can engage: the professional register, where one demonstrates ones proficiency, experience, popularity, and professionalism; the personal register, where one connects with wider social and political interests and activities; and the intimate register, where one allows the audience in to one’s private world. The complexity of the performance and reception of these registers is influenced by the shared nature of the performance space—where previously different roles would be performed for different audiences without reference to one another, the networked nature of online social media influences decisions of how much, and when, to share with whom. These three registers occupy the same performance space, but are implicitly or explicitly for different segments of the digitally networked audience of fans, followers, friends and family. The professional, personal and intimate registers of performance enable us to see the consideration and care with which each participant creates their artists persona.

The experiences of performing the self in these three registers provides an insight into the complexities involved in creating online persona, while also demonstrating that this type of presentation of self is, in itself, no different from the types of role play and performance of self that has arguably always occurred in our physical world. Despite focusing on the role and performance of artistness, this dissertation speaks to the creation and performance of online persona more broadly.
1. Introduction

clinging to the fringe

for Kim Barbour

out of nowhere
this woman
kim
she says her name is

(but who knows
she could even be a
lunatic stalker
or something)

facebook me
talking about
i've been
reading your blog

& would like
to do an interview
for my phd

It is about
fringe artists
& their use of
online space

or something

there is a synopsis
i don't bother
reading

cause i am too busy
clinging to the fringe

to be arsed
with the fine print

Maxine Beneba Clarke, clinging to the fringe, Slamup, 2013
With this poem, my doctoral research project went ‘meta’, where the primary research became self-referential. Through this investigation into the creation of online persona by fringe artists, I met and interviewed performance poet and writer Maxine Beneba Clark in December 2012. In mid-January 2013, she responded to the interview by writing ‘clinging to the fringe’, published on her blog Slam Up and promoted via her Facebook account, tagging me in the post to connect it with my profile. Through this poem, we can see the three key elements this dissertation discusses. Firstly, artists who operate outside of the traditional systems of representation of the art world—systems such as galleries, publishers, critics, and agents—use digitally networked spaces to present themselves and their work to their audience. In using these digitally networked spaces, these artists create online personas—a digital version of the self—that legitimises their self-identification as artists without depending on cultural intermediaries for external validation. Secondly, there is an element of agency and reflexivity in the way that artists present and represent these personas online. And thirdly, in presenting themselves as artists, the participants produce and reproduce what I call artistness (explored in depth in chapter 3), recognisable tropes and typologies that fit within established notions of what it means to be an artist in 21st century Western liberal society.

This study will investigate these three elements through the experience of persona creation of eight artists. The research demonstrates that for these artists, the online persona can operate in three registers of performance—professional, personal, and intimate—and in creating their personas, participants draw on socio-cultural discourses of artistness. This chapter introduces key literature that underpins this research, including theoretical and conceptual material, the research problem, purpose, and
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

significance, methodology and methods used, assumptions and limitations of the project, and key terminology where there are multiple possible interpretations of a word. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure for the rest of the dissertation.

1.1. Persona Studies

Persona studies is the framework I am using to investigate the key concern of this project: exploring how individuals experience the phenomenon of the presentation of self in online settings. In investigating this experience, I focus on personas created by artists. Persona studies is an emerging field of research, defined by P. David Marshall as “an investigation of the presentation of self” (2013, p. 14). Building from work in celebrity studies and cultural studies, the focus on persona is a strategy to investigate ways of presenting the self. In persona studies, Marshall asserts, “the self and public intersect and produce versions and identities that in some way continue to support the wider demands of our work economies” (2013, p. 1). For the purpose of this study, I define an online persona as the presentation of the self on and through digitally networked spaces, where the self presented is an extension of a particular individual, by said individual in conjunction with their networked micropublics (see section 1.9 for a definition of this term). Therefore, through primary qualitative research, this study explores how artists present themselves in digitally networked spaces, where the selves presented can be a mix of professional, personal, and intimate, in support of their art practice.

1.1.1. Theoretical context

Persona studies is an interdisciplinary project, but has its roots in cultural studies. Of particular influence are celebrity studies, audience studies, the sociology of identity, and post-structuralism. From celebrity studies comes the focus on the individual as the locus
of meaning in contemporary society (Marshall, 2013). As new technologies and platforms provide the everyday individual with the potential of a global audience (even if that audience is never achieved) for their presentation of self, the personal and private lives of the highly celebrated individual who is visible through traditional and new media (Turner, 2004), become templates for others looking for recognition and acclaim. Theories of microcelebrity (Senft, 2013) and the branded self (Marwick, 2013) both attempt to deal with the ways that individuals use social media and digital networking tools to expand their reputational reach. However, these analytical structures are limited by their focus on people who want some type of fame or recognition, whereas the persona studies approach used here does not make this assumption, focusing on the experience of the presentation of the self, rather than the motivations and behaviours behind the activity.

The influence of the study of the audience on persona studies is less significant than that of celebrity studies theories. Nevertheless, some consideration of the reception of the persona is necessary when exploring what it is like to present, or perform, a particular version of the self. Due to the focus on the producers of the persona in this research, considerations of audience are framed as ‘imagined’, those whom the individual believes they are performing for, as well as those with whom they have direct interactions through their digital networks. This group of actual and imagined audiences can be conceived of as a micropublic, what Marshall (2013, p. 12) defines as smaller groups “that are produced and serviced by individuals presenting their media and communication online”. Within this study, micropublics are discussed from the perspective of the research participants, who talked both of interactions with specific people, and of their imagined audience more generally.
The framing of the presentation of the self in digitally networked spaces as a performance is drawn from Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analogy as described in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Metaphorically linking the labour of self-presentation with the work of an actor, Goffman provides a theatrical vocabulary to describe the process of performing the self in different settings. Of particular use are Goffman’s discussions of impression management and role-play. The former sees the individual selectively enacting particular elements of identity in different settings and for different audiences in order to maintain control over the way that identity is perceived by each audience. The related concept of role-play recognises the multiplicity of identity performances, where a person puts on different types of performances—different roles—depending on the context.

### 1.1.2. Artistness

In investigating the experience of persona creation, this study focuses on the performance of a specific role: that of the artist. In order to do this, it was necessary to identify what defining features make up the role of the artist. The combination of these features make up what I term ‘artistness’: the quality of being an artist.

In determining what can be understood as the role of the artist, I draw here on two key discourses that are most pervasive within the context of my research. The first of the two discourses is known as the ‘myth of the artist’ (explored in greater depth in chapter 3, particularly section 3.1.1). This understanding of the artist is as transgressive and bohemian, a romanticised figure whose inspiration is divine and for whom financial reward is secondary to the truth of the work (Gluck, 2000). The myth of the artist is a socially constructed role that continues to be enacted by, or imposed upon, artists in both traditional—painting, sculpture, composition, writing, acting—and non-traditional—film direction, installation, performance—art forms.
The second key discourse that is used here to identify artistness stems from the identification of the creative industries, including the arts, as an economic sector worthy of definition. The creative industries discourse sees artists as creative labourers (expanded in section 3.1.5). Rather than depending on psychological, presentational, or biographical features to define artistness (as in the myth of the artist), the artist as creative labourer is defined by their capacity to create and distribute art works, most often for financial reward.

By combining the core elements of artistness that make up the myth of the artist and the artist as creative labourer discourses, it is possible to get a sense of how the role of the artist has been socio-culturally defined. By identifying how the participants in this project enact elements of artistness, it is possible to examine the experience of the creation of a particular type of online persona—that of the artist.

1.2. Problem

It is clear from the previous sections (expanded in depth in chapters 2 and 3) that a number of gaps in knowledge exist in current research. Firstly, as an emerging field of scholarship, persona studies lacks a detailed empirical study of online persona as it currently operates by those involved in their creation. Qualitative research into online identity performance has largely followed ethnographic methodologies (boyd, 2014; Bruns et al., 2013; Buckingham, 2008; Donath, 1999; Gatson, 2011; Markham and Baym, 2009; Marwick, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010), leading to a focus on behaviour and impact. There is therefore a gap in knowledge as to how persona creation is experienced. Equally, despite a number of studies that empirically investigate the artistic identity (Bain, 2005, 2004, 2003; Becker, 1982; Charland, 2010; Codell, 2003; Fine, 2003; Meamber, 2000; Wolff, 1993), there has been little investigation on the
influence of digitally networked spaces on the creation and performance of identity by artists.

1.3. Purpose

In this study, I address the above gaps in knowledge by conducting an in-depth qualitative investigation of the experience of persona creation in digitally networked spaces. Following a methodology built on an adapted form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, I use my analysis of in-depth interviews and online listening strategies to interpret what it is like for eight fringe artists to create and perform online persona. Drawing on the theory introduced in sections 1.1-1.1.2 (expanded in depth in chapter 2), my interpretation links the ways that these artists experience online persona creation with historically developed, socio-cultural discourses of artistness.

By drawing my participants from four fringe or alternative art forms, existing outside the traditional representational structures of the art world, I investigate the experience of the performance and presentation of self by the artists themselves, independent of agents, publishers, galleries, critics or other cultural intermediaries. Six participants were drawn from the Melbourne art scene, and two are based in the United Kingdom—one in Birmingham and one in Edinburgh (selection and recruitment strategies are introduced in section 1.6, and covered in depth in section 4.3). The online listening practice (introduced in section 1.6, and covered in depth in section 4.5.2) occurred primarily on Facebook, with the addition of Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and a number of blogs.
1.4. **Significance**

Through this research project, I make four significant contributions to current knowledge: methodological, theoretical, conceptual, and disciplinary.

By adapting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis from its roots in psychology (Smith et al., 2009) and incorporating online listening (Crawford, 2009) alongside in-depth interviews, I have produced an innovative methodology for studying experience in digitally networked spaces—this term is defined in section 1.9. This methodology provides equal weight to the narratives recalled in a face-to-face setting through interviews as it does the narratives built up through the use of the spaces themselves as observed through online listening. The methodology and associated data collection and analysis methods can be used by scholars who desire a structured approach to the experience of online phenomena, as explained in depth in chapter 4.

By developing the registers of performance (theorised in sections 4.7-4.7.3, and forming the basis of chapters 6-8) used to structure my analysis of the transcripts and online listening, I have constructed a theoretical frame through which to understand different types of behaviour and experiences in digitally networked spaces. Given current interest in the potential context collapse inherent when different performances and audiences share a performance space online (Baym and boyd, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012), the capacity to separate elements of a persona’s performance according to the performance register allows scholars to deal with the complexity inherent in online identity creation.

Through my focus on the artist as the producer of persona, this study has contributed to understanding of both how the role of the artist has been historically defined and socio-culturally encoded in the west, and how artists working outside of the representative
structures of the traditional art world currently produce and reproduce artistness (see chapter 3) through their role inhabitation.

Finally, at a disciplinary level, this study marks the first complete empirical project in the emerging field of persona studies.

1.5. Research Statement
This dissertation investigates the experiences of online persona creation by eight artists, framing different types of experience through three registers of performance, the professional, the personal, and the intimate. Drawing on sociological and cultural studies approaches to understanding identity as performance, I tie the participants’ presentational and representational practices to historically grounded, socio-culturally constructed discourses of ‘artistness’.

1.6. Design
As mentioned in section 1.4, this research project uses an adapted form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Briefly, IPA is a phenomenological research methodology developed within psychology, which aims to “understand an individual’s personal perceptions of their experiences” (Hinds, 2011, p. 193). Researchers come to this understanding through structured interpretative analysis of the narratives of experience gathered from research participants.

In order to understand how artists experience the phenomenon of persona creation through digitally networked spaces, I used purposive sampling to identify possible participants drawn from tattoo art, craftivism, performance poetry, and street art (sampling technique covered in depth in section 4.3.1). A total of 15 potential
participants were contacted to obtain the final sample of eight. Each art form is represented by two artists, who are each introduced in chapter 4.

Data collection was conducted in two ways. Each artist was interviewed once in a face-to-face setting of their choice, with the unstructured conversations lasting between 40 and 90 minutes, with the interviews transcribed and approved by the participants prior to analysis. Additionally, I spent the period between January 2012 and December 2013 engaged in online listening, following each participant’s online persona across multiple platforms, and recording examples of experience with screen shots. For a detailed discussion of the data collection methods used, see section 3.5.

Data analysis (see section 4.6 for in-depth discussion) took the form of repeated close readings of each interview transcript. Through these readings, emergent patterns were identified and thematically coded into complementary pairs: strategy|happenstance, visibility|self-protection, specialisation|diversification, self|collective, and work|play. These pairings, as suggested by their presentation using a vertical line rather than a dash or slash, are not elements on a continuum nor in binary opposition. Rather, through the data analysis process these thematic pairings seemed to pivot around one another; they are connected, related, dependent, and yet still separate. Screen shots obtained during the online listening were coded similarly, allocated to one of the five thematic pairings. When all eight transcripts were coded, the data in each thematic pairing was associated with one of the three registers of performance, with screen shots adding to the depth of the analysis by contributing their own elements to the narratives of experience.

The three registers of performance were developed in response to the data analysis process, when it became clear that the initial level of data analysis did not sufficiently aid understanding of the participants experience of persona creation. The professional,
personal, and intimate registers of performance provide a conceptual frame through which to understand different types of performances online, and how these performances inform participant experience (see section 4.7).

### 1.7. Assumptions

I began this research project with a number of assumptions regarding my participants and their presentational practices, based on my existing knowledge of art history, the sociology of art, and online identity studies. One such assumption was that those artists who engaged in persona creation in online environments, i.e. presented themselves as artists in digitally networked spaces, did so at least in part to further their professional and creative development. I also assumed that as people whose core activity is creative, artists would take an equally creative approach to their use of digitally networked spaces, and that those operating outside of the representational structures of the traditional art world (what I’m calling ‘fringe’, represented here by tattoo art, performance poetry, craftivism, and street art) would be the most active in presenting themselves. This assumption is built on the fact that fringe artists lack the agents, critics, publishers, distributors and other cultural intermediaries who perform identity management roles on behalf of artists working in more traditional types of creative practice.

At a methodological level, I also assumed that those who agreed to participate in the research would be able to provide me with insight into their experience of persona creation through reflection and narrative, and that I would be able to interpret these narratives to gain understanding into the phenomenon of using digitally networked spaces for the purpose of self-presentation. At a theoretical level, I operate under the assumption that the self is multiple, shifting, complex, adaptive, and made up of
different roles performed for different purposes, rather than a single, unified entity waiting to be discovered. I believe that despite the context collapse and identity flattening that occurs through online spaces, this complexity continues online. These assumptions informed the literature this project utilises, my research design, and my interactions with my participants.

1.8. Limitations
As an in-depth, qualitative research project, this study is not designed to use representative samples and or provide generalizable results. Rather, it is an investigation of the experiences of eight individuals in relation to a phenomenon, and these the analysis of these experiences may have led me to different findings by altering the participant group. Indeed, as detailed in chapter nine, further research is required to verify the applicability of the findings with participants outside of the eight involved in this study. Likewise, as this study has focused on artists and the incorporation of artistness into their persona, the findings may have limited applicability for those whose presentational practices depend on other types of roles and constructs. Finally, time and distance constraints meant that I was only able to interview each participant face to face once, and despite the addition of ongoing online listening practice, and the feedback opportunities offered to participants, additional data potentially including contradictory findings may have been gathered had I been able to conduct multiple interviews or discuss the findings with each participant in person.

1.9. Terminology
Throughout this dissertation, I use a number of pieces of terminology, some of which are new, and some whose definitions are contested within the humanities and social sciences. To simplify and ensure consistent understanding, I outline my use of these
Persona: a persona is a public identity, the outer self presented to an audience. It is similar to the idea of a role (Goffman, 1959) or a self-brand (Hearn, 2008), but is mediated and connected with a wider sense of the proliferation of the public self that has been occurring over the past 50 years (Marshall, 2013). Chapter 2 provides an in-depth discussion of persona and persona studies. Throughout this dissertation, I have opted for the modern English plural of ‘personas’, rather than the Latin personae.

Register: As expanded in section 3.7, I have taken the term ‘register’ from the study of vocal registers (Hollien, 1972). Vocal registers are distinct frequencies produced with equivalent voice quality, what the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) describes as “a portion of … a range similarly produced or of the same quality”. In this dissertation, the registers are distinct elements of a persona performed with equivalent impact or intensity.

Performance: Utilising Goffman’s dramaturgical analogy (1959), I understand the undertaking and adoption of a persona as being a performance. The persona is a part or role played for an audience, where the performer is undertaking impression management whether consciously or subconsciously. See sections 2.1.3 and 2.2.3 for more discussion of this idea.

Professional: The term ‘professional’ can refer to high status, white-collar occupations which require considerable training such as doctors or lawyers, or used to describe a paid rather than amateur job such as professional sportsperson or actor. In this project, I refer to artists as professional when it is their core concern and the central identifier in
their work identity, irrespective of income or training. For an explanation of the complexity of defining artists as professional, see section 4.7.1.

Personal: As a project focused on the presentation of artistness through personas, I use the term ‘personal’ to refer to behaviour and experiences that are not related to the participant’s core creative activity, but that are widely known. This could include involvement in political or social causes, or interactions with friend networks that share no overt connection to the participant’s art. See section 4.7.2 for further discussion of the term in relation to the personal register of performance.

Intimate: In this project, the term intimate refers to behaviour and experiences of a personal nature which would normally only be shared with those to whom an individual is closest: immediate friends, very close friends, sexual partners or lovers. Although this understanding could include physical intimacy, the data did not address this element of intimacy. See section 4.7.3 for more detail.

Digitally networked space: The terms Web 2.0, social media, and social networks all attempt to describe the transition of the internet from a networked information repository to interactive technologies designed to facilitate user generated content sharing. I have elected to use the phrase ‘digitally networked spaces’ to describe elements of the internet and world wide web which are used by my participants. The term Web 2.0 has been largely abandoned within the humanities, and I feel that the
focus on the social unnecessarily trivialises the labour inherent in producing an online persona\(^1\).

Online/Offline: Although I do not see a split between activities presented in digitally networked spaces and those presented in physical space—after all, it is the same embodied self producing both through different systems of mediation—it is useful to have a short hand way of distinguishing between the performance spaces involved. Here I have used online and offline to make this distinction.

1.10. Structure

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter two, titled Persona Studies—Theory and Concepts, functions as a literature review and introduction to the key concepts and ideas that inform this research. I begin by covering persona studies, briefly discussing the key influences on the field from celebrity studies, audience theory and the sociology of identity. Identified next are key theoretical concepts that are used in my research: subjectivity, agency, presentation, representation, performance, performativity, mediation and experience. In chapter three, I explore

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\(^1\) There has been some considerable research and theorisation of what can be termed ‘digital labour’, particularly from a Marxist perspective. Beginning with the 2009 Internet as Playground and Factory Conference, from which came an edited collection of papers on modes of labour, impacts of participation, and exploitation (Scholz, 2013), and more recently seeing a special issue of TripleC (Sandoval et al., 2014) and the book Digital Labour and Karl Marx (Fuchs, 2014), this work conceptualises digital labour as broadly as connected by “not a common type of occupation, but rather the industry they contribute to and in which capital exploits them” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 4). More specifically, Fuchs and Sandoval (2014, p. 492) describe digital labour as “a specific form of cultural labour that has to do with the production and productive consumption of digital media”. In the context of this study therefore, digital labour can be understood as the physical and mental work involved in the production of a persona, for as Bagust (2014, p. 91) comments, “Web 2.0 platforms rely on users to provide content, and … this content is provided through user-friendly and richly interactive interfaces that do not require special skills to make such content production feel natural”. Although theories of digital labour could be useful to understand the impact of the production of a persona on the individual who creates and maintains it, discussion of these ideas is outside the scope of this dissertation.
artistness: the artist as subject, the myth of the artist, the theory of reputation, typologies of the artist, authorship, auteurs, and authority, the construct of the artist, the artist as creative labourer, and the artist as fringe. The chapter concludes with a consolidation of this material on artistness with the key concepts from chapter two in order to theorise the persona of the artist.

Chapter four, titled Research Design, includes detailed discussion of: methodology, participant sampling and recruitment, ethics including informed consent, data collection methods, and interpretation. In this chapter I also outline the development of the three registers of performance, and explain the procedures for participant feedback. In chapter five, titled The Artists and Their Practice, I introduce the reader to the four art forms of craftivism, performance poetry, street art, and tattoo art. Here I also introduce each of the eight participants, briefly outlining their careers to date, and explaining the conditions by which I included them in the sample.

Chapters six through eight are based around the three registers of performance, professional, personal, and intimate respectively. These three chapters detail the findings of the research, connecting the experiences of the eight participants in the project to the theories of identity, self-hood, and artistness discussed in chapter two. Structured through the emergent thematic pairings of strategy|happenstance, visibility|self-protection, specialisation|diversification, self|collective, and work|play, the findings chapters demonstrate how the different elements of artists are performed through registers of performance by the eight participants in the research. The final chapter, titled Implications and Further Research, takes these findings further by considering how the construction of persona by these artists could inform the study of identity more widely, and proposing a number of possible directions for this research.
2. Persona Studies—Theory and Concepts

The key concepts and terminology for this study of online persona, along with the structure of this document, were outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I expand on the theoretical and conceptual framework, locating this research project within core literature, and connecting my own work to other research on persona, celebrity and identity. This review of key literature, divided into two sections as explained below, will also expand my identification of current gaps in knowledge I seek to address with this research project.

The first section of this chapter introduces Persona Studies, the theoretical framework with which I am investigating the way that individuals experience the creation of online persona. I begin by exploring persona studies’ development from cultural studies broadly, and the more recent discipline of celebrity studies, particularly the focus on the individual as the locus of meaning in contemporary prestige economies. I then explain the influence of audience theory, sociological studies of identity, and authorship on Persona Studies, and how these inform the way that online persona can be understood.

Having outlined the disciplinary and theoretical basis for persona studies, the second section of this chapter will introduce the key concepts that drive the persona studies approach. As an interdisciplinary project, persona studies draws on a range of concepts familiar to many disciplinary areas within the humanities. These concepts include performance, subjectivity and agency, presentation and representation, performativity, mediation and identification. Each of these concepts is defined here as per its use in contextualising my understanding of the creation of online persona by fringe artists. This section of the chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the phenomenological understanding of ‘experience’ as it will be utilised in this project.
2.1. Persona Studies

By using the term persona, I move through the extensive literature on identity and self, expanding on Marshall’s (2013, p. 14) account, in which he suggests “persona studies is an investigation of the presentation of the self, in an era where self-presentation has moved quite dramatically to centre-stage for large expanses of the populace”. I do not seek to understand the nature of identity or of the self (or selves) presented; what I seek instead is an understanding of how these people present and represent themselves to diverse, geographically dispersed audiences. This understanding is phenomenologically driven, where the participants’ subjective experience of the presentational and representational practices are important, rather than any objectively observable behaviour. The phenomenological will to truth in this project seeks not to define some notion of the authentic individual, but rather to explore and interpret how the participants themselves experience the creation of personas. The participants are considered agents in their own presentational practices. Although as individuals they are drawing on and working with the sociocultural expectations of artistness described through art history, sociology and cultural policy discourses—in chapter three I explore these ideas in considering the development of the artistic subject—the artists are creating their own persona by selectively acting upon these expectations. It is the intersection of these two elements—the historical construction of the artist, and the subjective experience of those who inhabit this construct and play this role—that offers a new understanding of the presentation and representation of the artistic persona.

However, it is important to note that persona can be utilised to study any type of public identity, not solely those within the arts (see M/C Journal of Media and Culture, volume 17, issue 3, ‘persona’, for a range of applications). Therefore, this chapter will address the development of persona studies broadly, before focusing specifically on the artist’s persona in chapter 3.
2.1.1. Celebrity studies
In considering persona, I am drawing on theories and disciplinary framing developed within celebrity studies (a discipline that stemmed from cultural studies), which “as much as it implies a social construct and industrial construct, also implies a kind of individual agency” (Marshall, 2013, p. 13). I am therefore beginning with the focus on both the individual as an agent in their own presentational practice and an understanding of the socially constructed nature of identity. Taking this as my starting point, I am able to expand out from celebrity studies by incorporating broader theoretical concerns and a methodological approach that will be of value to celebrity studies by shifting the focus from the famous and infamous to the everyday individual. The focus on the media representation and public reception of film, television, sporting, political, and everyday celebrities, provides the basis for understanding the celebrated individual as simultaneously a social product and a personal creation. Holmes and Redmond (2010, p. 6) describe celebrity studies as “less as a distinct discipline than the product of an expanded and expanding intellectual interest in celebrity” which although currently located in media and cultural studies, is in fact intrinsically interdisciplinary. The interdisciplinarity of celebrity studies matches the approach I take here in researching persona. Drawing on sociology, cultural studies, psychology, aesthetics, and art history to develop a framework for understanding the experience of presentational and representational practices allows for an analysis that is both broad and deep in its application.

One key critique of celebrity studies as a whole is that it has tended towards an overwhelming focus on textual analyses of the representation of individuals through the media (Turner, 2010, p. 13). This is leading to a point where “the field is populated with analyses of individual celebrities either as media texts interesting in their own right or as pointers to broader cultural formations or political issues” (Turner, 2010, p.13). This
CHAPTER TWO: PERSONA STUDIES: THEORY AND CONCEPTS

This project engages directly with the people whose representational and presentational practices are of interest, and although I am not arguing for the eight participants to be counted as ‘celebrities’—those who have an “impact on public consciousness” (Rojek, 2001, p. 10), or “a name which once made by the news, now makes news by itself” (Kotler et al., cited in Holmes and Redmond, 2010, p. 4)—the account of public individuality developed within celebrity studies informs my understanding of the presentation of self. As Marshall (2006, p. 635) argues, celebrity is one of the “discourses of the self” that emphasises and draws attention to broader ideas of individuality.

This particular discourse—the “revelation of the private self” (Marshall, 2006, p. 639)—operates through the extra-textual dimensions of the public persona, which traditionally have been mediated by the broadcast and print media. The capacity of new media forms to connect the individual to their audience is breaking down the influence of the representative layer provided by journalists, critics, or gossip columnists. This shift in the way that individuals connect with their audience, even when mediated by the digitally networked platforms on which the persona is presented, also suggests a more direct approach to research. In taking a phenomenological approach by studying experience (outlined in depth in Chapter 4), I am refocusing the celebrity studies approach from the outcome of the representative work onto the experiential elements of creating a persona in digitally networked space.

One key strength of the celebrity studies’ approach to individual identity performance is its understanding of agency. The presentational practices of celebrities are, within the bounds of social, political, and technological possibility, self-selected. Although others such as managers, booking agents, and stylists may seek to influence or direct celebrity presentation, and although there may be unintended intervention from paparazzi
photographers or even fans, there is still some element of impression management (see section 2.1.3) in the ways that celebrities present themselves to their audience. This agency (discussed further in section 2.2.1) is balanced by a need for audience, either real or imagined. In order for a persona to persevere, it must be supported by its audience, or given what Goffman (1959) calls an appropriate level of deference, just as in order to achieve celebrity status, an actor, musician, politician or other public figure must be appropriately celebrated. A networked audience of fans, followers, and critics is necessary to legitimise the role that is being played.

Turner (2004, p. 1) argues that celebrities usually emerge from the sport or entertainment industries, are highly visible in the media, and have more attention paid to their private lives than their professional abilities. This conceptualisation of celebrity identifies those whose actions, achievements, and mistakes are reported in magazines, tabloid newspapers and television shows, and gossip websites. Senft’s (2013) studies of what she terms microcelebrity – the online self-presentation of an individual who does not meet the contemporary conditions of celebrity – goes beyond those captured in Turner’s definition. In contrast to the film, television, sport or music celebrities as defined by Turner, Senft’s microcelebrity refers to those involved in “deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (2013, p. 346). Although also focused on individual agency and self-presentation in online environments, Senft’s understanding of microcelebrity differs from the way I am using persona in her assertion that presenting oneself online is problematized by the potential for harm as a result. Senft comments that “at the same time that people are beginning to perceive a coherent online presence as a good and useful thing, they are also learning that negative publicity can be quite dangerous to one’s employment, relationships, and self-image” (2013, p. 347). This characterisation
of the activity of creating an online identity as “fraught” in nature and of microcelebrity in “crisis” (2013, p. 347) is appropriate given Senft’s participant groups, but in this study would unnecessarily focus discussion on the potential for harm as a result of producing an online identity.

The discourse of potential harm touched on by Senft in her discussion of microcelebrity is reflected in much of the popular media coverage of online identity creation, particularly in relation to the perceived replication of celebrity or microcelebrity presentational practices by young people. Newspaper articles reporting both specific events and editorial opinion focus largely on issues of identity theft, predation of children, and other risks of over-sharing, or posting large amounts of personal information and images through social media websites. For example, an article in the San Francisco Chronicle states "Along with wonderful new capabilities, new technology often ushers in opportunities for abuse" (Temple, 2012). The article frames an uneasiness with technological change around a typical media panic narrative, detailing several cases of paedophiles contacting minors and engaging in either digital or physical sexual assault. After outlining the perceived risks social networking sites pose for children, and discussing a number of actual cases of children being abused by adults they met online, Temple concludes by pushing the responsibility back to the parent. Another article from the same publication draws on a piece of commercial research from a credit reporting company, stating that "More than half of adults 45 and older who are on social networks like Facebook could be in danger of becoming victims of identity theft or other crimes because they share too much private information" (Evangelista, 2010). The Sydney Morning Herald warns "Mobile phones and social networking sites have become the new frontier for cyber criminals who are stealing passwords and personal information by taking advantage of people's cluelessness"
While Olding (2012) reports that two-thirds of online adults have fallen victim to cybercrime in New Zealand, the New Zealand Herald reports that in that country, "Two-thirds of online adults have fallen victim to cybercrime" (Wade, 2012).

This discourse of anxiety and risk associated with the sharing of personal information on social media is not the only discussion of the technology in the news media, but does tend to be fairly pervasive, and it by no means new. In 2005, when the focus was on MySpace rather than Facebook, danah boyd critiqued this tendency towards what she calls “perpetuating a culture of fear under the scapegoat of informing the public” (2005). boyd goes on to argue “The choice to perpetually report on the possibility or rare occurrence of kidnapping / stalking / violence because of Internet sociability is not a neutral position - it is a position of power that the media chooses to take because it’s a story that sells” (2005). This maintenance of a culture of fear by traditional media forms such as newspapers and television is also troublesome considering the fact that new forms of online distribution of content are directly threatening existing business models.

In a more positive use of the concept, Marwick (2013) also utilises microcelebrity to analyse the way that particular individuals present themselves online. Defining a microcelebrity as “a state of being famous to a niche group of people, …but also a behavior: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention” (2013, p. 114), Marwick looks particularly at the San Francisco technology community. Marwick notes that the practice of both achieved and ascribed microcelebrity uses mediated presentational techniques informed by more traditional celebrity forms in order to commodify the self. Ascribed microcelebrity is where high-status individuals within a particular niche are “treated with the celebrity-fan relationship of distance and aggrandizement”, whereas achieved microcelebrity is the result of a strategy of self-presentation designed to increase and maintain an audience through self-disclosure (Marwick, 2013, pp. 116–117).
Although persona studies draw on similar conceptual underpinnings as microcelebrity, it does not begin with the presumption that this is necessarily negative as does Senft (2013). Equally, although the conceptualisation of ascribed and achieved microcelebrity can be useful when discussing persona, the focus on commodification of the self—where the persona is “constructed and performed to attract attention and publicity” (Marwick, 2013, p. 117)—presumes a relationship to the audience as a market. This presumption could lead to the exclusion or dismissal of other types of relationships with an audience built up by those creating personas in digitally networked spaces, such as community building. Finally, by removing the direct reference to the term ‘celebrity’, the conception of persona is more easily applicable to a wider range of people who may not ever come close to the level of fame required to be counted as a public celebrity as defined by Turner (2004, p. 1). Whereas microcelebrity necessarily constructs participants as less than celebrities, studying persona levels the playing field.

To conclude, while acknowledging the important influence of celebrity studies and the theoretical connection that persona studies has to the discipline, I emphasise that persona studies provides a distinct approach to the study of the performance of self. Although best known as a celebrity studies scholar, Marshall (2013) outlines the reasons for his choice to shift to the word persona by linking to the terms’ history. He comments that in its definition, persona “implies an outward appearance of the individual” (Marshall, 2013, p. 14) rather than a more holistic and internalised view of identity or selfhood. Drawing on Jung, Marshall also notes the relationship between individual persona and society, arguing that persona “contains the individual as they form their mask for the outside world” (2013, p. 14). Marshall states that persona studies needs to “identify and explore individuated prestige economies, and how they are constituted through persona” (2013, p. 15). In maintaining the celebrity studies
focus on the individual as the locale of meaning in contemporary western society, and increasing the inclusivity of the research by moving outside of the sport and entertainment fields for potential participant groups, persona studies extends the reach and possible impact of the celebrity studies field.

2.1.2. Audience theory
Although this study is interested in the creation of persona from the creators’—as opposed to the audiences’—perspective, as a form of performance it is necessary to have some sense of who the performance is for. In the online context, determining who is engaging with a performance is complicated by the accessibility of that performance to an audience. This audience is often called ‘the public’, as speaking to the public “implies that the public is acting as an audience” (boyd, 2008, p. 125). This creates the sense that there is a mass of people watching, following and engaging with a persona, when the truth is usually much more modest. In order to specify an audience that exists as a result of the development of digitally networked media, particularly the internet, the term networked publics has been used (boyd, 2008; Langlois et al., 2009; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Russell and Echchaibi, 2009; Varnelis, 2008). Ito (2008, p. 2) originally defined networked publics as “a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media”. The term extends past the concept of audience as a collection of individuals who share engagement with a text or performance (boyd, 2008; Livingstone, 2005) to incorporate the idea of a mediated public as a space, a place and a technological network.

Because of my primary focus on the creator of a persona, rather than those who engage with it, a more focused understanding of audience is necessary. Marshall (2013, p. 9) has termed the social media audience of a particular persona a micropublic, which he
defines as “a series of smaller publics … that are produced and serviced by individuals presenting their media and communication online”. A micropublic can be developed by the individual through a process of selection—as on sites such as Facebook that require approval of friend requests for ‘private’ pages—or through an audience opt-in process such as the development of a following of a publicly accessible Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr or Twitter account. What separates the membership of a micropublic from the wider audience, Marshall (2013, p. 12) suggests, is that:

these are the followers and friends that are connected to a range of content via a particular individual that is simultaneously a ‘private’ network, but regularly and publicly updated and responded to in the tradition of broadcast and print media forms that makes it a quasi-public network.

Each persona may be developed, or nuanced, in an attempt to meet the needs of a particular micropublic, but this persona is also likely to be accessible to a wider audience for whom it is not designed or directed, and who may be largely invisible. The micropublic itself can also be conceptualised in relation to the imagined audience, that creation of every person involved in any communicative act. Litt (2012, p. 331) defines an imagined audience as “the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating, our audience”. The greater reach and population of the potential online audience (when compared with the audience engaged with in most physically bounded spaces), combined with the diversity of membership of this potential audience, is argued to complicate significantly the conceptualisation of an imagined audience occurring in digitally networked spaces (Litt, 2012, p. 331). Discussing imagined audiences as they relate to online communication, Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 115) state that “We may understand that the Twitter or Facebook audience is potentially limitless, but we often act as if it were bounded”. This tendency to behave as if there is a limit to our online audience can be understood as a tacit acknowledgement of our understanding that our
imagined audience is, in fact, a micropublic. However, the limits placed on the
imagined audience also relate to the capacity of many digitally networked spaces to
provide us with metrics of possible visibility. These metrics can be in the form of friend
or follower numbers, or like, view, click, and share counts that can be compared
between users. These metrics help to give a sense, however accurate or inaccurate that
sense might be, of the relative size of a potential audience for a given persona
performance.

The performance of persona in digitally networked spaces necessarily requires that the
performer believes their performance will be witnessed. The real or imagined witnesses
that make up the audience are understood here as a micropublic that is developed
through selection by both the performer and the audience member. These micropublics
work to legitimise the performance by their engagement with the presented persona,
whether through highly visible activities such as liking and favouriting, commenting,
retweeting, or sharing, or through the less visible activities of following and lurking (see
Edelmann, 2013 for a comprehensive consideration of lurking). Although the role of the
audience cannot be discounted, this study of persona focuses on the experience of the
individual who creates that persona. Therefore, throughout this study I consider the
audience primarily from the perspective of the creator of the persona, rather than in its
own right.

2.1.3. Goffman and the sociology of identity
In taking the position of the individual who is creating the persona, I conceptualise the
identity enacted as one element in a complex, multiple sense of self rather than as a
reflection of a coherent, inner truth. Therefore, we can best understand persona creation
as a form of performance. Here, I use Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analogy from
The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), particularly his considerations of impression management and role-play.

The range of potential acts that make up the performance of a particular social role can be diverse enough that an individual may pick and choose the aspects of the overall performance that suits them best. These individual aspects can then be integrated into a performance that allows for a demonstration of that social role or construct that is both sincere (to use Goffman’s term) and allows for individuality. The individual is adopting a social front, a “collective representation” which has become “institutionalised in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks” that are necessary for the front to be performed (Goffman, 1959, p. 37). Commenting that no matter what type of role an individual might take on, there is almost always an established front, Goffman states that “Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he has to do both” (1959, p. 37). In other words, in order to successfully maintain the front, one must perform both the representative and practical elements the role requires: a doctor must both look and behave like a ‘doctor’ and practice medicine; a bricklayer must both dress and act the part and lay bricks.

As indicated above, this social front can be made up of a variety of elements stemming from the expectations of the socio-cultural space in which the front is performed. Goffman here proves an instructive starting point to the development of a nuanced understanding of how individuals perform their roles, both in physical and digitally networked sense. Key to understanding the idea of role-play is the idea that each role is played as a form of impression management. Impression management is made up of “the attributes that are required of a performer for the work of successfully staging a
character” (Goffman, 1959, p. 203). Goffman describes the work of impression management as the creation of a front, which is “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (1959, p. 32). The front is then divided into ‘setting’ – the fixed attributes of the front, usually related to a room or space, or in terms of digital performances, the platform or website used—and ‘personal front’ for everything that is associated with the individual—appearance, speech, imagery, writing style, regularity of performance and so forth. As explored by Manning (1992, p. 40), Goffman believed that “fronts add ‘dramatic realization’ to performances: they help performers to convey everything they wish to convey in any given interaction”, and act as a set of “abstract, stereotyped expectations” (1959, p. 37). These abstract, stereotyped expectations, whether or not they are all enacted through a process of impression management, are what I argue make up the ‘persona’.

Bromley (1993, pp. 14–15) argues that impression management is in essence the management of reputation. In aiming to control the way that others think of us, through “preparatory, concurrent or subsequent efforts to influence particular people” (or impression management) (Bromley, 1993, p. 15), we are trying to influence “the general opinion … or impression” those particular people may have of us (1993, p. 2). In most cases, a reputation can be “strongly evaluative (in a positive or negative way), or ambivalent or neutral” (p. 5), and the “aura of reputation that surrounds a person” is a particularly important to being successful in the arts, along with business, politics, entertainment, and science (1993, p. 6). Reputation, whether positive, neutral, or negative, is the result of the reception of a persona by an audience. As this study analyses persona creation from the perspective of the creator, not the audience, an in-depth discussion of reputation theory is outside the scope of this chapter. However, I
return to the concept of reputation as it specifically applies to the artist in the next chapter (section 3.1.2).

Along with impression management, audience selection is important in the study of persona, and is enacted in different ways in physically and digitally networked spaces. By allowing one’s performance to be seen only or primarily by a select group, the chances of something going wrong or the performance being questioned are minimised. Goffman comments that

the circumspect performer will also attempt to select the kind of audience that will give the minimum of trouble in terms of the show the performer wants to put on and the show he does not want to have to put on. (1959, p. 113)

This selection is relatively straightforward when it is considered solely in terms of the physically present audience, as there are only so many people who can be within a particular audience in a particular physical space at a time, and the person creating the persona is able to perceive that audience in an immediate way. However, online audiences, as discussed earlier, can be more difficult to perceive or select, and often impossible to track. Therefore, perhaps the audience becomes less the people who are potentially watching, and instead becomes the people the performer deliberately engages with. Here, the circumspect performer selects who to respond to in the comments section of a blog or Facebook wall, which tweets to reply to or retweet, who to follow on Tumblr or Instagram, and so on. This process of selection works to segregate a mass audience into micropublics. The problematic nature of audience in online settings, discussed earlier in this chapter (section 2.1.2), can be managed in part through the use of different platforms. A blog, website, Twitter stream or Facebook fan site may be publicly accessible, but only a select few, a particular micropublic, get access to a personal Facebook site or a private Twitter stream.
The influence of Goffman’s work on the presentation of the self can be seen in many studies looking at identity construction in online environments. Specifically analysing college students’ use of Facebook, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) look at how nonymous online environments such as Facebook influence identity construction in ways quite different to anonymous sites. As opposed to early studies of anonymous sites, the authors found individuals are less likely to “play-act at being someone else or to put on different online personae that differ from their “real life” identities” (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1818). The author’s most interesting claim is that what students are presenting is not their ‘true self’ or a ‘hidden self’, but “hoped-for possible selves”—a term which they have taken from Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan and McCabe (2005)—defined as “socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes they can [establish] given the right conditions” (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1819).

The level of awareness of the performance here provides insight into the way that online media can be used to present personas.

Again starting with Goffman’s performance ideas and dramaturgical analogies, Pearson (2009, para. 11) links these concepts with Granovetter’s (1973) idea of social ties. Pearson (2009, para. 11) uses the term ‘glass bedroom’, a “metaphoric construct that has been suggested informally” by social networking site users, to describe interactions within social media. This metaphor acknowledges that there is the ability of anyone nearby to see the interactions of those in the bedroom, a highly personal and presumably private space, but that there is also some distance—people do not expect everyone who comes across an interaction to participate. This relates to audience selection, but rather than completely excluding parts of the audience, the user simply ignores their presence, opting not to engage. To extend the metaphor further, the user knows that anyone walking past can see in, but that does not mean everyone gets to sit on the bed. In her
ethnography of camgirls, Senft (2008, p. 8) deals with the exposure of a personal space (specifically a home) to a public audience, and comments that the creation of an online presence (or multiple presences) complicates our impression management strategies:

Although it is possible to compartmentalize online, it’s not easy — just ask anyone on Facebook who has agonized over blocking a ‘friends’ request. Online, our public persona is utterly integrated — we can present different selves to different audiences in private email, but each of these selves must somehow be consistent with the self we create for our LiveJournal, or our homepage, or our webcam, unless we decide to develop entirely new personae and accounts for each of our new ‘selves.’

This requirement for consistency of identity across multiple platforms means that although identity play is possible, once a particular identity type has been established online, compartmentalising will only allow for degrees of impression management and audience segmentation. And given the dependency and necessary interrelationship of the digital persona with the physically present person creating it, there is also a requirement for consistency between these presentations of the self as well. The networks of strong and weak ties that operate through online social media both require and support the development of this type of consistent, if often nuanced, impression management.

The relationship between online social networking and the social ties theory has already been well explored (Brown et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2011; Gilbert and Karahalios, 2009; Grabowicz et al., 2012; Kivran-Swaine et al., 2011; Komito, 2011; Shamma et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2010) but Pearson also considers the ways that these ties affect our performance of self, and comments that the performative spaces facilitated by these mediated platforms create a kind of ‘accessible privacy’. The amount of disclosure is managed by the performer, and
through this structuralist agency, the performer may wish to open the door to private or intimate aspects of their constructed identity. (2009, para. 22)

When considering how an individual interacts with their segmented micropublics, it would be useful to consider how much of their performance is targeted to their strong ties (friends, family, other artists, long-time fans, immediate customers) and how much is targeted to the much larger group of people with whom they have weak ties.

In one of the few studies to include non-users in an analysis of social networking sites, Tufekci (2008) takes Goffman’s ideas of performance alongside the idea of ‘social grooming’, which is described as activity equivalent to the social grooming seen in primates, and includes all the phatic communion, soft contact and social niceties that enable us to function in social environments. Tufekci states that Dunbar’s notion of social grooming and Goffman’s concepts of the presentation of the self and impression management are complementary aspects of the construction of the social self... It is through social interaction and socially embedded public or semi-public action that we affirm our relations, construct our status, and ultimately produce the social ‘me’. (Tufekci, 2008, p. 547)

The social actions, or grooming activities, that people engage with online could include posting status updates or photos, along with the practices of commenting, sharing, liking, retweeting, or favouriting that are embedded within each site’s systems. This type of grooming contributes to the development of the persona by solidifying and making visible the connections and networks between the individual and their micropublics.

In a more recent study of image use for identity presentation on Facebook, Farquhar (2013) utilises Goffman’s later work on interaction (1969, 1967) to investigate the use of ‘identity pegs’—visual cues that demonstrate group membership—to perform particular, and often exaggerated, social roles through the posting and sharing of
images. Although supplementing participant observation with participant interviews gives significant depth to this study, Farquhar’s concentration solely on image use renders invisible other important identity formation activities and behaviours online. Likewise, the decision to concentrate solely on Facebook use by college students similarly limits the analysis; to understand online identity formation and the personas that are created and performed, it is necessary to engage with a range of digitally networked platforms.

In contrast to the above uses of Goffman’s work, Hogan (2010) creates a strong argument that the creation of online persona through social media is not performance of self, but is instead an exhibition of self. Expanding on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach, Hogan makes the case that due to the a-synchronicity of social media, where the audience can access the presentation of the self regardless of whether the performer is available in time or space, an exhibitional (as from an exhibition of work in a specific space, rather than ‘exhibitionist’) approach is more appropriate. Drawing on Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Hogan argues that the aura of the person is removed when the performance is recorded, and that this means that the selves displayed in social media are reproductions, rather than originals. Benjamin (Benjamin et al., 1992) used film as an example of the transformation of performance into representation, shifting the identification of the audience from the actor to the camera, and Hogan’s extension of this into the reproduction of the self through social media provides a way to interpret how these reproductions are identified with by the audience. In an approach to persona studies that fits with this critique, a created persona could be considered what Hogan calls an artefact. Hogan finishes with the following:

The capabilities of exhibition sites allow a person to be found when others want to look rather than when the person is able to be present and perform. Thus, extending presentation of the self by considering an exhibitional approach
alongside a dramaturgical one is meant to be a step towards a clearer articulation of both the potentials and the perils of self-presentation in an age of digital reproduction”. (Hogan, 2010, p. 384)

However, Hogan’s work is interested in the consumption of online selves, not in the experience of their production, just as Benjamin was interested in the consumption of film, rather than the experience of the actors performing in front of the camera. As this study deals with individuals’ subjective descriptions of the experience of presenting themselves in and through digitally networked spaces, the performance metaphor is a more appropriate approach. Additionally, the persona itself can undergo change without input from the individual it is primarily created by, through comments, tags, posts, shares and so forth by members of their associated micropublics. Whereas an exhibition can be conceptualised as primarily static, a persona is both active and interactive.

Because of these elements, Hogan’s conceptualisation of online self-presentation as an artefact due to the asynchronicity of the engagement with the audience is problematic. There are aspects of exhibition (and exhibitionism) in some social networking sites—photo and video sharing sites such as Flickr or YouTube are obvious choices here—but their use in this way is outside the scope of this research.

By taking the dramaturgical analogy developed by Goffman, and focusing particularly on the use of fronts, role-play and audience selection within his theorisation of impression management, I have a framework in which to develop the interpretive process of the persona as presented in both physically and digitally networked spaces.

Having located persona studies within its disciplinary context, connecting to studies of celebrity, audience, and identity, I have demonstrated that existing scholarship outlined here does not sufficiently address how persona creation is experienced for individuals. In the following section, I again address existing research and literature, exploring the
key concepts of subjectivity and agency, presentation and representation, performance and performativity, mediation and experience, that are integral to understanding persona performance in both physically and digitally networked spaces.

2.2. **Persona Studies—Key Concepts**

As a field with roots primarily in cultural studies and celebrity studies as outlined above, persona studies utilises a range of concepts which have contested meanings. While acknowledging the range of possible understandings and uses of the ideas introduced below, this section works to explain how these concepts are applied in this study. Here I draw primarily on the work (and subsequent interpretation) of Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, and Judith Butler, along with a return to Erving Goffman, to provide a starting point for my understanding of subjectivity and agency, presentation and representation, performance and performativity, mediation and experience. These key concepts form a base on which to interpret what it is like for the participants involved in this study to create their personas.

2.2.1. **Subjects and agents**

In studying persona creation, I make use of what I call subjective descriptions of experience. However, the subject and subjectivity are contested terms within the humanities, and as such a brief explanation of my use of the term is required to ensure consistent understanding. Simply put, I refer to subjectivity primarily in the sense that the description of an experience or phenomenon comes from the perspective of the experience. That is, the experience is understood from the viewpoint of the subject, the person who provides the narrative. In the case of this study, the narratives come from the eight participants. These narratives are then interpreted and analysed (as discussed in section 4.6) to elicit the findings of this research as outlined in chapters six through nine. In gathering the data prior to this analysis, the participants were directed to reflect
on their own experiences of persona creation, a process which engaged them in a second layer of identity construction. Their choices of stories shared during the interview process are as much a part of their persona creation practice as those shared through digitally networked spaces. These choices, I believe, demonstrate the agency inherent in the process of identity creation, and the interaction between subjective reflection and agency in performance are reflected in existing theories of discursive identity formation.

Drawing on Foucault, Weedon comments

Although the subject in post-structuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling, subject and social agent capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives and able to choose from the options available. (1987, p. 125)

Indeed, Foucault’s *Technologies of the Self* (1988), in describing the historical practices of self-making, offers us a context to understand the contemporary practice of self-disclosure and confession. Describing Stoic traditions of writing the self through descriptive letters to friends, journaling daily activities, and self-reflection, plus early Christian practices of penitence and exposé, and daily self-examination through prayer, Foucault concludes by stating:

From the eighteenth century to the present, the techniques of verbalisation have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. (1988, p. 49)

Our capacity to reflect actively on our own subjectivity becomes a part of the way we understand ourselves. Therefore, as Mansfield (2000, pp. 6–7) states “Subjectivity is primarily an experience, and remains permanently open to inconsistency, contradiction and unselfconsciousness”. It is through our exploration of this experience that we can
understand the complex negotiation between the performance of a social role, and the individual agency that drives that performance. Mansfield goes on to state that

Since there is no authentic or natural self that we can simply recover or struggle to liberate, subjects should be geared towards a dynamic self-creation, an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being that are being laid down for us constantly in every moment of our day-to-day lives. (2000, p. 63)

It is through the process of persona creation, through the choice of performance elements that are enacted, that the performer both engages with and defies existing identity constructs. Here, Hall’s conceptualisation of identity not as something that exists—a truth—but rather as “a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990, p. 222) is useful. As a partial identity, a deliberate creation, a persona (whether enacted in digitally or physically networked space) is similarly never complete and is constituted within the systems of representation on which it is built.

Agency and subjectivity connect in persona studies. In order to study this connection, we need to look at how an individual experiences their own subjectivity, their own subjective experience of persona creation. The study of experience through phenomenology, in this case Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), allows me to go beyond a discussion of behaviour, and deal with the participants’ subjective understanding of their own experience.

### 2.2.2. Presentation and representation

As with subjectivity and agency, presentation and representation are contested terms which I am using in a particular way in this study. Presentation and presentational, originating from the Latin praesentare meaning to ‘place before’, can refer to the formal giving of something such as a certificate or gift, the formal introduction of someone to a
group, as at the end of a wedding ceremony, or a speech or talk to an audience, as at an academic conference. In the context of my research, I use it as per Goffman’s (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* to encompass all the aspects of a public or semi-public performance of identity or persona.

Representation and representational are somewhat more loaded terms, but trace their roots to the Latin repraesentare, 'bring before, exhibit'. A contested term in cultural studies, I take Hall’s definition: “Representation is the process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploys signs, any signifying system) to produce meaning” (1997, p. 61). I argue that presentation and representation exist along a continuum of meaning making behaviour. When considering the practices that go into the creation of an online persona, those that appear closer to the presentational category involve little in the way of mediation by other parties; it is the agent acting alone. By contrast, those practices that appear closer to the representational category engage more directly with their systems of signification and mediation. Hall (1990, p. 222) states that “Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write”, and that we can never completely reconcile ourselves as the speaker, and as “the subject that is spoken of”. This could be problematic if this project sought to find some form of truth in the presentations and representations of the personas that the participants have created. However, the phenomenological approach taken here, discussed in the next section, acknowledges only the desire to engage with the participants’ subjective descriptions of experience, not to determine whether or not they constitute some objective understanding of truth.

In addition to these understandings of presentation and representation lies the conceptualisation of media cultures as representational or presentational as outlined by Marshall (2010a). In discussing the influence of celebrity and social media on identity
construction, Marshall makes a distinction between representational and presentational media forms based on the influence of the highly mediated, constructed notion of a public self found in traditional media forms, and the continually negotiated, less mediated public self found in new media forms. Marshall comments that through social media, “individuals engage in an expression of the self that, like the celebrity discourse of the self, is not entirely interpersonal in nature nor is it entirely highly mediated or representational” (2010a, p. 35).

Therefore, in the context of this study, the key difference between presentation and representation lies in the perceived distance between the performer and the performance; the more immediate the connection, the closer to the presentational end of the spectrum the performance lies.

### 2.2.3. Performativity and performance

As outlined in section 1.10, I understand the undertaking and adoption of a persona as being a performance. The persona is a part or role played for an audience, where the performer is undertaking impression management whether consciously or subconsciously. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this persona does not necessarily reveal the true selves of those who engage with them, nor are they necessarily falsehoods. Likewise, the socially constructed role that informs the persona’s creation does not describe some essential truth of what it means to be (in the case of the participants in this study) an artist. In fact, it could be argued, following Butler (1988) that the identity is performative as opposed to expressive. The distinction between expressive and performatively acts and attributes suggests this distinction.

Paraphrasing Butler, if artistic acts or attributes, or “the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured”, and a true identity
“would be revealed as regulatory fiction” (1988, p. 528). It is, perhaps, less threatening to the established order to consider the role enacted through a persona as performative than it is to propose the same of gender, as Butler has famously asserted. However, rather than take this path, I view the presentational and representational practices of the participants in this research as role-play or performance, an engagement with the artistic subject by an active, engaged individual, that results in the creation of a persona. This choice is driven by my engagement with a phenomenological focus on how the participants experience their artistic persona creation, what it is like, rather than on their performative acts, behaviours, or attributes.

2.2.4. Mediation

Although I primarily use these terms to discuss behaviour, within persona studies we can also speak of different media forms as sitting along the continuum of presentational to representational. In discussing the increased focus on individual expression and desire, Marshall (2010a, p. 499) describes the shift from representational to presentational media:

Instead of television or magazines organising a sophisticated panoply of idealized representations of ourselves through famed and celebrated people, we now have an incredibly complex presentation of the self through the screens of social media via the Internet and mobile communication.

Marshall’s distinction here acknowledges a continuum of mediation in media formats—representational media such as broadcast television, newspapers, film and magazines are all highly mediated, where the individual has little agency in the presentation of the self, or even if they are represented at all. In contrast, presentational media such as social media, blogging and other forms of self-generated content, puts at least a portion of the control back into the hands of the performers. This is not to dismiss the impact of the effects of code, software, screens or other mediating effects involved in new media,
the discussion of which are somewhat outside the scope of this project. Rather, I seek to
distinguish between the levels of mediation that occur within the media industries
themselves, from the highly constructed and edited formats of broadcast and traditional
print media through to the user-generated content of new media where the
aforementioned agency is key in practices of presentation and representation.

2.2.5. Experience
The tension between the individual as an agent in their own presentational practice, and
the fact that their presentation is informed and influenced by wider understandings of
social roles, is the impetus for the use of the phenomenological approach that drives this
study. Phenomenological researchers, in seeking to “reveal any subject-matter on its
own terms" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108), believe that "we are a fundamental part of a
meaningful world ... and the meaningful world is a fundamental part of us" (2006, p.
106). As such, the experience of the individual in creating an online persona is
fundamentally linked with, informed by, and part of the social construction of what it
means to play a particular role. However, this experience of the creation of online
persona can never be fully accessed by someone other than the individual themselves.
Rather, we can “glimpse a person's current subjective mode-of-engagement with some
specific context or aspect of the world” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 109). In the case of this
study, I glimpse the participants’ current subjective engagement with artistness and
relate this engagement to their experience of artistic persona creation.

In order to study this relationship between the context and the experience of artistness, it
is necessary to ground the discussion in the various constructions of the artist as
produced within the western art world, which are discussed in depth in the following
chapter. By investigating the roots of the historical artistic subject, the artistic
reputation, and existing typologies of artistic identities, it is possible to locate the ways
that the participants in this project themselves play the role of ‘artist’, and work to represent themselves as having sufficient ‘artistness’ through their online personas.
3. Understanding Artistness

This chapter takes the theoretical and conceptual background outlined in chapter two and applies it to the artist. Here, the historical foundation of the artist as subject and social construct is considered. By tracing through a particular history of the myth of the artist, the development of an artistic reputation, typologies of artistic representation, and current understandings of what makes one an artist according to cultural policy, I explore the tension between the philosophical concepts of socially constructed identity with the persona studies’ concern with individual agency and presentation of self, and the way that these ideas are complicated by presentational practices in digitally networked spaces. Drawing these ideas together, I conclude the chapter by describing my conception of the artist’s persona.

In order to understand how the participants’ online personas engage with ideas of what it means to be an artist, we must first attempt to understand how the role of the artist has been constructed socially and culturally over time. To do this, I employ the term ‘artistness’. This, I argue, is the institutionalised “collective representation” referred to by Goffman (see section 2.1.3). The ‘artist’ is a social role that exists outside of any particular individual creative practitioner; it is a trope, a descriptor, a construct. In order to understand this construct, I draw on theories of the artist developed within art history (Codell, 2003; Pollock, 1980; Vasari et al., 2005), the sociology of art (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Bourdieu, 1996), in addition to post-structuralist theories of the author from Barthes (1977) and Foucault (1991), and recent research into creative labour and the creative industries. This interdisciplinary discussion of artistness informs my interpretative analysis of the experience of online persona creation presented in chapters 5-7.
Here I explore a particular understanding of artistness that is the most dominant within the western liberal democracies in which my participants work and construct their online personas. Firstly, I introduce the artist as a subject, before tracing the development of that subject through the historical construction of the ‘myth of the artist’. This is followed by discussion of the development of an artist’s reputation, and the way this relates to the construction of an artist’s authority. In addition to the historical notions of the artist, other influences on contemporary understandings of artistness are also important to consider, and the way that the artist is defined through creative industries research and policy is introduced. The agency within persona creation and self-presentation more generally is then connected to artistness, through discussion of the ways that artists negotiate different elements of these constructs and typologies in order to present a version of artistness that suits their own presentational requirements. Concluding this section is a discussion of the fringe artist: those who are outside of the representational systems of the traditional art world.

### 3.1. The Artist as Subject

The performance of artistness is the performance of a socially constructed role, made up of identifiable elements drawn from historically grounded discourses of what it means to be an artist. These elements, explored below, combine to create the artist as subject. This subject is then performed by creative practitioners enacting the role, performances which, in turn, reaffirm the discourse. As explored earlier (section 2.2.1), Weedon (1987, p. 125) describes the subject as socially constructed through discourse, and then inhabited by a “thinking, feeling ... social agent capable of resistance and innovation”. I argue that as agents in their own presentational practices, artists perform artistness, drawing on elements of the discourse that created the subject through their performance
in order to mould their identity to fit the discursive subject. This aligns with how Hall (2004, p. 3) describes the difference between identity and subjectivity:

one’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity.

In other words, a creative practitioner will have their own identity made up of beliefs and allegiances. In presenting themselves as an artist, however, they will enact the role of the artist-as-subject with some “degree of thought and self-consciousness”. I therefore argue that one can, to some extent, actively engage with the artistic subject while one is performing the types and playing the role of artist. It is this active engagement that indicates a degree of individual agency within the performance. Hall goes on to state that “in probing agency, we are in effect, tackling the fundamental question of responsibility: in personal action, in aesthetic creation, in inter-personal norms, and social valuations” (2004, p. 5). I argue that the creation of online persona foregrounds the agency within the performance of a particular subject by encouraging (and in some cases forcing) choices in the presentation of the self. The choice of name, the choice of image or avatar, the personal description each online profile requests, the choice of level of engagement through networks all demonstrate agency in self presentation. At the same time, the people creating the personas are also responding to the pressure of expectation to create a representation of themselves that is consistent with discourses of the artist-as-subject.

As the discussion below will make clear, the elements that make up the role of the artist are subject to change over time, and built through representation. The current discourses
that are most dominant in present constructions of the artist-as-subject stem from the ‘myth of the artist’, and the artist as a creative labourer. By working through the historical development of these two discourses, I identify how artistness is currently represented. This understanding of artistness then provides a reference point for discussions of artistness as performed by the participants in the empirical portion of this study.

3.1.1. Myth of the artist as the beginnings of the artist-as-subject
The myth of the artistic genius is persistent and pervasive, adaptive to both new social norms and to historical figures who lived, worked and died thousands of years prior to its development. The myth is both pervasive and persistent, as demonstrated by Charland (2010), who conducted a study on the reasons behind the proportionally low numbers of African Americans in visual arts studies at post-secondary level. Interviewing African American middle class youth, Charland (2010, p. 123) asked them to describe what they believed the archetype artist:

When informants were asked what an artist is or does, conceptualizations were romanticized and conventional, referring to artists' skills and personal behavior, but lacking any awareness of an expressive or social context. When asked to close their eyes and picture an artist, informants imagined Bohemian stereotypes, "you know, how you see in cartoons". Most of our informants visualized a White male. Only one described a Black artist, and none mentioned a woman. Posed with a palette and paint brushes, he was dressed in a blousy, ragged, or messy 19th-century smock, his long hair spilling down from a beret. His nationality, when mentioned, was French, his attitude egocentric.

This ‘man with the black beret’ artist stereotype can be traced back to the early years of the Romantic Movement in Paris in the early 19th century. At a time of social, political, and artistic change, the Romantics inadvertently defined how a creative practitioner should look and behave into modernity. Although the ‘artist’, as we now understand it,
began to be considered an important individual in his/her own right in the Enlightenment, prior to the Romantic Movement the focus was on the artist as “intellectual elite” along the same lines as mathematicians as holders of “higher forms of knowledge” (Bain, 2005, pp. 28, 43). The importance of the Romantic Movement can be seen in the creation of a defined stereotype associated with bohemian lifestyles and withdrawal from society that can be seen in the children’s description above of what an artist is.

Gluck (2000, p. 357) traces the history of the development of the bohemian artist, and explores the physical manifestations of the desire to separate from the increasingly important French middle class: "The young artists in historical costumes carefully distinguished themselves from the fashionable dandies or 'lions' of the time, who dressed according to the latest fashion imported from England”. However, the distinction was not only made through the adoption of contextually lurid clothing, but more importantly through behaviour, as "the young bohemians were neither authoritarian, nor religious, nor hierarchical in orientation; they were, on the contrary, irreverent, antimoralistic, and transgressive" (Gluck, 2000, p. 358).

Bourdieu (1996, pp. 54–55) describes this primarily French movement as made up of “young people without fortunes, issuing from the middle or popular classes of the capital and especially the [French] provinces” who had education but no financial support. Once in Paris, Bourdieu goes on, they “find themselves pushed towards literary professions, which are surrounded with every prestige of romantic triumph and which … do not require any qualification guaranteed by scholarship, or else pushed towards the artistic professions, exalted by the success of the Salon” (1996, p. 55). Without inherited wealth to provide financial support, these young artists had to choose between making art for money, or deferring financial gain in the short term in the hopes of becoming
recognised and celebrated later in life. Many chose the latter, claiming that the creation
of art was an end into itself, not to be sullied by the desires of the marketplace. 

Summing up this position, Flaubert wrote “I would rather be a wretched monitor in a
school than write four lines for money” (cited in Bourdieu, 1996, p. 85). The rejection
of financial reward as a core indicator of success for an artist, or even as something to
be expected or achieved in the short term, along with an expectation of long delayed
recognition, has led to the incorporation of the starving artist into the myth. This is, in
Bourdieu’s words, “the heroic figure of the struggling artist, a rebel whose originality is
measured by how far he is the victim of incomprehension and how much scandal he
arouses” (1996, p. 133). The incomprehension Bourdieu describes means that not only
does an artist not require financial recognition in the short term, they also do not require
recognition by accepted cultural gatekeepers. In Flaubert’s time, these gatekeepers were
primarily the Académie Française and the Salon; today, they might be critics, gallery
owners, judges on award panels, reviewers, or teachers. Wolff (1993, p. 11) sees this
rejection of official recognition as a part of the artistic subject, arguing "The
artist/author/composer as social outcast, starving in a garret, persists as a common idea
of a social type, and one particular form of an historical figure is transformed into a
universal definition".

The apparent rejection of the pursuit of financial reward, the rebellion and courting of
scandal, along with the traits of irreverence, transgression and an anti-moralistic stance
are still found in the modern understanding of the myth of the artist. This figure is often
seen as a loner or isolated from mainstream society, the heroic/mad genius, a risk taker
who is in a constant search for inspiration. An example of this figure, and the audience’s
acceptance of the role being played, can be seen in the celebration of British street artist
Banksy. Primarily working with spray-paint and stencils, Banksy’s street art can be
found on buildings and streets in his home city of London, and in major metropolitan centres around the world. Banksy is anonymous, therefore can be perceived as a loner or removed from mainstream society; he risks his safety and his freedom in order to produce his work, which can be read as both madness in its intent and genius in its success; he creates artwork that challenges societal norms and expectations, meeting the audience’s expectations of the artist as transgressive and anti-authoritarian. These oftentimes negative perceptions of artists are noted by Charland (2010), who concludes that the stereotypes associated with artists, as described by the children in his study, are very similar to the most negative stereotypes accorded to African Americans. Specifically, Charland notes the links to poverty, drug use, unemployment, laziness, and promiscuity, and argues the persistence of these stereotypes is a contributing factor to the low numbers of African Americans in post-secondary art education.

Less negatively framed, the myth of the artist includes a “tendency to rebel against established norms - to repeatedly question, challenge, and defy the limits of acceptability – [which] may have become the defining feature of what it means to be an artist in contemporary society” (Bain, 2005, p. 30). This rebellion can also be seen in Banksy’s artistic identity, where the rebellion is both in terms of his illegal art practice, his rebellion against the representational structures of the traditional art world, and the rebellion as encoded in the work itself through the illegality of its production. Bain posits that working artists play into the artist’s myth, as it allows them a way to define themselves as professional in an unregulated, unlicensed work environment that may exist for the majority of the time as a solo endeavour. She comments that “many contemporary artists have consciously or unconsciously sought to preserve their symbolic marginalization (social, economic or cultural) and their mythologized alienation” (2005, p. 29). Bain goes on to discuss how the conception of what it means
to be an artist as described in the myth of the artist has also been backed up by psychologists, who characterise the artistic persona as “hypersensitive, aggressive, autonomous, and independent, preoccupied with work to the exclusion of social activity, intolerant of order and seeking novelty and change, suffused with intense but chaotic emotions, and opposed to the conventional and banal” (Steptoe, cited in Bain, 2005, p. 30). This psychological analysis was used in describing a 17th century Italian painter, but as outlined in relation to Charland’s work, it can be concluded that these characteristics are still ascribed to artists living and working today. This characterisation of the artist is what makes up the artistic subject, and it is from these expectations that working artists draw in order to create an artistic persona.

3.1.2. Theories of reputation
One way of determining whether any given person is an artist (or playing any other specific social role) is by looking at their reputation. In fact, as introduced in the previous chapter (section 2.1.3), all forms of impression management, audience management, role-play and persona creation are actually forms of reputation management. Reputation management is the focus of considerable attention within management and public relations disciplines. Liehr-Gobbers and Storck (2011, p. 18) define corporate reputation as “the collective perception of a company or institution through its stakeholders. It is the result of an exchange of personal and conveyed experiences between the organization, its stakeholders and third parties over time”. This supports my earlier contention (section 2.1.3) that reputation is located in the audience reception of a persona. Although Liehr-Gobbers and Storck’s definition is predicated on the reputation belonging to a business, it could equally refer to an artist: the artist’s reputation is the collective perception of her/his fans, followers, collectors, supporters, critics and so forth, built over time as a result of interactions and experiences of both the
artist and their art. Voswinkel (2011, p. 32) argues that, as reputation is essentially
capital (whether social, cultural or economic), “it is subject to mistrust”. In
understanding reputation as capital, I take Putnam’s (1993, p. 169, cited in Field, 2008,
p. 4) definition of social capital as the “features of social organisation, such as trust,
norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating social
actions”, and Bourdieu’s (cited in Harker et al., 1990, p. 1) understanding of cultural
capital as “culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns”. From these definitions,
we can understand that artistic reputation is developed by and through intermediaries –
corporate reputation is dependent to a larger extent on the mass media to play a key role
in the development of reputation (Voswinkel, 2011) – but there are also peculiarities
within the art world which bear investigation. In the following discussion of the theory
of the artist’s reputation, these peculiarities are unpacked.

Howard Becker’s construction of a theory of reputation (1982), which directly relates to
artists, is useful in considering how our modern understanding of the artist has
developed. Becker argues that artistic reputations are made up of five key elements.
Firstly, the artist is someone who is specially gifted, who, secondly, creates works of
exceptional beauty and depth which, thirdly, express profound human emotions and
cultural values. The fourth element is the capacity of the artwork to testify to the artist’s
special qualities, and vice versa, and fifthly, that only works by that individual can be
used to determine the artist’s reputation. These five elements come together to create
‘the artist’. Each of these points will now be unpacked further.

The idea of special gifts being attributed to artists can be traced back to “society’s
attitude toward the artist” (Kris and Kurz, 1979, p. 2) and has been applied both to those
living and dead from the time of the Enlightenment in the West. In order to allow for
the special place accorded artists within our society, we must agree that they are in
some way special or important, that they can do things that others cannot, that they are ‘gifted’, and that it is these gifts that allow them to create art where others only create pictures, writing or entertainment. Kris and Kurz talk about the magical virtuosity attributed to the artist, which contributes to their heroization in the public eye; I argue that this is recognition of (or attribution of) the artists’ ‘specially gifted’ nature.

The works themselves must also be, in some identifiable way, special. Becker talks about ‘exceptional beauty and depth’ as what makes the artwork special and indeed it is in the relationship between these two elements that the specialness of art can be seen. It is not simply outward appearance, but also the expression of an important emotional, political, or social construct that creates the work as art. Virtuosity or magical skill is not enough; the work must also speak to the audience on another level which transcends the beauty of the object or performance. The idea of depth therefore overlaps with the third element in the theory of reputation, the capacity of the artist, through the work, to speak of and to something profound. The work must appeal to our emotions or values in some large way.

The fourth element here is that the work and the artist must support one another: the artist’s special gifts must be visible through the quality of the work, and the art works’ special qualities—beauty, depth, and emotional or value appeals—must embody the artist’s special gifts. This is where we get into the circular definition of the artist, as someone who makes art, because art is what artists make. The two must continually support one another.

Finally there is the idea of a corpus of works created by the artist to be used to judge the previous four points. Only those works by the artist, and all of those works by the artist, can be used to judge the artist and their art works as worthy of the title. Here Foucault’s
(1991, pp. 101–120) discussion of the construction of a body of work is useful to consider how the corpus is attributed to the artist. In his adaptation of Saint Jerome’s criteria for judging the authorship and value of saintly texts, Foucault suggests four criteria to judge the authorship and value of a body of artistic work:

- firstly, all works must have a similar level or skill displayed, and inferior work excluded from the corpus;
- secondly, the body of work as a whole must have a significant level of coherency;
- thirdly, the body of work must have stylistic unity;
- and fourthly, works that refer to events outside of the artist’s experience must be excluded from the corpus.

If we apply these criteria to the creation of a body of work—a corpus by which to judge the special gifts of the artist, the exceptional qualities of the work, the emotions or values the work displays, and the supportive relationship between the works and the artist who created them—we have a workable theory that gives us a way to judge an artist as having sufficient ‘artistness’, and their work as sufficiently ‘arty’. Foucault was, in discussing the creation of a corpus or body of work, primarily discussing artists who had died, meaning that said corpus would be fixed. However, it is still possible to apply these ideas to the bodies of work under construction by currently practising artists, provided one allows for the ongoing extension of the corpus as the artist continues to create new work.

To provide an example of these two structures in practice, I turn again to the work of well known British street artist Banksy. Considered one of the most well-known artists working today (Dolan, 2011), Banksy’s work is reproduced (seemingly without input
CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING ARTISTNESS

from the artist) on consumer goods such as teeshirts, posters, greeting cards, and coffee mugs, making famous not just his name but also particular art works. As Van Gogh is famous for Sunflowers, and Monet is famous for Waterlilies, Banksy is famous for Flower Thrower, and Kissing Coppers. This level of fame and notoriety is particularly interesting when one takes into account the fact that Banksy himself is ‘anonymous’—despite numerous apparent ‘unveilings’ (some hoaxes) by the media (BBC News, 2007; Joseph, 2008; Morrissey, 2013), Banksy remains elusive, managing to separate his legal identity from his professional artistic persona. Banksy works in a creative practice which is marginalised and usually illegal (as discussed in chapter five in relation to street art and craftivism). It is also transitory, ephemeral (similar to those working within performance practice), and unsigned (as with tattoo art). Despite these hurdles, Banksy has developed an international reputation based on his growing corpus that demands the title of artist. In determining Foucault’s first criteria in the construction of this corpus, that all the works in the corpus must be of a similar level or quality, we must incorporate all those works which are typically ‘Banksyeque’, whether or not they have been signed or claimed by Banksy himself. The clean execution of the work (lacking accidental drips, over-sprays and so on), the multiple layers in the stencils, the realistic figuration, and the politically engaged messages of the art works themselves all contribute to their identification as by Banksy. This identification, as his in stylistic approach, placement and theme, creates the sense of coherency and unity required by Foucault’s second and third criteria. And finally, works that exist outside of Banksy’s experience (places he hasn’t been known to visit, for example) are excluded from this corpus. It is by meeting this criteria that Banksy’s body of work is created, and this body of work is that on which his reputation as an artist is based.
Although we do not have access to Banksy himself, we can still work through Becker’s five elements of the theory of reputation. One could argue that, given his continued anonymity outside of the highly secretive and protective street art scene, Banksy’s special gift lies in his capacity to prevent discovery of his legal identity, and this anonymity works to produce a heroic discourse around the artist. His triumph over the legal system, which he critiques in his work as both corrupt and overly concerned with punishment, allows Banksy to become something of an anti-establishment hero. However, as an artist, his special gifts are also demonstrated through his talent as both a stencil artist, and in his freehand spray-can work. It can be argued that the works he creates also meet the second criteria—that of exceptional beauty and depth—as judged by those to whom they hold value; Banksy’s works, even when they’re legally considered vandalism, are protected by city councils (Gill, 2010), sold for large amounts of money (Hattenstone, 2003; Kopstein, 2013) and sought out by tourists and locals alike all over the world (Spiegel Online, 2008). Their appeal lies not only in their aesthetics, but also in the simplicity and poignancy of their message. Often speaking of contemporary concerns with privacy, corruption, consumerism and violence, Banksy’s work addresses many of the key concerns of 21st century western liberal societies. The fourth element in the theory of reputation, the relationship between the themes of his work and the artist as required by Becker to testify to one another’s value, again relates to Banksy’s continued public anonymity, but is also somewhat contentious. As an artist whose primary practice, painting on walls, provides no source of income, Banksy has been criticised for selling out due to his practice of creating limited run prints of his public work, and for producing, and allowing the production of, consumer goods (Fuertes-Knight, 2013; Hanrahan, 2011; Modery, 2011). However, despite this criticism, Banksy’s public identity and his work support each other through their anti-establishment ethos and deliberately provocative nature. When the four elements of
Banksy’s reputation discussed above are combined with the body of work created according to Foucault’s criteria, we can see that Banksy has developed a reputation as an artist. This reputation is accepted within the wider art world despite the often contentious environment in which his works are created and consumed, and the questionable legal status of Banksy’s original art works.

Both Becker’s theory of reputation and Foucault’s criteria for determining the extent of a body of work are useful tools to use when determining whether a creative practitioner can be understood within the context of the artist-as-subject. However, these discourses themselves must be understood in order to investigate how someone who identifies with that social construct performs the role of artist. The remainder of this chapter works to understand what makes up the artist-as-subject, and which elements of this historically developed construct persevere in discourses around artistness today.

3.1.3. Artist’s typologies
Pollock (1980) explores the idea of the construction of the artistic subject, within which specific types of artists’ personas (including the bohemian, the genius, the magician, and so forth) can be located: “The construction of an artistic subject for art is accomplished through current discursive structures - the biographic, which focuses exclusively on the individual, and the narrative, which produces coherent, linear, causal sequences through which an artistic subject is realised” (Pollock, 1980, p. 59). In her discussion of the lifewriting’s—biographies, autobiographies, reviews and journals—of British artists in Victorian England, Julie Codell (2003) outlines a typography of artistic subjects that were either enacted by or imposed onto artists through writing. Within a period of substantial focus on biographical publications, descriptions of the lives of artists became increasingly sought after, and Codell comments that “The rise of British artists’ celebrity was considered evidence that … artists were thoroughly socialized, not
alienated and suffering in garrets… Biographically recognized artists were marked by conflicting and fluid identities between 1870 and 1920” (2003, pp. 2–3).

Codell’s (2003) typology of these identities consists of four identifiable artist stereotypes: the bohemian (the vagabond adventurer, a playful rogue, although British bohemians were often considered gentlemen as well); the degenerate (which linked biology, creativity and madness, and where artists were constructed as dangerous, impulsive and immoral); the uniquely Victorian prelapsarian (innocent, unworldly, humble, selfless and unsocialised); and the professional (skilled, educated, economically established, and validated through membership to professional groups and societies). The degree to which an artist was associated with each of these types was dependent on who was doing the lifewriting. For example, while the bohemian stereotype was only occasionally written into British artists’ biographies during this period, “some presented the benign Bohemian” as a connection of sorts to Continental artists, while still retaining moral superiority over French or Dutch counterparts (Codell, 2003, p. 100). Codell offers satirical novelist William Makepeace Thackery as an example of this benign bohemianism in his characterisation as a gentleman bohemian; similarly the non-fiction of the time “emphasized Bohemians’ playfulness, [which was] so unlike the solitary mad artist of degeneracy theories or the introverted Bohemians of Victorian fiction” (2003, p. 98). Perhaps the benign and somewhat twee rebelliousness of the hipster movement could be considered a contemporary reflection of this particular flavour of bohemianism.

Similar to the bohemian stereotype, the construct of degeneracy was only occasionally written into biographical literature from the Victorian period, and actively denied in artists’ autobiographies and biographies written by family members. At a time when moral characteristics were thought to be visible and linked to physical characteristics,
“most biographies and autobiographies denied artists’ degeneracy through photographs of their bodies, homes, and families, including children and ancestors, to signal domestic, genetic, and biological normality” (Codell, 2003, p. 103). Although the link between appearance and character has largely disappeared since its heyday in Victorian England, the traces of self-destruction evident in the appearance of singer Amy Winehouse could be a reflection of some continued persistence of the degeneracy stereotype. Hailed as “prodigiously talented and perennially wasted” (Heller, 2007), Winehouse’s talent won her five Grammy awards—the first British female to do so—and the album responsible, Back in Black, became the highest selling album of the 21st century in Britain shortly after her death in 2011 (McCormick, 2011). The link between her drug and alcohol abuse, her talent, and her music is perfectly embodied by her hit song Rehab (which won Grammy awards for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Female Pop Vocal Performance), and this impassioned rejection of medical help for her addictions provided a soundtrack to the tabloid media’s documentation of her physical degeneration. Bentley (2011) describes photographs which “caught her unsteady on her feet or vacant-eyed, and she appeared unhealthily thin, with scabs on her face and marks on her arms”, and this external evidence of internal troubles shows the continued persistence of the link between creativity, talent, and mental illness.

Without scale and ubiquity of photography and tabloid newspapers tracking artists’ lives, Victorians used personal photographs in their autobiographies to deny the worst of the characteristics of the degenerate and the bohemian as described in fiction of the time. These images showed the artist as physically healthy, within stable family groupings and showing thriving offspring. This worked to counteract the fictional depictions of creative people, where artist characters within stories were “divorced from the world by their excessive devotion to art [and] appeared dishevelled, oddly dressed,
spiritual, sloppy, and single” (Codell, 2003, pp. 99–100). Here we can see the co-creation of the artistic subject through biographical, autobiographical, and fictional representations of the artist. The fictional exaggerates the stereotypes, while the biographical and the autobiographical minimises and denies the worst stereotypes, with the agency of the artist contributing to the construction of a more socially acceptable artistic persona. House (2012) argues that some artists even worked to create a particular representation through their private letters, rather than only through public representations such as autobiography, as they were aware that letters were used extensively in the construction of biography both before and after the artist’s death. Nineteenth century French Realist Gustave Courbet deliberately “used letters to propagate an image of his artistic identity, or rather to construct a public persona that would be used as a frame within which his œuvre might be viewed” (House, 2012, p. 337), and Post-Impressionist Paul Gauguin used letters from his home in Tahiti to those in France, where his paintings were sold, as “part of his strategy of self-presentation and self-promotion” (p. 339). These artists, House argues, depended on personal connections through letters to help create an artistic persona that drew on the positive aspects of Romantic and bohemian stereotypes to explain and legitimise their marginalised artistic practice.

In addition to artist types seen in the bohemian and the degenerate, Codell (2003) describes the Victorians’ development of their own unique artistic stereotype in the prelapsarian artist. She describes how artists of the time “were often revered for their unworldliness, cut off from social, commercial and professional demands” (Codell, 2003, p. 79). The innocent, childlike artist was seen to be capable of creating great art only if they were kept separate from the art market, and this separation would protect the artist’s character and talent. By retrofitting famous artists of the time with this
construct, the artistic gatekeepers—patrons and collectors—could maintain control over the market by excluding those who were actively involved in producing for that market. The growing celebrity of artists through the circulation of biographical materials was countered by the expectation that they would not engage directly with that celebrity, and concentrate solely on their work. Codell (2003) explains that these expectations were particularly strong for the growing contingent of female artists, but others argue this conception of innocence-as-genius has also been co-opted into descriptions of brilliant people outside of the arts. Radcliff (2008) describes representations of Albert Einstein as artist which draw on understandings of the artist having “an incredible passion and a determination to follow a set path despite any possible consequences” (p. 67) and the “untainted genius who retains the innocence of childhood” (p. 68). Here, a figure of considerable public renown who is not involved in artistic practice has an artistic persona attributed to him through the use of the prelapsarian artistic subject. This attribution utilises an existing shorthand the public can understand to present a figure “beyond the reach of average mortals” (Radcliff, 2008, p. 70).

The use of prelapsarian expectations as reinforcement of existing control structures is seen in opposition to the development of aestheticism and the desire for professionalism of many artists. Codell states that “Aestheticism, while advocating an anti-commercial preoccupation with art for its own sake, nonetheless shaped new professional identities for artists in opposition to the infantilizing didacticism of much Victorian art criticism” (2003, p. 93). It is in the development of these professional identities that the artists themselves contributed to the typology, as “In the face of stereotypes of degenerates, bohemians, or economically and socially naive prelapsarians, lifewritings intervened to construct mature artists embodying economic efficiency, the work ethic, and sociality” (Codell, 2003, p. 272). Describing the autobiographical norms of the time, Codell states
that artists endeavoured to demonstrate they “earned status by hard work and market
acumen”, presenting themselves as entrepreneurs (2003, p. 111). Just as Victorian artists
proclaimed their professionalism through the creation of artists’ societies and
academies, so too do artists working today, including those working in the fringe
practices that this research focuses on. Street artists create prints and canvas work both
to sell and to exhibit in galleries; tattoo artists attend conventions and are interviewed
for magazines discussing inspiration and training; craftivists work in collectives that
engage with the process of legitimisation of craft technique as art practice; performance
poets distribute recordings of their shows (and often publish page poetry), to
demonstrate skill and participation with the wider scene in which they’re involved.

As introduced above, Codell describes artists of the Victorian era engaging with and
contributing to the development of the artistic subject through their own lifewritings.
These artists rejected elements that were not useful for their career (particularly from
the degeneracy discourse, but also elements of the antisocial bohemian and the naive
prelapsarian), and instead worked to construct an artistic subject which embodied the
professional ideal. This analysis is particularly useful in discussions of the artistic
persona. This professional identity, where the artist is represented as “an autonomous
expert who determines the market value of his/her expertise and who produces for the
sake of fulfilling a calling” (Codell, 2003, p. 112) draws on the mythology of the artist
as developed from the Enlightenment and through the Romantic movement. However,
this representation of the artist also suggests a divergence from this mythology that
allows us to consider the impact of creative industry and cultural economy discourses
that emerged in the late 20th century. This shift in discourse towards viewing the arts as
a contributor to the financial economy provides additional complexity to our
understanding of the artist-as-subject.
3.1.4. Authors, auteurs, and makers
Throughout this study, I use the term artist broadly, encompassing visual artists including painters with brush and can, sculptors, photographers, film-makers, writers of prose and poetry, musicians, actors, dancers, and performance artists, as well as those working in less traditional mediums such as tattoo, needlework, and fibrecraft. As can be seen in Codell’s (2003) work, and in Charland’s (2010) study introduced earlier, the term ‘artist’ is most often used to describe those working in visual arts such as painting or sculpture. I am less concerned with the media used in the creation of an artwork than in the self-identification of the maker as an artist. In taking this broad view, I draw not only from the discourses developed within the visual arts, but conceptualisations of the literary author, auteur filmmaker, and maker. These latter alternative understandings of author, auteur, and maker are explored briefly below.

Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’ (1977) and Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an Author?’ (1991) are the two most seminal texts that discuss the role of the author in literature (Lamarque, 1990; Raj, 2012). Both texts argue for the removal of the author from the text: the interpretation of the text should rest not with some all-knowing “Author-God” (Barthes, 1977, p. 146), but rather should be interpreted without reference to either the author-as-person or the wider social construct of the author. However, in constructing their arguments for the death of the author, they also work to define and locate the concept of the author-as-person, which is instructive in my study. Both Barthes and Foucault describe the author as a “modern figure”, created through ideology and discourse. This connects to Pollock’s (1980) conceptualisation of the discursive “artistic subject”. The discussion of both the author as subject (what Foucault terms the author function) and the author as a specific individual, allow us to see the figure of the author as “a more weighty figure with legal rights and social standing, a producer of texts deemed to have value” (Lamarque, 1990, p. 321). This separates the
role of the author from all others who write, whose texts are not considered valuable; the identification as an author or artist is determined by whether their works are categorised as literature or art. A scientist who writes scholarly papers is not considered an author in the same way that a novelist is. The image of the author portrayed by Barthes and Foucault is one that holds back the interpretative process, informing and polluting the text with extraneous information. In Barthes’ words “The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying Baudelaire’s work is the failure of Baudelaire himself, Van Gogh’s his madness, Tchaikovsky’s his vice” (1977, p. 143). This connects directly back to the role of the myth of the artist in determining whether a writer can be an author. The social role of the author/artist, and the specific elements of that role that are enacted by any specific individual, are integral to our understanding of the artwork that individual has created.

Barthes and Foucault were, in Lamarque’s (1990, p. 330) terms “prescribing the death of the author and by promoting the text over the work, both writers see themselves as liberating meaning from unnatural and undesirable restrictions”. Whether or not you agree that this liberation of meaning is desirable, necessary, or even possible, the persistence of the role of the author/artist indicates we are by no means able to separate the work from its creator.

The development of auteurism and auteur theory in film is testament to the enduring need to allocate an artist to an artwork. Despite the reality that film-making is a collaborative endeavour, involving in many cases large numbers of highly skilled people who each contribute to the final product, the role of the director as auteur persists. Andrews (2012, p. 42) argues that auteurism and auteur theory persist despite having been debunked many times, with “critiques of auteurism generally condemn[ing]
it for the false picture it provides of cinematic activity, which it simplifies at best and badly distorts at worst” (p. 42). Perhaps more than any other socially constructed artist’s role, the role of auteur is not dependent on the individual’s influence on the final creative product so much as it is granted by the audience. Andrews argues that “auteur status is hard and real while the authorship to which that status refers is subjective, negotiable, and marked by multiple contexts” (2012, p. 49); the role of the director as the sole author of the film is false, but that individual will still receive the credit and acclaim as author. By allocating a single author to a collaborative work, as with the auteur to the film, the artist-as-genius is enacted, and the film director becomes responsible for the beauty and depth of the film-as-art.

In a different vein, the craftsman (or maker, to use a gender neutral term) may struggle to gain recognition as an artist. Whereas authors and auteurs are working in fields now accepted as ‘fine arts’—Risatti (2007, p. 90) argues that painting, sculpture and architecture are the foundations of the fine arts, and that these three creative practices have been supplemented by “printmaking, photography, performance, happenings, film, installation, and video”—craft makers are most often excluded from inclusion. As a result of their objects not being considered art, the makers are not considered artists. The distinction between craft and art can often seem arbitrary, as Becker (1982, p. 272) notes: “The same activity, using the same materials and skills in what appear to be similar ways, may be called by either title, as may the people who engage in it”. A common way of determining whether an object is craft or art (and therefore its maker a crafter or an artist) is to consider the role of function: an object which places function at the core is considered craft or design, whereas an artwork may contain no function other than its own existence. Relating this back to the determinations of artistness explored above, the artist must have the capacity to explore their own creative impulse and
vision, irrespective of whether the final result will be of use. Risatti explores the role of creativity as a driver of craft:

If the maker is deprived of choice, of free will in the making process, he or she is also denied any chance at expression; there is no possibility to freely and wilfully ‘shape’ the object so that it can be the bearer of the maker’s intentions to artistic meaning. (2007, p. 221)

This requirement of freedom of expression and creativity does not in itself exclude makers from the realm of artistness, as many makers fully explore and test the boundaries of functionality and expression in the creation of objects. This is certainly not true of all makers, and Becker’s (1982, p. 276) distinction between ordinary craftsmen, whose focus is on the practical and functional, and artist-craftsmen, whose focus is on the beautiful and expressive, is useful here. The former may be just as capable and skilled as the latter, but in focusing on function over appearance these makers do not engage with elements of artistness. By contrast, the artist-craftsmen may use the same materials and techniques as the ordinary craftsmen, but their focus on beauty and creative expression connects them to the artist’s reputation discussed in section 3.1.2.

These three conceptualisations of the artist—as author, auteur, and maker—all draw on and extend elements of artistness as described in the myth of the artist. However, despite its persistence, the myth of the artist is not the only discourse through which artistness is understood.

3.1.5. Artist as creative labourer

Although the myth of the artist still forms the basis on which the artistic subject is built, additional defining characteristics can be seen through the development of the creative industries discourse, where artistic identity is defined through a relationship with the labour market. The relationship between artists and the market is arguably as old as the
art world itself; however it is useful to discuss relatively recent developments in policy rather than tracing the lineage of patronage and valuation throughout art history. Prior to the emergence of the creative industries discourse discussed below, Frey and Pommerehne (1989) outlined a list of criteria for use in determining whether someone could identify themselves as an artist. These criteria include how much time is spent on artistic work, income generation from artistic work, reputation and recognition as an artist by either the public or other artists (or both), quality of artistic work, membership of professional groups or organisations, art qualifications, and self-identification as an artist (Frey and Pommerehne, 1989). Including both objective (qualifications, membership of organisations, time spent and income generation) and subjective (reputation, recognition, quality, self-identification) criteria, the combination of elements that make up Frey and Pommerehne’s definition of the artist shows a distinct shift from the highly subjective, historically grounded understandings of the artist’s myth. Gone are behavioural and presentational expectations, and in their place appear the economic and labour motivations that feed into the creative industries discourse which developed during the late 1990s.

The creative industries framework expanded the art world to include all “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have the potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS 1998, p. 3, cited in Hartley et al., 2013, p. 59). This definition of the creative industries included the traditional art world at its heart, but also included other creatively driven industries such as software, design, and antiques. Hartley et al (2013, p. 41) comment that “Cultural (and arts) policy is often regarded as a means to protect artists from the uncertainty of the market by providing institutional supports that channel both aesthetic creativity and collective ways of life”. However,
despite working to draw attention to the importance of creative work, including the arts, creative industries policy can also further marginalise the art world, by holding it up for comparison against much more economically influential industries such as advertising and designer fashion. In a critical description of the creative industries as both concept and policy reality, Hartley (Creative Industries, 2005, p. 114) states:

The creative industries are enterprises that monetize (creative) ideas in a consumer economy. They are the … beneficiaries of the drift from production to consumption, public to private, author to audience. They exploit the commercialization of identity and citizenship. … They represent a dispersed and unorganized but nevertheless coherent social effort to gear up individual talent to an industrial scale.

Because of the focus on labour and/or economic contribution as determining features of inclusion within the creative industries, this discourse of artistic practice shifts the expectations that are placed on artists. Artists were once people with special gifts who created exceptional works of art as in Becker’s (1982) discussion of artistic reputation, or people who fit into the wider myth of the artist in terms of meeting transgressive, anti-establishment expectations, or even belonging to appropriate academies and societies as per Victorian professional artist’s. Under the creative industries discourse, artists are those whose intellectual property can be exploited. Haseman (2005, p. 159) comments that in the creative industries

notions of individual genius give way to the collective creativity of collaborative teams, and priorities shift away from artists creating unique works of art toward the needs of creative producers developing content for the digital and networked infrastructure which covers much of the world.

This is a profound change in the understanding of the role of the artist, and although it has not (at least as yet) subsumed older discourses of artistic practice, it still requires investigation in the context of the creation of artistic persona.
The work of Karttunen (1998) is particularly useful in understanding the process of defining an artist for policy. In a comprehensive look at what the author calls ‘status-of-the-artist’ studies, Karttunen investigates how the term is applied by those conducting empirical studies into the arts for government. The author makes a distinction between how the term is used commonly – “a person who for a start paints, dances or sings, either as a job or as a hobby, or even someone who is instead simply very skilled at some activity, not necessarily art at all” – and how it is used in labour surveys, where the researchers are interested “in people who practise - or seriously endeavour to practise - the arts as an occupation” (1998, p. 3). Karttunen goes on to discuss the difficulty in determining who fits into these categories, issues related to professionalism versus amateurism, training versus skill, and self-identification and definition. Despite defining the artist on the basis of their dedication and success (another difficult term in relation to the arts), including economic success, the myth of the artist described above comes back to haunt researchers of creative labour, as “Artists’ occupational ideology... portrays the ‘true’ artist as being indifferent to economic motives” (Karttunen, 1998, p. 4).

An example of the definitions used by these studies can be seen in the work of Throsby and Hollister on the Australian art market from 2003. Here, the authors define who is (and who is not) able to take part in their survey by looking at what they make, or in their own words “Our approach … has been to identify artists by their basic creative occupation” (Throsby and Hollister, 2003, p. 13). Therefore, participants were designated to be artists if they worked in an artistic occupation (for example writer, actor, dancer). Further criteria included a requirement of ‘professionalism’ within their field, although not necessarily income generation, and this was judged instead by looking at “serious practitioners operating at a level and standard of work and with a
degree of commitment appropriate to the norms of professional practice within their artform” (Throsby and Hollister, 2003, p. 13).

The somewhat sterile understanding of what creates an artist from the perspective of creative labour does have some benefits over the Romantic mythology discussed earlier. For one thing, there is no need to look or act in a distinctively ‘artistic’ manner to identify with this definition, which could help to remove damaging stereotypes that work against wider involvement of ethnic minorities or immigrant communities in the traditional art world. It is important to note that both Bain (2005) and Charland (2010) spoke specifically of the visual arts, particularly traditional painting practice, and minority and immigrant involvement in the music, craft, and performing arts industries is significantly higher than in painting and sculpture. The art market, which is encompassed by the larger conception of the cultural/creative industries, is described by Schroeder (2005, p. 1293) as “all about money, value, and investment, and artists – at least the most well-known examples – are tremendously occupied with successfully selling their images”. The author defines successful artists purely within the economic frame, as “those that manage to have their work widely exhibited, bought, and collected” ( p. 1293), and posits that all ‘successful’ artists are in essence successful brand managers, who create and sell their own identities in addition to, or as opposed to, their work. This brand management mirrors Senft’s (2013) description of microcelebrity discussed earlier in this chapter, and the creation of artistic persona as impression management could be viewed purely from a branding perspective. However, in engaging with the ongoing experience of creating that persona, this research is able to draw on all elements of the artistic subject to provide insight into what it is like for artists to present themselves online. This wider approach is necessary due to my focus on artistic practice that operates outside of the traditional art world and its associated
systems of representation. For street artists, income generation is often impossible, as their work is not only created for free, but usually in direct opposition to vandalism laws. Equally, tattoo artists have collectors of their work, but as it is inscribed permanently on the skin of that collector, it is not available for resale. Performance poets and craftivists may have a strong reputation within their own niche communities, but be completely unknown to the wider public. Professional qualifications are largely irrelevant within all of these forms of creative practice. As such, in order to identify as an artist, the creative industries discourse alone is not broad enough for people working within these art forms.

3.2. Artist as Fringe

Having explored characterisations of the artist as variously mad genius, bohemian, marginalised, art-making, labouring, and economic contributors, a discussion of the fringe in relation to the mainstream art world is useful. In his investigation of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Shrum (1996, p. 63) states:

Fringe has never meant outcast or pariah. As a modifier, it is wonderfully evocative, connoting creativity, scruffiness, oddity, scandal, frivolity, youthfulness, frothiness, and frippery. It can be attached to all sorts of activities, from theatre to sociology, making them marginal and secondary. But it is also a frontier, a limit, a periphery. A fringe is a border, but an ornamental one.

It is important to note the first point he makes here—that fringe does not necessarily connote the status of outcast. Certainly the performances and exhibitions that make up fringe festivals around the world are often lower in production values than commercially produced, sponsored, or commissioned events—the self-funded nature of these festivals has a lot to do with this, as does the focus on works-in-progress. However, fringe festivals attract audiences for precisely this reason; they run alongside
so-called ‘high art’ festivals, and offer a burst of innovation and creativity to counter the blockbuster touring exhibitions, classical ballet and opera productions.

The key distinguishing feature that Shrum makes in his discussion of the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art (or between the International Festival and the Fringe Festival) is the role of mediators, whether critics, agents, gallery owners, or theatre producers. He states:

The difference between high and popular art is not fundamentally a difference in the institutions that promote them or in the class background of their consumers. Rather, it is a difference in the way that talk and text intervene in the relations between producers and consumers of art. To state it as a sociological hypothesis, the higher a work is in the cultural hierarchy, the more important is discourse about the object to its status. To state it in plain language, taste in high art is mediated, whereas taste in low art is not. (Schrum Jr, 1996, p. 26).

The lack of mediation is capitalised on by many artists working outside the formal networks of art worlds, those who are located on the fringes, the edges, the borders. The internet has allowed those outside of the mediation frameworks to connect directly with their audience(s). The fringe is also not necessarily a transitional space; certainly not all artists wish to become ‘mainstream’ or ‘high’ artists, and for many such a term would be considered an insult, a sign that their work had become stale or predictable.

When I speak about artists working on the fringe, I speak of this idea of the peripheries, the borders, the limits, that challenge the ‘mainstream’ art world. As Hetcher and Carpenter (2010, p. n.p.) argue, some “creative works that while at the fringe of what is conventionally understood as art nevertheless present issues that go to the core of what constitutes art”. By considering the creative practice that I am investigating as ‘fringe’ or ‘counterculture’ art, I do not wish to imply that the work produced is of lesser value, of lesser quality, or in any way secondary to the practice of those working within the
more established, mediated art worlds, even though the effects of those preconceptions may well effect the artists themselves. As stated in section 3.1.4, I define artist widely, and am less concerned with the work created than I am with the person who self-identifies as artist. What I want to acknowledge is that producing an artistic persona when one is separated from the systems of support and legitimization is a different type of undertaking from those working with cultural intermediaries such as gallery owners, agents, or critics.

The range of artistic practice that this project interrogates throws up some real issues with determining the defining characteristics of the sample. Street artists may not obtain any income from their work, so the purely economic criteria would exclude a disproportionately large number of them. By contrast, all tattoo artists with a studio or professional workplace should earn at the very least a living wage from their work, as in essence each piece is a paid commission. However, not all tattooists could be considered artists (see section 5.2 for more on this). Slam poets may label themselves simply as poets, or as writers, authors, or performers rather than artists, as within the literature and writing fields a number of specific terms already exist. As mentioned earlier, craft is always difficult to discuss in relation to art, as the commonly accepted distinction between craft and art rests on whether or not it is able to be used – does this distinction mean that those crafters/makers who balance aesthetic interest and skill with a product that is useful (a major focus for crafters with environmental/political concerns) should be excluded? As discussed above, Becker (1982, pp. 272–299) raised an additional issue in that there are already distinctions within the craft between craftsmen, artist-craftsmen, and artists who use craft media and techniques, but for purely artistic purposes.
A generalised, overarching definition of ‘artist’ is thus unlikely to be possible or helpful for this research. The Romantic myth of the artist is a useful concept to look back on when analysing how practicing artists, from whatever field and using whatever definition, are constructing their online persona. Those who refuse to play along with the rules of the myth could instead focus on their role as a creative labourer, constructing a persona that identifies value through sales histories, exhibition histories and collected works. More likely than either of the above is some sort of blend of the two, which creates authenticity both through identification with the myth and through the validation of the market. Any or all of these make for an interesting analysis.

3.3. Artistic Persona

What the two key discourses that inform the artistic subject in the early 21st century—the myth of the artist and the creative labourer—have led to is a situation where in order to meet all the expectations of artistness, artists must be simultaneously anti-establishment and commercial, poor and well paid, inspired and prolific, heroic and transgressive. One way to deal with these contradictory expectations is to separate the ‘creator’ from the ‘labourer’ through the use of intermediary representational structures (agents, galleries, patrons, critics, producers, distributors and other cultural gatekeepers) which allow the artist to symbolically distance themselves from the economic structures that permit them to continue to work. This is possible only for those whose primary forms of creative expression can be hung on gallery walls, printed in books, recorded and sold, where the artist is credited and paid for their endeavours. However, for those whose work is not so portable, saleable or duplicable, the artist must instead find a way to balance the need for economic return with the need to perform the role of the traditional mythical artistic genius. The tattoo artists, performance poets, craftivists and street artists I have spoken to in the course of my research provide insight into the
experience of finding this balance. They provide a narrative of experience that fits within the context of the artist’s myth, balanced by an online persona that encodes this myth, but also presents more contemporary discourses of the creative labourer. Therefore, I argue that experience of creating an artistic persona in online spaces can be seen most clearly in those artists who operate outside of the traditional art world. Lacking the symbolic distance between the economic producer and the bohemian, mythical genius, these individual artists instead negotiate a place to stand in direct relation to their audience of fans, followers and micropublics.

At the beginning of this chapter, I defined an online persona as the presentation of the self on and through digitally networked spaces, where the self that is presented is a reflection, extension and distillation of a particular individual, by said individual in conjunction with their networked micropublics. In the most simplistic sense, an artistic persona is a persona created by an artist. However, I go beyond looking at the persona as made by an artist and look instead at the experience of artists, as agents in their own presentational and representational practises, who create online persona that works with existing socio-cultural expectations of artistness or plays with ideas of the artistic subject. In doing so, I recognise that although the artistic subject that operates within contemporary discourse has been built on historical developments in the art world, including recent shifts towards a focus on creative industries, the 21st century artist has significant freedom and agency in presenting themselves to their audience. New technological developments have enabled artists from all forms of creative practice to connect directly with fans and followers, bypassing the representational structures of the traditional art world. These new representational and presentational structures, and the way they are used by artists, are fundamentally explored within this thesis. The capacity to connect with a global network has worked to alleviate geographical constraints, even
for those whose artworks are fixed in a physical space. This wider, more direct access to audience has led to increased flexibility for artists in terms of how they engage with the expectations encoded in the artistic subject. This allows each artist to pick and choose from the range of identity constructs and roles when presenting their artistness to that audience. Artists who use digitally networked technology to create an artistic persona are operating within and across public, private, and intimate registers of performance, engaging in strategic impression management and role-play, drawing on elements of the artistic subject in ways that support their explicit or implicit self-identification as an artist.
4. Research Design

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design used in this investigation into artists’ persona in digitally networked spaces. I begin by outlining the research question, and describe my ontological and epistemological positioning as a researcher. The methodology which drives the research design, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is then detailed. The process of selection of research participants, including sampling and recruitment, is described, followed by a discussion of the ethical issues involved in this project. Specific consideration is given to issues related to recruiting participants involved in illegal activity, issues of anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent, and data collection in online spaces. I introduce the specific methods used for data collection—the interview process, and online listening—and detail the procedure used for data interpretation and analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion of participant feedback.

4.1. Research Statement

Through this research, I gain insight into the lived experience of online artistic persona creation by investigating what it is like for those whose artistic practice places them outside of the representational structures of the traditional art world (as discussed in section 3.2) to create an online persona. This research question has three key elements:

First, the focus of the research is to investigate experience—what it is like to create an online persona—as opposed to a focus on behaviour—how the artists use online sites. This is in line with a phenomenological approach, where “we need to disengage from the activity and attend to the taken-for-granted experience of it” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13).
Secondly, the artists’ subjective descriptions of their experience through the interviews are the primary site of interpretation, where “people’s everyday thinking is given credibility and respected in its own right as valid” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 6). This respect for the participants’ description of their experience as valid data is also driven by the phenomenological methodology, which focuses on the narrative provided, rather than subjecting the participant’s words to tests for truthfulness or authenticity. The phenomenological approach utilised here places the participant in a clear position of expertise, as it is their descriptions of experience that drive the research.

Thirdly, the conceptualisation of the ‘artistic subject’ (see Pollock, 1980), as introduced in chapter three, provides a structure through which an understanding of the relationship between these artists’ experiences of online persona, and broader sociocultural notions of artistness can be reached.

### 4.1.1. Ontology and epistemology

Titchen and Ajjawi (2010, p. 45) describe ontology “as the theory or study of what really exists” (p. 45). I come from an ontological position of relativism, what Guba (1990, p. 26) states is the only possible position for those who believe that “knowledge is a human construction, never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing”. Relativism sees that “realities are multiple, and they exist in people’s minds” (Guba, 1990, p. 26). The ontological questions that I am asking in this study can prompt deeply personal responses from the participants, and the knowledge that comes from analysing these responses cannot be gained in any other way, or from any other person or investigative form. The answers are not only relative to the individual and their practice, but also to the relationship between the researcher and the participant.

Epistemology is “concerned with knowing through cognitive representation” (Titchen and Ajjawi, 2010, p. 45). Likewise, as Guba goes on to explain, “if realities exist only in
respondents’ minds, subjective interaction seems to be the only way to access them” (1990, p. 26), which means that I am operating from a subjectivist epistemology. The combination of a relativist ontology and an subjectivist epistemology stem from my own constructivist paradigmatic approach to research. This constructivist paradigm allows for an interpretive and dialogic methodology, in which I seek “to interpret and understand the lived experience”, to search for meaning, analyse, critique and negotiate between the theory of the construction of identity and the experiences of the artist-participants involved, along with my own. The methodological framework of phenomenology meets the interpretive and dialogic criteria, and is explored next.

4.2. Methodology

Human behaviour with regards to new media and web based technologies is studied qualitatively by ethnographers, virtual ethnographers, anthropologists, and cultural studies theorists. The study of people has led to the development of specific methodological approaches by uses and gratifications theorists, social psychologists, sociologists, and grounded and narrative theorists. Added to these approaches are the opportunities offered by computational and other quantitative methods used within the digital humanities. However, what these approaches have in common is a focus on the study and analysis of human behaviour. In contrast, as identified in the research question, this persona studies project aims to investigate experience. Applying phenomenology to the study of the human experience in digitally networked spaces has been attended to previously by Dickerson et al. (2005), Rodham et al. (2009), and Rose (2011), but is certainly underutilised outside of psychology. Phenomenological research “seeks to reveal and richly portray the nature of human phenomena and the experiences of those who live through them, taking into account the contexts in which these experiences occur and the subjective meanings participants give to particular situations”
The focus on context and subjective meaning allows this investigation into the creation of an artist’s online persona to reveal the richness of the experience of creating a persona in digitally networked spaces, to go beyond how the artists use the technology and investigate what this process means to the artists. The purpose of phenomenological research, as explained by Saldana (2011, p. 8), is “to come to an intimate awareness and deep understanding” of human experience, and involves revelations between researcher and participant of “what goes through one’s mind and what one feels as the phenomenon occurs”. This is distinct from the study of behaviour as seen in projects that utilise an ethnographic or anthropological methodology, and my use of this approach gives this project a clear point of difference to other studies of online identity. The researcher in phenomenology provides a way in to understand how those directly involved experience the phenomena under investigation. This point is explained in greater depth in section 4.6 – Interpretation.

The tension between the artist as an agent in their own presentational practice, and the fact that their presentation is informed and influenced by wider discourses of the artistic subject, is the impetus for the use of the phenomenological approach that drives this study. Phenomenological researchers, in seeking to “reveal any subject-matter on its own terms” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108) believe that "we are a fundamental part of a meaningful world ... and the meaningful world is a fundamental part of us" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 106). As such, the experience of the artist in creating an online persona is fundamentally linked with, informed by, and part of the social construction of what it means to be an artist. However, this experience of the creation of online artistic persona can never be fully accessed by someone other than the artist him/herself. Rather, we can “glimpse a person's current subjective mode-of-engagement with some specific context or aspect of the world” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 109); in this case we glimpse the artist’s
current subjective engagement with and relation to their experience of artistic persona creation.

This phenomenological ‘glimpse’ is developed firstly through the descriptions of experience that come from the artist her/himself, and secondly through the interpretation that I as the researcher have developed as a result of my analysis of the artist’s descriptions of experience, the artistic subject, and my own engagement with and experience of digitally networked spaces. The dual nature of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides its real strength; in Hinds (2011, p. 193) words:

IPA is phenomenological in that it attempts to understand an individual’s personal perceptions of their experiences. However, IPA is also interpretive in that it recognizes that another’s personal world is not directly accessible and therefore is reliant upon the researcher’s empathetic interpretation or understanding of their experience.

It is through this interpretive process that I am able to access a glimpse of the experience of the artists involved in this study. The lack of direct access to the experience of another "means we must inevitably accept a third-person view of a 'first-person' account" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 110), but by allowing the artists to speak through the analysis, I privilege their first-person account—they are the expert of their own experience—and acknowledge that, as noted by Hefferon and Ollis (2006, p. 145) “although I could attempt to retrieve the ‘insiders view’, I could never completely achieve this due to my own interpretive bias”.

**4.2.1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA as a methodology has been developed in the health sciences, particularly psychology, and as a result the key projects to date have been conducted into personal experience of health and illness. Smith et al. (2009) provide a number of examples of
studies in their foundational text *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*, which provides the methodological structure on which this project was based. In describing a study by the lead author looking at the psychological impacts of haemodialysis treatment for kidney failure, Smith et al. explain that the value of the case study of a single patient’s experience with treatment allows the reader to understand what such an experience might be like: “We would also hope that even though [the reader] may not share the content of the experience of [the patient] they nevertheless feel a resonance with the way it impacts on her existentially” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 131). Equally, in a study of psychosis, the metaphor-based description of a single participant’s experience was used to demonstrate the contextual and (in this case) gendered experiences of vulnerability (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 147–159). This insight supports a shift in psychological and psychiatric belief to view psychosis as understandable, and “not confined to people who come to be labelled with mental health problems” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 149). Both these studies engage with issues of identity, and this focus is extended further in Smith et al.’s discussion of the lead author’s longitudinal study into the identity changes that occur during the transition into motherhood, which operates in part as a theory-modelling project and “illustrates the concept of the relational self” (2009, p. 172). The integration of identity is a central concern of IPA research, as the authors comment:

> If one embarks on an in-depth inductive qualitative study of a topic which has a considerable existential moment, as is often the case in IPA research, then it is quite likely the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self/identity. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 163)

The focus in this study of artistic persona is intrinsically linked to wider conceptions of identity, making IPA an ideal approach, complimenting the theoretical background of the study in cultural studies and sociology. To my knowledge, this is the first time
interpretive phenomenological analysis has been used to study cultural practices and those involved in their production. It should be noted that Joe Hinds’ research into the psychological rewards of wilderness experiences (2011) broke ground by applying the IPA methodology to experiences of external environments and extending the methodology from its previous concerns with personal psychological or physical phenomena. Kate Hefferon and Stewart Ollis used IPA to study the psychological experience of ‘flow’ by professional dancers (2006). Both of these projects, as with the bulk of IPA work, was conducted by scholars and participants based in the United Kingdom.

The interpretive process of IPA allows me to draw on existing theories of self-presentation, thereby giving an analytical structure that increases the generalisability of an otherwise idiographic piece of research. The deep analysis of a small number of participants with no attempt at representation within the sample makes it difficult to extrapolate out to the wider population, which is a fairly consistent critique of phenomenology (Denscombe, 2010, p. 103). Although it is not the intent of my research to describe the experience of all artists as they create online personas, by incorporating the wider theoretical concepts and frameworks explored in chapter two, I am able to describe the relationship between these artists’ experiences and larger persona studies concerns. I develop my interpretation of the artists’ experience in a way that adds to the literature on online self-presentation practices. By utilising the existent literature from art history and aesthetics on the artistic subject (discussed later in this chapter), I am also able to demonstrate how the artists in this study relate their self-presentation practices to historical notions of what it means to be an artist.
4.2.2. Alternative approaches to IPA

It is outside the scope of this dissertation to detail the full range of approaches to phenomenological research. However, a brief discussion of some of the key influences on IPA is useful to contextualise the methodology used in this study. Although phenomenology as a discipline has many important theorists, the two key founders of modern phenomenology are generally accepted to be Edmund Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger (Moustakas, 1994; Pernecky and Jamal, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). As the founder of modern phenomenology, Husserl sought to develop a “rigorous and scientific study of things as they appear to be, in order to come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience” (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010, p. 1063). This first modern type of phenomenology is often called ‘transcendental’, and is the basis from which other theorists worked in developing their own approaches to the study of phenomena (Grace and Ajjawi, 2010). The key technique in this study was the phenomenological reduction, or bracketing, which sought to distance the researcher from their preconceptions of the phenomenon, leaving them capable of describing only things as they were/are (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Issues to do with causality are to be excluded, and an objective description of the phenomenon is the aim. For these reasons, Husserlian phenomenology is considered to function from a positivist paradigm (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010).

Heidegger saw phenomenology differently from Husserl, and was the first scholar to marry phenomenology and hermeneutics. In doing so, Heidegger creating a methodology with a linguistic focus (developed further by his student Gadamer) and brought the researcher back into the study. Rather than trying to bracket the researcher’s preconceptions, ontological and epistemological beliefs, and the context in which the phenomenon occurs, Heideggarian hermeneutic phenomenology makes these things explicit. Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1064) state that unlike Husserlian
phenomenology, “Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology did not claim to develop accurate descriptions ... but focused instead on the situated, dialogic and interpretive qualities of being”. Located within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm (Grace and Ajjawi, 2010; Pernecky and Jamal, 2010), hermeneutic phenomenology provides philosophical and methodological guidance for the investigation of the experience of being an artist working on the fringes of the art world, whether in offline or online settings.

Two other key traditions within phenomenological enquiry are worthy of mention here: existential phenomenology, which also began with Heidegger, but was extended by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, and experiential phenomenology, based on the work of van Manen. The former sees a focus on “individuals’ experiences of being-in-the-world, therefore research questions in this tradition tend to be oriented towards ontological rather than epistemological phenomena” (Grace and Ajjawi, 2010, p. 199). My research into identity construction includes both ontological and epistemological questioning, and as a result, the existential tradition could limit the enquiry somewhat. The latter tradition of experiential phenomenology, also called the phenomenology of practice, sees limitations placed on the other end of the methodological scale. As experiential phenomenology deals primarily with embodied knowledge and practice, it is a more appropriate methodology for use by practitioner researchers than those such as myself who investigate the experiences of others.

It is necessary to make explicit that the focus of this research is not on the philosophies of the phenomena, a common preoccupation of many phenomenologists (Grace and Ajjawi, 2010). Rather, the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis described above will be used as a tool or guiding philosophy to investigate the phenomena surrounding the creation of online persona by fringe artists.
This project shares data collection methods (interviewing, online listening) most clearly with ethnography, and an ethnographic approach was considered for use prior to the adoption of the adapted form of IPA described in this chapter. There are three key elements that distinguish these methodological approaches that are important here: firstly, the relative focus on behaviour or experience; secondly, the purpose of studying a culture or a phenomenon; thirdly, the depth of analysis of individual narratives. In the first element, I mean that ethnographers look primarily at what people do, and what those behaviours might mean for others. By contrast, phenomenologists investigate what something is like, how it feels for the person experiencing it. This is not to say that these approaches do not result in overlapping data, but rather that the focus of the methodological approach is different, and results in different questioning and interpretative approaches. In the second element that separates ethnography from phenomenology, the scale of the research is different. Ethnographers are interested in cultures, in social groupings wider than the individual, whereas phenomenologists see each individual’s experience of a phenomenon as unique and interesting in its own right. This results in the third difference between methodologies: the depth of discussion of any individual narrative. By looking at individual experiences in significant depth, rather than at cultural trends or social structures evidenced within a group, phenomenological approaches require significantly smaller sample sizes.

### 4.3. Research Participants

There is a wide range of art forms which could be considered as operating outside of the traditional art world as conceptualised by Becker (1982). I selected tattoo, craftivism, street art and performance poetry as the four types of creative practice to be represented in this study, as these four art forms represent a range of practice that covers the verbal, visual, written, aural, embodied, tangible, intangible and ephemeral qualities of creative
practice. Additionally, each of the four creative practices is contentious in its claim to being art, and those who work within these practices may not be recognised as artists. Despite the individual skill and talent required by tattoo artists, the practice has been marginalised, excluded from being categorised as art due to what could be considered primarily as issues of class and taste, along with secondary issues to do with the highly commercial, commission-based structure in which tattoo artists work. Craftivism suffers similarly from marginalisation although for quite different reasons, and this marginalisation is magnified by the deliberate adoption of techniques and media traditionally associated with women’s craft practice; this reconceptualisation of needlework and labour are in fact core to the role of craftivist practice. Street art as a creative practice is contentious due to its connection with the graffiti and tagging communities which are considered vandalism (activity which often overlaps in and informs street art practice); even when artists are working in legal spaces, the ephemeral nature of the work provides barriers to acceptance within the wider art community through collection, display and resale. Performance poetry has a long history, but the more recent development of slam poetry, with its focus on competition, delivery, and popular appeal (some would argue at the expense of content), the live performance of poetic work has been placed in opposition to ‘page’ poetry. This is in addition to the ongoing marginalisation of poetry as a creative practice in its own right. These ideas, and my resultant categorisation of each of these art forms as ‘fringe’, is discussed in greater depth in chapter 5.

4.3.1. Sampling
Each of the fringe art forms holds incredible diversity of approach, and this meant that it was necessary for me to place some boundaries on the potential sample. One of the easiest to instigate was geographical—to allow me to interview them, it was necessary
for the artists to be physically located in Melbourne Australia, or to be in Edinburgh, Scotland, during my international fieldwork. Other criteria for determining the extent of the potential sampling frame was developed specifically for each art form, as the diversity of practice required a different approach for inclusion as a street artist, a tattoo artist, a craftivist, or a performance poet.

The street artist potential participant group was made up of those who work as visual artists and whose primary practice takes place in public. This work could either be paid or unpaid, and may or may not be supplemented by other forms of creative practice or work. The artists maintained an online presence, either through a blog, social media site or other website, or any combination of these. The ephemeral and often illegal nature of street art, matched with the anonymity or coded authorship (through the use of ‘tags’ rather than personal names), makes linking work to an individual or group of artists a difficult task for those outside of the subculture. Therefore, online media and social networking has allowed these artists to present themselves to a wider, and international, audience without threat to their legal identities.

In order to be a member of the tattoo artist population, participants had to be working professionally as a tattoo artist, either from a studio or independently. They needed to maintain an online presence, either through a blog, social media site or other website, or any combination of these, and often had both a studio-based presence and a personal presence. Tattoo art is interesting as each piece is in essence a commission, and the vast majority are unsigned by the artist. The requirement to build a professional reputation is essential for tattoo artists wanting to develop their customer base. Online media has allowed tattoo artists and collectors to connect outside of the limited tattoo festival scene, and for reputations to spread beyond city or national borders.
Comprising the smallest potential population in this research project, the craftivists were made up of craft artists working in traditional, often women’s, craft media (needlework, knitting, sewing, ceramics etc), who infuse their work with political messages. Although creatively diverse, to be a member of this population, the craft artists needed to work with ideas related to environmental, political, race or gender activism, and to present their work in a public forum. Online networks have allowed a small, geographically diverse group of individual practitioners and craft circles to connect and share their projects with each other and with audiences, buyers and supporters.

The final participant group is be made up of those who take part in performance poetry, either in non-competitive contexts such as readings, or through competitive slam poetry tournaments, or both. The performance poets are likely to support this creative activity with other roles, either related or unrelated to their poetry. They will maintain an online presence, possibly including audio-visual recordings of their performances. The competitive, performative nature of slam poetry adds a new dimension to traditional poetry readings and publication. In addition, the use of new media technology to record and share performances through online sites such as Facebook or YouTube works to document one-off events.

Smith et al. (2009, pp. 49–50) argue that IPA studies samples require homogeneity in order to discover elements of convergence and divergence between participants. This criteria is answered in this study due to the requirements of the artists to be (a.) currently practising, (b.) have multiple profiles online, and (c.) be primarily involved in one of the four key creative practices introduced briefly above.
In keeping with the qualitative paradigm, the sampling method used in this research project was purposive. The eight artists whose experiences make up the primary data set were selected “on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomenon under study” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). In order to be considered a potential participant, an artist must have been currently engaged in one of the four populations described above, must have an active presence on a number of online platforms, and must be doing something with their online presence that I considered ‘interesting’. I considered an artist as ‘engaged’ if they were currently producing new work; the artists did not, however, have to be making money from their practice. Active presence related to their profiles being updated once every few days, and relating specifically to their creative work. Additionally, I sought artists who used the technology to engage with others, being active in the sense of commenting, answering questions, linking to and ‘liking’ other pages, rather than simply posting their own material. The purely subjective criteria of being ‘interesting’ took many forms—with one artist, it was an engagement with design and self-description, for another it was the use of images and editing software, for a third it was a particularly creative use of language.

4.3.2. Recruitment
Because of the range of artistic practice covered by this research, I used a number of different strategies to identify and recruit potential participants. In order to identify tattoo artists, I attended the Rites of Passage body art festival in Melbourne in April 2012, where I sought exhibiting tattoo artists who promoted personal (rather than studio) social media profiles on their marketing collateral or signage. I contacted two potential participants during the festival (one of whom was Amanda Cain, who accepted) and a third participant was approached by email the day after the festival
(Benjamin Laukis, who also accepted my invitation to participate). In order to identify street artists to participate, I began by searching online for those featured in Young et al.’s (2010) *Street/Studio: The place of street art in Melbourne*, and it was from research into the street art and graffiti crew Everfresh that I was able to identify Mike Maka as a participant. The second street artist, GHOSTZz, I found by searching Facebook for street artists based in Edinburgh or the surrounding areas, and when contacted, he enthusiastically accepted my request for an interview. Similarly, the Birmingham-based performance poet, Ben Mellor, was identified by searching out acts in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival programme who were categorised under ‘spoken word’ and also met the other criteria of active participation in an interesting way with online social media, while the Melbourne based poet Maxine Clarke was identified through her involvement in and posting to the local Facebook page for the promotion of spoken word performances. To identify the first craftivist I interviewed was straightforward: although we are not close, I have known Rayna Fahey since we were children, and it is through her Facebook profile that I first became aware of craftivism as a creative practice. In order to find a second Melbourne craftivist (I had arranged to speak to a woman in London near the end of my fieldwork trip, but our arrangements fell through the night before), I identified a Melbourne based craftivist website, and via email was able to recruit Casey as the final interview in early 2013.

My final sample was made up of eight participants, two from each of the four art forms. There were four women and four men, although both street artists are male, and both craftivists are female. Participants’ ages range from late teens to late 30’s; I didn’t specifically ask about age other than to ensure they were over the age of 18, as required by my ethical approval. Most of the participants were based in Melbourne, Australia, although a fieldwork trip to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2012 allowed me to
include the Edinburgh-based street artist, and the Birmingham-based performance poet. It had been planned for me to include a more geographically diverse sample, but constraints of time and funding limited my capacity to speak to more widely dispersed artists. In total, I contacted sixteen artists in regards to participation in this study, with a 50 per cent recruitment rate.

### 4.4. Ethics

In accordance with Deakin University regulations, this project sought and received ethical approval from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00213). Some specific areas of human research ethics needed consideration both before the research began, and ongoing throughout the project. These areas are: the inclusion of participants who are likely to be involved in, and talk about, illegal activities; the need to balance the academic traditions of anonymity and confidentiality for participants with a desire to acknowledge and support the creative practitioners whose experiences and online persona I am studying; and the use of both public and semi-public digitally networked spaces for data collection. Each of these areas will be discussed below.

#### 4.4.1. Researching illegal activity

One of the four case studies in my research focuses on street artists. Much street art is illegal, and all of it has an element of the ephemeral; at any time the work can be destroyed by weather, painted over (buffed) by authorities, or altered, added to or covered up by other artists. This is an essential part of the movement's development. Bowen comments that "Taking risks was sometimes the initial attraction to graffiti for young artists. They made conscious choices about whether they should break the law, knowing the consequences involved" (1999, p. 26). As a creative practice that as often as not is illegal, making a living from street art adds an extra layer of complexity.
Worldwide, a number of street artists accept commissions to work on walls, fences and buildings, while others work concurrently in graphic design or other commercial creative roles. Despite this range of practice, Lewisohn (2008, p. 127) believes that the best street art and graffiti are illegal. This is because the illegal works have political and ethical connotations that are lost in sanctioned works. There is a tangible conceptual aura that is stronger in illegal graffiti: the sense of danger the artist felt is transferred to the viewer.

The two street artists who participated in this research work in a mix of illegal and legal spaces, and it was necessary for me to ensure that I was not putting them at risk by making them identifiable through my research. In these cases, the participant determined the extent of confidentiality required—for GHOSTZz it was through the use of his now defunct ‘tag’ rather than his personal name, while the much more widely known Mike Maka was more comfortable with my use of his ‘gallery name’, the name used on his promotional and legal works.

An interesting addition to this ethical consideration was the fact that both craftivists also operate in legal grey areas through their interventions into public and private spaces. Fence stitching—the practice of using wool or fabric to decorate chicken wire fences—by both craftivists, and Casey’s cunt fling-ups are both creative practices that could be considered vandalism. Both artists considered carefully their involvement in this project before determining how they would like to be identified.

4.4.2. Anonymity and confidentiality
From the outset, I believed that the artist participants in this project should be allowed the opportunity to be identifiable should they wish, to give them recognition for their creative endeavours and for the work that goes into presenting themselves online. However, acknowledging the complexity of this issue for some participant groups (as discussed above) I determined that the level of identification should be decided by the
artists themselves. As such, the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form each participant was provided with allowed them to choose one of three options: the use of their legal names, a self-identified nickname or tag, or the allocation of a pseudonym. These options allowed the participants to determine the level of anonymity they were comfortable with in the context of this research project. Additionally, the participants were informed that they may alter their level of anonymity at any point up to the 15 December 2013 when the drafting process of this thesis was completed. All participants other than Mike Maka and GHOSTZz agreed to use their legal names for the purposes of this research.

4.4.3. Informed consent and online data collection
The artist’s consent was sought prior to the process of screenshotting their online personas commenced. However, there was also information included on websites, comment streams, or Facebook pages that was posted by users who have not given consent to participate in the research. As with much research into social networks or other types of digitally networked spaces, it is often impractical to seek consent from every user in a discussion. All information collected without the consent of the user for the reasons explained above will be de-identified: although it is acknowledged that confidentiality of online postings is difficult to achieve, removing the names and profile images of the users provides a level of protection to those whose engagement with the artists is of use within the study.

4.5. Data Collection
As a qualitative research methodology, IPA research requires a method of data collection that facilitates the building of a rich, descriptive collection of experience. As such, one-on-one interviews between myself and each of the artists make up the basis of the data analysed here. Smith et al. (2009, p. 56) state that the data collection needs to
“invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences”, and in-depth interviews are the clearest way of obtaining these accounts from a range of participants. However, other data collection methods have been used in IPA studies, including the keeping of diaries by participants, focus groups, participant observation, questionnaires, and computer-mediated data collection (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 56–57). This project takes a mixed approach to data collection by integrating online listening and capturing screenshots of the participant’s online persona with the interview analysis to provide richer data on the online experience than that obtained during the single interview.

4.5.1. Interviews
Qualitative interviews take a number of forms. Weerakkody (2009, p. 166) discusses the three main types of qualitative interview—structured, semi-structured, unstructured—and states that the distinction relates to the level of “freedom and flexibility available to the interviewer when asking questions from respondents”. Although there are benefits to all three approaches, the semi-structured and unstructured interview styles are most appropriate for phenomenological research which aims to give the participants “an opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56). Although IPA researchers usually take a semi-structured approach to interviewing, developing an interview schedule to guide discussion (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58), I determined that given the disparity of art practice and online engagement, a more unstructured approach would allow the discussions to flow more freely. Therefore, at the beginning of the interview participants were advised that we would be talking around two key questions: 1. What it was like for them to do what they do, and 2. What it was like to translate that to the online. However, we did not address these two questions directly, but rather I
asked them to tell me stories about their creative practice, and used these stories as a bouncing off point from which to engage with their conceptualisations of their creative practice, online social media, and the relationship between the two. Smith et al. (2009, p. 58) support this approach, stating that “The plan for IPA interviews is an attempt to come at the research question ‘sideways’”, and by talking around the edges of online artists persona, I found I was able to obtain anecdotes and descriptions of experience that gave me rich insight into the artists’ experiences.

Although I did not use a formally prepared interview schedule, there were similarities in structure between the interviews. I asked each participant to begin the interview by telling me the story of ‘how they got into X as a creative practice’, what I call the ‘becoming an artist’ narrative. I also prompted a number of the participants to tell me about the process by which they went about making a particular piece, whether a tattoo, poem, stencil or piece of visual art. Each artist tended to focus their discussion of the online largely on a single platform; this was usually Facebook, but also included Twitter, Instagram, and a blog. The artist-participants often slipped into narratives of activity or behaviour rather than discussing experience, and in accordance with the IPA methodology, I prompted greater reflexivity by asking them ‘What was that like?’, or ‘How did you feel about that?’. In only one case was the discussion stilted, and this was a result of a collision of circumstances. The participant was suffering from a bad cold, was tired, and suffered from anxiety, all of which made him uncomfortable speaking to me. This was compounded by the fact that we’d agreed to meet in a busy cafe where we were interrupted several times by wait staff, and I was recording our discussion on a digital recorder set on a small tripod, with a bright red recording light. The impact of the recording device on the participant was apparent as soon as I turned it off and put it away: the participant immediately relaxed, spoke more freely and fully, and
acknowledged his own discomfort with the situation. Although I made notes as soon as possible after our meeting, I was unable to capture the depth of the discussion that occurred after the recorder was turned off, and so this is not included in my interpretation. In response to this experience, I recorded the remaining six interviews using the voice recorder on my smartphone, which was much more discrete; the presence of a mobile phone on a table made it easier for the participants to relax and put the recording of the discussion out of their minds.

The interviews were conducted in a range of locations in order to provide the greatest convenience for the participants. Two were conducted in the participant’s homes, one in a public park, one in the artist’s studio, and the remaining four in cafes. Ranging in length from 30 to 90 minutes, the interviews were digitally recorded as described above, transcribed and emailed to the participants to check for accuracy, and to allow any additional suggestions, thoughts, or nuances to be included prior to the analysis beginning. Only two of the participant’s made changes to the transcripts, and the changes were largely related to the spelling of names, places and other people, or to remove some of the hesitancies and disfluencies seen in the verbatim transcript.

4.5.2. Close observation of online persona
As introduced above, in addition to interviews this research makes use of online listening, observation, and screenshotting to add richness to the data gathered. In a sense, the object of analysis, the online artist’s persona, becomes a data collection method. I monitored and analysed the participants’ publicly available online presence both before and after the interview, and used examples from these sites during the interview process to drive discussion. By prompting the participants to consider specific examples of persona creation that I had witnessed them engaging in, such as the posting of available appointment times, or the sharing of personal stories, I was able to elicit
narratives during the interview process about specific phenomena as well as a more
general sense of the experience of online persona creation.

**Listening online**
Following Crawford (2009, p. 525), I frame my engagement with the online personas of
the artists in this study as a form of listening, a metaphor she describes as capturing the
“ongoing processes of receptivity” that characterises the use of social media or other
digital spaces. The choice of the listening metaphor is in contrast to other terms which
have been used to describe the practice of watching, reading, and following people or
communities online without contributing content. Lurking, peripheral participation, and
non-public participation are all terms that have been used to describe these practices.
Crawford argues that these terms negatively construct these groups as on the edges of
the communities they are involved in. By contrast, listening “invokes a more dynamic
process of online attention, and suggests that it is an embedded part of networked
engagement - a necessary corollary to having a ‘voice’” (Crawford, 2009, p. 527). By
engaging in a practice of listening to my participants when they engage with their online
personas, I am not only operating as a researcher, but also become a true member of
their imagined audience, becoming embedded in their presence online just as other
members of their networks would be. Perhaps I listen more intently than most, but
online, I am able to engage with their personas as would any other individual with the
same access.

**Screenshots**
My online data collection consisted of more than simply listening however. From
identifying potential participants through to the completion of data collection, I also
utilised the screenshot capacity of both my own mobile devices (smartphone and tablet)
and my PC to collect examples of particular types of persona building activities
performed by the artists I interviewed. This collection of artifacts, taken from Facebook,
Tumblr, blogs, Twitter, and webpages, not only gives me a way to record the potentially ephemeral performance of persona, but also adds richness to the data analysed by observing and recording the participants while they were engaged in the experience that was the subject of our interview.

This process of recording the online became particularly important around six months after my interview with street artist GHOSTZz. His legal and artistic personas collided during a run-in with the police, prompting him to go through a process of changing his tag and closing down his Facebook page, re-emerging under his new artist’s name. The process took around 48 hours, much of which I spent furiously screen shotting his profiles to retain what data I could; GHOSTZz agreed to leave the pages live for a little while longer than intended to facilitate this process.

However, it is necessary to make it clear that my use of screenshots in my data and my interpretation is my own remediation of the artist’s experience. Although the screenshots were taken from publicly accessible websites or from networked communities of which I was an accepted member (such as a semi-private Facebook page), the decision of what to capture, of what was important or interesting from within the range of posts, comments and links, was my own. Moore (2014) considers the role of screenshots in the production of persona in online ‘gamer’ communities, and suggests that the “promise of the screenshot as a digital media object is the recording of an experience which is not entirely bounded within its visual representation” (p.2). He contends that the “… similar characteristics of computational devices and screens recorded by screenshots produces a particular ‘authentic’ phenomenological understanding”, and it is these two elements—the record of an experience larger than what is visually present, and the closeness for the researcher of the record and the ‘original’—that provides me with the richness of data within these elements. This rich
data gave me insight into the persona and personality of the participants prior to the interviews, and allowed me to direct the interview to specific past performances online if the conversation stalled. My continued online listening after the interviews were complete gave me an opportunity to revisit the interview data with new insight as the participants continued their online engagement. In some cases—discussed in chapters 6-8—the participants changed the way they engaged with their audiences in interesting ways after I spoke with them, and by capturing these changes through screenshots, I was able to incorporate these as narratives of experience along with the narratives collected during the interviews.

These screenshots function by documenting specific elements of the experience of persona creation by these participants, but their selection and incorporation into the larger data set is in itself an interpretative process on my part. This means that the specific moments in time that were captured, and their importance to the analysis of the persona creation experience, was determined by me as the researcher. For this reason, rather than incorporating the screenshots into the overall discussion and reconstituting them as text, I have included some representative and exceptional examples as illustrative of the superordinate and subordinate themes that I discuss in chapters 6-8. Where there are contributions from non-participants (comments or likes) that I feel are important to the narrative, I have endeavoured to remove identifying information such as names or profile pictures. I have used the Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide (Markham and Buchanan, 2012), specifically the ‘Charting Ethical Questions By Data And Type’, as a guide to determining whether the inclusion of a screenshot, or comment within a screenshot, should be included in this document. All screenshots appear with approval of the participant.
4.6. Interpretation

Transcript analysis in IPA research does not follow a single fixed method, but Smith et al. (2009, p. 79) outline a number of common processes that direct the researcher to consider “participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences”. The strategies outlined by Smith et al. (2009, pp. 79–80) are: line-by-line analysis of each participant’s discussion of their own experience; identification of emergent patterns within this analysis, both for the individual participant and within the sample; the development of a ‘dialogue’ between the researcher, their data, and their wider knowledge of the discipline to allow for interpretation; the development of a structure in which to describe relationships between the themes; organisation of data to demonstrate analytic and interpretive process; external testing of analysis and interpretation via supervision, collaboration or audit; narrative structuring of material to elucidate themes and interpretation; and researcher reflexivity to incorporate and acknowledge perceptions, conceptions and processes. Each of these elements of the interpretive process and their use in the analysis of the data (both transcript and screenshot) will now be explained as to how they functioned in this study of the experience of online persona creation by fringe artists.

The first element of the analytic process involved a close, line-by-line reading of the transcript. This was achieved by arranging the interview transcripts in a table format with two main columns. Column one had the transcript content, divided into rows by speaker. In column two I made broad notes as to the meaning of each section of the transcript, key ideas raised, and initial analysis. After I had read the transcript closely and made notes as to key ideas, I used highlighters to allocate particular parts of the transcript to either the professional, personal, or intimate register of performance.
Transcript analysis, Mike Maka

Each transcript was read individually, and during my analysis I attempted to see each transcript on its own merits rather than seeking out similar themes. This is a form of phenomenological bracketing, where the researcher seeks to be aware of their preconceptions, and attempts to minimise their impact on their interpretation of the experience. However, as Smith et al. conclude, bracketing can be understood as a “cyclical process and as something which can only be partially achieved” and as a reflexive process wherein the researcher interrogates their own systems of understanding and preconceived ideas in order to limit their (unavoidable) impact on the interpretation (2009, p. 25). This is important in phenomenology, as the researcher is trying to understand the thing itself, to glimpse another person’s experience of the world.
The third process in IPA data analysis is the development of a dialogue between the data, the theory, and the researcher. Here, I contextualise the themes and findings from the transcript and screenshot data within the theoretical and contextual framework of persona studies as outlined in chapter two. This stage adds an additional level of subjective interpretation to my analysis, and feeds into the broader structure that produces the relationship between the themes. This structure is made up of the three registers of performance—professional, personal, and intimate—and continues the process of linking the empirical findings of the research to the theoretical and contextual framework developed through persona studies.

Through the processes of close reading, pattern and theme identification, and structural development, I engaged in a process of re-examination of each chunk of transcript, each thematic designation, each pattern and each interpretive structure, working to determine
whether I was uncovering a thematic structure that emerged from the content itself, or if, as the analyst, I was imposing a structure in order to make my data fit my preconceived notions of what I would find. As with any system of data analysis, my interpretation is inherently and unavoidably subjective. Smith et al. (2009, p. 80) describe this subjectivity, stating that “Although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participant and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking”. I acknowledge that another researcher may look at the same data and come to a different conclusion, but through the fifth process, the organisation of data to demonstrate analytic and interpretive processes, I am able to describe how I came to the conclusions described in chapters five to eight. [For a detailed example of the analytical process, see Appendix.] This organisation of data also provides for external testing of the truth claims I make, process six, initially conducted by my supervision team, but this testing can also be performed by other external parties. An additional layer of collaborative analysis was conducted via participant feedback, discussed in section 4.8 below.

The seventh process in Smith et al’s (2009) suggested structure for the analysis of IPA data is the development of a narrative structure of the materials. It is this narrative that makes up the bulk of the findings chapters in this thesis, while the discussion chapter works to fulfil the elements of reflexivity not already encoded into the analysis itself. In constructing the narrative structure, I consider which examples best illustrate the thematic pairings in each register of performance. I also work to ensure each participant whose experience of persona creation contributed to the development of a theme has a voice, and that no single participant’s story dominates the overall analysis. This is to ensure that the analysis tells the story of the full range of research data. Through the
narrative structure of the findings, I aimed to include the participants’ words wherever possible: “telling the story of one’s life has personal significance for the individual, indeed can be described as a central marker of what it is to have an identity” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 197). By including the participants, own voices, and allowing them to speak through the analysis in their own works, I demonstrate my respect and appreciation for their understanding of their own experiences and identities.

Additionally, the development and writing of this analysis aided in developing my own understanding and interpretation of the data. The findings came together through the process of writing.

As introduced earlier, the interpretative process which led to the development of the subordinate and superordinate themes and from there to the five thematic pairings that structure the analysis, was not sufficient to fully explain how the participants experienced persona creation in digitally networked spaces. The incorporation of three performance registers provides an additional level of analysis to this study and has been developed in order to describe the different types of performances that occur for different audiences and for different purposes.

4.7. Registers of Performance

As has been argued in chapters 1 and 2, the presentation of a digital self or identity has become increasingly ubiquitous with the widespread use of social and professional networking and media platforms. However, the ways that individuals engage with these platforms and negotiate their performance of self for different audiences of friends, family, fans and followers requires new ways of theorising and studying identity and self-presentation. In this section, I conceptualise three registers of performance—the
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

professional, personal and intimate—with which I structure my three core findings chapters.

Drawing from my analysis of the artists’ interviews and the experiences identified through online listening, I illustrate each register of performance with examples from these artists’ descriptions of how they perform their identities online. The conceptualisation of registers of performance makes a metaphor of vocal registers, defined as “a series or range of consecutive frequencies that can be produced with nearly identical voice quality” (Hollien, 1972, p. 1). Just as a single human voice can move between different vocal registers, so can a single online persona move between different performance registers. Equally, Hollien (1972, p. 3) notes that many people can produce sounds at frequencies which seem to “lie between” vocal registers, and there are elements of performance which appear to sit between the professional and personal, or personal and intimate, performance registers.

The selective performance of different elements of the social and cultural construction of the artist’s role occurs through all three of the registers of performance: in the professional register we see independence and preoccupation with work, displays of genius or skill, the search for novelty or innovation; in the personal register we see a performance of rebellion against established norms and systems; in the intimate register we see the performance of emotional sensitivity and intensity. However, my thematic analysis of the artists’ descriptions of the phenomena of persona creation found a negotiation of a range of different types of experience that has resonance outside of the performance of artistness. These experiences, as described in section 3.8 above, are categorised as strategy|happenstance, specialisation|diversification, visibility|self-protection, self|collective, and work|play. The first thematic pairing of strategy|happenstance focusing on the role of both planning and chance by artists while
creating their artist personas. The second pairing of visibility|self-protection focuses on how the artists work to present themselves to particular audiences while utilising impression management to limit others access to elements of their lives. The pairing of specialisation|diversification includes reflections on both the creative process and outputs of the artists, and on their choice of platforms for persona creation. The balance of self|collective incorporates narratives of engaging with diverse networks, both online and offline. Finally, the work|play pairing sees discussion of both the creative practice and the creation of online persona as a form of labour and/or a source of fun. Through interpretation of these experiences, we can see how these artists engage with digitally networked spaces to create an online persona, and from here consider how the professional, personal, and intimate registers of performance operate for other persona types.

The designation of ‘professional’, ‘personal’, and ‘intimate’ for these performance registers does need some explication, and I briefly introduce each of these terms below.

**4.7.1. Professional**

In choosing the term ‘professional’ to describe the first of the three registers of performance I identify in this study, I recognise the contested nature of what counts as professional in an unlicensed, unregulated work environment. Indeed, as Smeby et. al. (2011, pp. 1–2) outline, even outside of the arts the definition and use of the term is disputed: in everyday terms professional can be a synonym for occupation, as with a ‘professional hairdresser’ or ‘professional chef’; it can be used descriptively to indicate people who use expert knowledge in their work, such as doctors or lawyers; or ‘professional’ can indicate the adoption of normative models of quality and ethics, such as in journalism or public relations. As discussed in section 3.1.3 in relation to Codell’s (2003) professional category in her typology of Victorian artists, professionalism was
judged on the basis of membership to specific clubs or societies, or inclusion in shows and events. More recent creative industries’ discourse of artist identification as professional (as discussed in 3.1.5) includes these Victorian elements, along with a requirement for income generation for the artist, self-identification as an artist, and art-making as the individual’s primary role.

For the purpose of this study, I am identifying a performance register based on the artist representing themselves as an artist. Their performance is directly that of artistness. In terms of behaviour, the participants speak about their work, their process, and their struggles and successes in relation to their role of artist; experientially, the participants recount what it is like to be a working (professional) artist. Therefore, my use of the term professional is closest to that of the everyday understanding, that “a profession is a kind of occupation” (Freidson, 1999, p. 118), “a particular kind of specialized work located within a much larger universe of work” (1999, p. 118). This understanding of the term comes with the caveat that an artist does not need to be drawing income from their professional practice in order to meet the definition of professional artist.

4.7.2. Personal
The term ‘personal’ as a title for the second register of performance needs to be understood in comparison to the professional and the intimate. Where the professional register describes the relationship between the artist and their art practice (see above), and the intimate describes sharing the very private (see below), performance in the personal register accounts for those aspects of an individual’s life occurring between the two. Rather than being personal in the sense of not being publicly accessible, the personal register accounts for the performance of hobbies, interests, events, or activities outside of the arts: the artist at leisure. As I argue in chapter six, the artists’ performances in the personal register, “the participation in public culture and in publicly
visible popular culture” (Driscoll and Gregg, 2010, p. 16), give a rounded view of the person behind the persona and behind the art. Additionally, the nature of many of the digitally networked platforms used in online persona creation privileges and rewards sharing of personal moments. Facebook in particular, designed from the outset as a social rather than professional network, encourages a focus on the personal, and what Melissa Gregg (2011, p. 89) describes as “a certain comfort with sharing relatively personal information in a comparatively public space that may be subject to outside manipulation”. Making connections to other profiles and pages, sharing and commenting on posts made by others, and having posts, profiles and pages connect to the persona all give depth and a holistic view of the persona, and add to the experience of persona creation by the participant.

4.7.3. Intimate
The information, stories, and performances seen in the intimate register could be interpreted in relation to the increasing comfort with which western society at large discloses personal information through new technologies, which Lambert (2013) explores in depth in relation to Facebook. In introducing the increasing publicity of personal information, Lambert comments that although we now have the capacity to connect regularly with a much wider range of people through Facebook, leading to what he terms “zones of gregarious intimacy”, the lack of control over how these disclosures are then circulated means that the unintended distribution of the intimate can be felt as “a kind of loss of self” (2013, p. 2). A number of writers and scholars have traced the way that the experience of intimacy has changed over time (Clough et al., 2013; Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 2007; Lambert, 2013), while others, particularly journalists writing for popular press, connect increasingly intimate sharing and self-disclosure in digitally networked spaces with a perceived loss of privacy and security (AAP, 2013;
The Oxford Online Dictionary (2014) defines the adjective ‘intimate’ as “closely acquainted” or “familiar”, or “private and personal”. Drawing these threads together, and by labelling the third register of performance the intimate register, I am addressing a level of sharing of the personal that would normally be seen only among the very closely acquainted, that is, immediate family, very close friends, or lovers. However, in line with the focus of this research, my analysis looks at how those artists who perform in the intimate register are contributing to and working from the socially constructed discourses of artistness. For this reason, it is outside the scope of my research to deal with wider concerns of privacy, or changing understandings of intimacy and self-disclosure where these issues are not directly addressed by the participants or my analysis.

4.8. Participant Feedback

As part of the research process, participants were offered a transcript of the interview to review and correct should they wish. Four of the eight participants returned the transcripts with changes, although these changes were largely related to spelling of proper names and the removal of dis-fluencies and hesitancies. At this stage they were also offered the opportunity to add any additional thoughts or comments on the issues discussed during the research. None of the participants took up this opportunity.

Prior to the submission of the thesis, elements of this research were written up and presented for publication in conference proceedings, as a journal article, and as a book chapter. The participants whose data was being analysed for each publication were again offered the opportunity to read and provide feedback on the analysis presented in these papers, and also gave consent for the use of images or screenshots prior to publication. Again, minor corrections to place names or the spelling of non-English
words were offered, but no changes to analysis or interpretation were requested. As a final opportunity for feedback, the participants were offered the chance to read their introduction in chapter 5, plus review three findings chapters and see the screenshots of their online personas I intended to use. Two participants requested the screenshots and personal descriptions, and one gave feedback on the way I had described her work, which I incorporated into this transcript. None of the participants requested to read the findings chapters prior to the completion of the project, although one did offer to read these chapters as something of a favour, and if time allowed. As this participant was travelling internationally at the time the final draft was being prepared, this offer was not accepted.

Although these opportunities for participant feedback are not strictly required in IPA research, I feel strongly that when utilising the labour, life stories and experiences of creative artists, it is imperative for me to ensure that they are comfortable with the truth claims I am making. This is as much a methodological issue as an ethical or moral issue, and also drives my approach to the next chapter in this thesis, which introduces each artist and contextualises their practice within the wider discipline of their art form.
5. The Artists and their Practice

This study draws on the experiences of artists whose creative art practice places them on the edge of the traditional art world, and this chapter functions as an introduction to both the art forms and the artists. The tattoo artists, craftivists, street artists, and performance poets are practitioners of what I call these ‘fringe’ art forms. Fringe arts status outside of the representational structures provided by galleries, publication and distribution companies, critics and agents—what collectively can be termed ‘cultural intermediaries’—means that these artists must develop and manage their own online identities. The experiences of eight fringe artists in creating artists’ personas is outlined in the following chapters, which describe these experiences as operating in three registers of performance: professional, personal, and intimate. This chapter will describe each of the four art forms—craftivism, tattoo art, street art and performance poetry—in order to contextualise both the artists and their practice. It will briefly introduce the eight artists: Rayna, Casey, Benjamin, Amanda, Mike, GHOSTZz, Ben, and Maxine. These introductions function by establishing the artists’ publically presented personas as they were presented to me through the interview process and through online listening. These biographical sketches allow the reader to have a sense of the whole person behind the persona, and guide the reader through the analysis chapters.

5.1. Craftivism

‘Craftivism’ is a term attributed to Betsy Greer (Williams, 2011), founder of the website craftivism.com, and an acknowledged leader within the international craftivist community (Corbett, 2013; Williams, 2011). Greer describes the mix of craft and activism as “a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite”
A creative practice made up of a diverse range of mediums and motives, craftivists nevertheless share common practices and purposes. These include the working of fibres and fabrics—craftivism is most well-known through knitting (particularly yarn bombing and knit-ins), embroidery or needlework. Many practitioners are young women, predominantly white and predominantly urban, who are based in the global West—North America, the UK, and Australasia. However, projects such as the NAMES Project AIDS Project Memorial Quilt (Stull, 2001), which included the work of many men, and groups such as Knitting Nanas Against Gas (KNAG, 2014) are dominated by retirees. Additionally, the engagement with causes of the political left such as environmentalism, anti-consumerism or anti-capitalism, exploitative labour practices, and third wave feminism are common, but not universal. There has been some criticism of the movement being too closely aligned with what is derogatorily termed ‘lipstick feminism’ or ‘girly feminism’, which is arguably a recoding (rather than renegotiation or resistance) of patriarchal gender norms (Portwood-Stacer, 2007; Williams, 2011). The focus on reclaiming and celebrating domestic skills, especially those performed predominantly or solely by women, that have been marginalised through the industrial revolution, and by second-wave feminists’ desire to untie women from the constraints of household labour can be considered central to craftivist practice (Newmeyer, 2008).

Buszek and Robertson (2011, p. 197) describe craftivism as “creative, traditional handcraft (often, assisted by high-tech means of community building, skill-sharing and action), directed towards political and social causes”. The ‘high-tech means’ mentioned here are most visible in terms of the ways that craftivists use the internet and digital networks in order to organise and collaborate; indeed, Newmeyer believes that the resurgence of activist craft can be attributed directly to the capacity to “foster communication and community among crafters” online (2008, p. 453). Sarah Corbett,
founder of the Craftivist Collective based in the United Kingdom, has been particularly effective at building an online network of craftivists working individually or collectively on projects located around the world. Corbett describes her practice as a form of slow activism, “respectful and thought-provoking”, “providing a provocative, non-violent creative platform from which to open up conversations about global injustices” (2013, pp. 5–6). This type of activism can appeal to those frustrated with the shouting, marching, and petition signing that accompany much traditional activist activity.

Craftivism is by no means new, even if the word itself is a recent neologism. Newmeyer (2008, drawing on Parker 1984) recalls a history of resistance and dissent through craft, whether through embroidery samplers, suffragette banners, Abolitionists quilts, or more recent examples such as the Peace Camp at Greenham Common in the 1970s. Crafting as resistance or dissent has seen a significant resurgence in the early 21st Century, included within contemporary interests in sustainable living, DIY, and punk and post-punk feminist movements such as Riot Grrl. As with other traditional craft practices, such as woodwork and pottery, craftivist practice is situated outside of the traditional art world of the visual and performing arts, music, literature, and page poetry. Craftivism also problematizes the distinction between art and craft based on functionality, where “the ends of art involve contemplation, while those of craft involve more mundane physical activity” (Markowitz, 1994, p. 58). However, this distinction seems to fall apart when dealing with craftivist work, which often functions solely as provoking objects. More cynically, Markowitz summarizes a critique of the distinction between art and craft as elitist: “what white European men make is dignified by the label ‘art’, while what everyone else makes only counts as craft” (1994, p. 55).
For the purpose of this study, I am including craftivism and the two craftivists who participated in this project as art and artists respectively. Primarily, this is because both Rayna and Casey self-identify as artists, although by no means consistently. Additionally their creative practice meets the subjective criteria of art works: they are works of exceptional beauty and depth, encompassing profound human emotions and cultural values. Finally, Rayna and Casey can both be considered artists by satisfying Becker’s (1982) conceptualisation of an artistic reputation, and Foucault’s (1991) criteria for a body of work by an author (see section 3.1.2). Of these three reasons, the first is counted as the most important for this project.

Both artists are based in Melbourne Australia and co-founders of Melbourne Craft Cartel, but Casey and Rayna have different types of craftivist practice, and made different entries into the craftivist field. What follows is a brief introduction to each artist, in which I locate their craftivism within the art world as a whole and craftivist practice more specifically.

5.1.1. Rayna Fahey and Casey Jenkins
Rayna Fahey describes herself on her curriculum vitae as “mother artist crafter gardener lover activist”, but notes that she uses the term ‘artist’ rarely, preferring ‘crafter’ or ‘maker’. Rayna’s craftivist work is based around the tradition of needlework, particularly cross-stitch, a woman’s craft which has a long history of being marginalised as ‘decorative’ rather than ‘artistic’ (Parker, 2010). The pieces that Rayna creates, either solo or as a member of collectives, generally operate in one of two scales. The first is the scale of the domestic: Rayna creates, hacks, redesigns and re-purposes cross-stitch samplers and needlework designs to incorporate political, feminist, environmentalist or other activist messages. The second scale is more public, where she uses cross-stitch techniques in much larger formats, using chain-link fences and scrap fabric rather than
linen or Aida fabric and embroidery floss. These pieces intervene in vacant lots, neighbourhood parks or gardens, and other communal or publicly visible spaces. The two scales of work come together on occasion through gallery shows and artist-in-residence programs, where domestically scaled samplers and aprons are exhibited alongside images and representations of fence stitching and other public interventions.

Rayna runs a blog—radicalcrossstitch.com (see image below)—which operates as a digital archive of both her own creative work, and the history of political and activist craft. She engages with networks of makers, artists, activists, politicians and business people through Facebook and Twitter, and links together her varied interests in permaculture, environmental degradation, deforestation, women’s rights, and anti-capitalism to create a diverse, multi-layered activist/artist persona. However, Rayna was an activist long before her engagement with craftivism and art, and she took up cross-stitch in 2001 as a way to alleviate the boredom associated with pregnancy-enforced bed rest. Rayna is a woman’s studies major at university, and an active participant in the Green Party which included a time as a social media coordinator for a prominent Green Party politician in New Zealand. These experiences meant that the connections between the traditions of embroidery and marginalised women’s labour, the economies of consumption and making, and the potential to use her chosen craft to register dissent soon became apparent. Rayna’s overlapping interests in craft and activism coincided with the beginnings of the contemporary craftivist movement, and as such she is seen as something of a pioneer. Her work building an online history of activist craft does much to link current craftivist practices to their oft-forgotten roots, working to counteract what Newmeyer (2008, p. 443) describes as “an ahistorical understanding of crafts as political but also a remarkable ignorance of feminist theory, practice, and indeed
crafting”. I spoke to Rayna in her West Melbourne home garden, on a sunny afternoon in early 2012.


Rayna Fahey, 2012, *Oh sorry, was that your land*, 23 August 2013
Casey Jenkins’ introduction to craftivism came through a similarly accidental route. Frustrated with the conservative Howard government’s attempts to retain power for a fifth term in 2007, Casey sought to find new ways to encourage people to vote against the Australian Liberal-National Coalition. Not having access to large amounts of money to fund protest or campaigning activities, Casey instead took advantage of media interest in any unique internet-focused stories by listing ‘Howard’s Integrity’ on ebay, in full knowledge that as an intangible item, the listing would be pulled. When this inevitably happened, Casey responded by sending a press release to all major media outlets with the hook that ebay had declared then prime minister John Howard’s integrity ‘non-existent’. Happy with the large amount of coverage this had generated, but wanting to do more, Casey made up Howard themed ‘cum rags’, stencilled with an image of Howard’s face with slogans such as ‘Cum on Howard’, which she handed out at political rallies with enrol-to-vote cards. The cum rags connected Casey to Rayna, and from there Casey’s involvement with craftivism became more direct. Working collaboratively as the Craft Cartel, the two ran an alternative craft market. Although primarily operating as an organiser of this market, Casey contributed occasional items, including pro-abortion maternity clothes, and women’s underwear sporting the phrase ‘deliberately barren’ in reference to the accusation made to then Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard by opposition leader Tony Abbott.

Unlike Rayna, whose activism encompasses a range of ‘leftist’ causes, Casey’s craftivist practice has focused primarily on women’s issues. A core concern for Casey is the place and perception of women’s genitalia in contemporary society. An ongoing website, cuntisnotadirtyword.com, documents a range of projects aimed at re-framing the word ‘cunt’ from one of the most derogatory or insulting words in the English language, “restoring ‘cunt’ to its rightful place in our lexicon as a descriptor of things
warm and lovable” (Jenkins, 2013). Casey co-ordinates workshops through Craft Cartel making ‘cunt fling-ups’, “crafted female genitalia attached to shoes & flung over power lines” (Craft Cartel, 2013). These objects operate both to insert the feminine into otherwise masculine spaces within cities, and to reference the practice of demarcating territory by gangs by throwing shoes over power lines. Casey has taken this practice internationally, producing and then flinging representations of cunts while travelling to festivals in Europe and the United Kingdom. In late 2013, Casey created the work *Casting off my womb*, a 28 day performance installation that consisted of her knitting from wool inserted into her vaginal canal, one skein for each day, with the resulting continuous passage of knitting displayed suspended from coat hangers visually marking both the rhythm of her work and of her menstrual cycle. Casey identifies as queer, and in her description of the work states “it seems the vaginal tunnel only really comes to take on great significance in a heteronormative context” (Jenkins, 2014). The slow and
meditative nature of the performance can be radically contrasted to the immediate reaction of the online audience once a short video news item about the performance went viral in November 2013. As well as having to deal with the criticism, censure, and bile from both journalists and public comments posted online, Casey has been dubbed ‘the world’s most famous vaginal knitter’ by Salon magazine (Malone, 2013), and attracted a notoriety previously unknown by a craftivist. I spoke to Casey at her home in Melbourne's inner city, in February 2013.

5.2. Tattoo

Tattooing and tattoo collection has become an expression of individualism and taste, a trend which has moved well past its perceived home within the labouring, naval, and criminal sectors of society, and located itself firmly within the middle class (DeMello, 2000; Fedorenko et al., 1999; Johnson, 2012; Kosut, 2006). The differences that exist between the way the art form is practised, including practical considerations of the physical spaces in which tattoos are created, the canvas on which they are placed, and the ways in which they are displayed, contribute to both the interest in and the marginalisation of tattoo as an art form. The dependence of the artist on the end purchaser for the creation of the work—the canvas and the client being one and the same—means that the relationship between client and artist is intimately connected: the artist is inking their work directly onto the skin of the client.

Commercial tattooing as practised in western countries from the early 20th century (the system in which the two tattoo artists involved in this research are working) has traditionally been based on ‘flash’ books and posters. These collections of drawings and photos, including designs for roses, skulls, daggers, butterflies, pin-up girls, naval iconography, tribal designs, Chinese characters and love hearts, were displayed in tattoo
studios. Customers browsed through, selecting the image they wanted, and then directed the tattooist to apply the design in a particular space on their skin. However, contemporary tattoo artists are now more likely to draw each tattoo in a co-creative process with the client, in what is called ‘custom’ tattooing (Atkinson, 2004; Fedorenko et al., 1999; Rubin, 1988). The emergence of custom tattooing as the norm within most studios throughout the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australasia has made it easier for tattoo to be considered art. Although these ostensibly unique designs may be variations on a theme, the same can be said of many other types of artistic practice, and should not stop us from accepting each piece as a valid work of art.

If tattoos can be considered art, then it is a logical extrapolation that tattooers are artists, or at least those who are producing art tattoos are artists: as explored in chapter 3, art can only be made by artists. The modern understanding of art, developed since the 18th century, requires that art is an intentional practice (Becker, 1982; Clowney, 2011). This is not to imply that all those who create tattoos are artists, nor that every tattoo is an art work. We do not consider house painters as artists, despite their use of the same essential tools as the painters of portraits, landscapes, or abstracts (Barbour, 2012). Likewise, the surgeons who tattoo nipples onto the reconstructed breasts of mastectomy patients are not creating works of art, despite using the same tools as a tattoo artist (Kiernan, 2014). However, a hindrance to general acceptance of tattoo being seen as an art form, other than those of a taste or class judgement, is that the structure of tattooing is such that the artist is subsumed to a large extent within the industry. Structured around an informal apprenticeship-mastery system, tattoo artists usually operate out of a fixed location or studio and with fixed hourly rates. The production of the actual art work occurs only with the co-presence of the client, who it could be argued cannot see, feel or experience the final product until well after it has been affixed to their skin, after
the swelling has gone down and the scabs have healed. However, the client is intimately involved in the creation of the work, and sees, feels and experiences the creative process in a way not often replicated in other forms of creative practice. In addition, the work will continue to change, stretch, age, fade and distort with the client. It requires a tremendous leap of faith on both sides to enter into this agreement. In order for the artist to continue to enjoy their work, value the process of tattooing, and extend themselves creatively, they must find a way to ensure their creative preferences and those of their clients are aligned. Rubin (1988, p. 207) describes this relationship for tattoo artists who work in custom tattooing:

Eschewing conventionalised designs, artists well versed in the history and ethnography of tattoo, technically skilled and conceptually innovative, increasingly mediate processes of deep introspection for their clients. Conversely, the uniquely personalized visual results of these highly individualized explorations have been characterized as comprising the hallmarks of a 'new tribalism', a bond of aesthetic elitism which cuts across considerations of class, sex, and age.

As tattooing becomes more common and accepted, those who create and wear tattoos become part of a much broader tattoo community, united by the process of submitting to permanent aesthetic body modification. Kosut (2006, p. 1043) argues that even when the design of the tattoo is standardised, those “commonly found on studio walls”, the tattoo itself becomes individualised, “rendered uniquely idiosyncratic during the application process”. For the tattoo artist, each work is a one-off, and must be completed in person.

Negotiating the tattoo design and creation processes are key to the role of the tattoo artists, and these skills are developed over time. Learning to tattoo is generally achieved through an apprenticeship, in a studio with an experienced tattoo artist. Without a
standardised qualification system, the length, style and process that each apprentice goes through differs within each studio, and with each tattoo artist who is training the apprentice (Wicks and Grandy, 2007). However, a basic structure can be seen, and it was within this structure that Benjamin Lukas and Amanda Cain, the two tattoo artists whose experiences are detailed here, developed their skills. Apprenticeships generally last around 4 years, and for at least the first year the apprentice is helper and observer only. The newcomers draw, clean the studio, make up and break down equipment, and observe. Progressing to tattooing can occur through practice on fruit or animal skin (pig skin is a good substitute for human skin), or through practice on mentors, friends or regular customers of the studio. The experience of the design, negotiation and creation of tattoo art, along with the use of digitally networked spaces for persona creation, was a focus of my discussions with Amanda and Benjamin.

5.2.1. Benjamin Laukis and Amanda Cain
Benjamin Laukis was trained as a tattoo artist while living on the Sunshine Coast of Australia before moving to Melbourne mid-2012, and is a specialist in realist tattooing. This style of tattooing focuses on portraits and pictorial work that has depth and perspective, and this style is generally considered the most difficult to master. As an avid convention attendee, Benjamin has won (and continues to win) a large number of awards and trophies for his work at these events both nationally and internationally, including best small colour and best large black and grey at the Australian Tattoo and Body Art Expo 2013, best small and best medium colour tattoo at the 2012 Melbourne Tattoo and Body Art Expo, and best portrait at the 2012 UK Tattoo Jam. Benjamin and I spoke about his experiences as a tattoo artist in an interview conducted in a Melbourne inner city cafe in July 2012, shortly after his relocation to the city and prior to him beginning work in his new studio.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE ARTISTS AND THEIR PRACTICE

For Benjamin, the tattoo apprenticeship was his second—prior to entering tattoo, he completed a formal sheet metal apprenticeship—and his tattooing apprenticeship lasted ‘just over four years’ before he moved on to a new city and studio. He’d been invited to join the studio where he apprenticed after the owner, who had tattooed Benjamin a number of times, saw his drawings. Tattoo was not a career Benjamin sought out, but suited him nevertheless. As a graffiti writer, he was already working within a visual art form, and tattoo allowed him to make this a paying career. He began tattooing people around nine months into the apprenticeship, starting on his boss then moving to volunteers. Our discussion coincided with Benjamin’s move from the Gold Coast to Melbourne, a shift he saw as making it possible to work with a wider variety of people and techniques, as he feels that the industry is more developed in Melbourne than at his previous base in Queensland.

Benjamin Laukis, *Hunter*, Facebook, 25 August 2013

Benjamin Laukis, *Jules*, Facebook, 17 March 2013
Amanda Cain is a specialist in what is called the neo-traditional tattoo style. Her work tends to be illustrative and colourful, drawing on traditional tattoo iconography, with side specialities in script work and animal (particularly pug) portraiture. Amanda met me in her studio between appointments, and talked openly about the frustrations and successes she has encountered thus far in her career. She also explored her desire to engage with other art forms, and her frustrations balancing her work life with her other artistic pursuits.

Amanda, having already begun and abandoned several creative careers, started a tattooing apprenticeship in what she describes as a ‘very … suburban shop’—suburban here is descriptive of lower socio-economic clientele, and artists who work primarily in flash, rather than custom—after responding to a job advertisement that her mother found in the newspaper. However, despite being encouraged to tattoo on customers within six months of starting the apprenticeship, Amanda left her position before the first year was out, saying ‘I knew what I was learning wasn’t right’. Her first tattoo, on a shop regular, was one where ‘there wasn’t much damage I could have done’, recolouring a tribal style tattoo. When her second client, a motorcycle gang member, passed out three times while getting an arm band tattoo, she realised she had no idea if that was a regular response to being tattooed. She comments ‘whilst I was really excited about being a tattooer, I knew I wasn’t learning the right information so my conscience got a hold of me, and I got the hell out of there’. Amanda was employed by a studio in St Kilda, Melbourne after around four years of waiting for the right apprenticeship opportunity to come up. Having received from the second apprenticeship the training she didn’t feel she got in her first, she was confident enough to travel, further developing her skills and techniques working ‘in a bunch of shops overseas’, before
settling for a number of years in Sydney, and eventually coming back to base herself in Melbourne.

Amanda and Benjamin had different pathways into their careers as tattoo artists, but their overarching experiences show similarities of practice which allow them to satisfy both their own creative preferences and their client expectations. As tattooing is essentially a commission-only work environment, these two artists make extensive use of their online personas to ensure a consistent flow of enjoyable, challenging creative work.

5.3. Street Art

As a creative practice, street art has a long history, drawing on a range of historical developments from murals, performance, and public art to the graffiti subculture that
stemmed from tagging and subway art in 1970's New York. The street art practice discussed in this paper has closer ties to the spray can-based graffiti movement of the end of the twentieth century than the older art forms, a tie based on the practice of the two individuals involved. Although tentative links can be made within the scene based on aesthetics, mediums, and location, the street art subculture is as diverse as the range of work seen within the more traditional gallery-based art world (Lewisohn, 2008). The broadest definition would include tagging, murals, stencils, paste-ups, posters, stickers, performance and 'pieces' (large format, muralistic tags), along with slogan writers, the yarnbombing and fence stitching practice in craftivism, scratchiti, and chalk drawing (Young et al. 2010). Work is predominantly figurative or text-based, but there are also artists working in abstract formats, and pieces can appear in both legal and illegal spaces.

Defining an individual as a street artist can be problematic. Lewisohn (2008, p. 15) commented on issues of categorisation, stating that artists, as a rule, don't welcome external categorisation; they prefer to be looked at as individuals. Street artists are by definition rule-breakers, so if you attempt to categorize them, they'll simply go and break the rules that have been set to define them.

In addition, people who see themselves primarily as taggers (or graffiti writers whose work generally occupies a larger scale than tagging) may strongly object to being defined as artists, both because of the implication that they are concerned with aesthetics defined by others, and because the essential aims of graffiti writers and street artists are different: graffiti writers speak to each other, whereas street artists speak to the public as an audience. For this reason, self-identification as an artist, in addition to the practice of placing work on the street, was sought from the artists I spoke to. Additionally, street artists are more likely to cross into galleries and exhibit their work.
on canvas or in other portable forms than graffiti writers. Work displayed in galleries is often described as street art, but it can also be re-branded as ‘urban art’ to satisfy those who believe street art can only exist on the street.

Much street art is illegal, and all of it has an element of the ephemeral; at any time the work can be destroyed by weather, painted over (buffed) by authorities, or altered, added to or covered up by other artists, writers, or taggers. This is an essential part of the movement's development. Bowen comments that "Taking risks was sometimes the initial attraction to graffiti for young artists. They made conscious choices about whether they should break the law, knowing the consequences involved" (1999, p. 26). As a creative practice that as often as not is illegal, making a living from street art adds an extra layer of complexity. The subway writers of the 1970s and 80s were briefly accepted into the traditional art world, sponsored by galleries and collectors hoping to find the next big thing. However, these co-options did not survive past a year or so of collaboration before the market lost interest (Lachmann, 1988). The Pictures on Walls collective, formed by artist Bansky and his friends, have created an income and what amounts to a self-contained art market selling numbered limited edition prints of their work online (Dickens, 2010). In Melbourne, street artists have begun moving back into gallery spaces creating canvas versions of their stencil works, selling stickers or posters to a growing body of collectors. Although some stay with their street aesthetic, others use gallery exhibitions to explore new mediums and styles, and a smaller group will work only in legal spaces. Worldwide, a number of street artists accept commissions to work on walls, fences and buildings, while others work concurrently in graphic design or other commercial creative roles. Despite this range of practice, Lewisohn (2008, p. 127) believes that
the best street art and graffiti are illegal. This is because the illegal works have political and ethical connotations that are lost in sanctioned works. There is a tangible conceptual aura that is stronger in illegal graffiti: the sense of danger the artist felt is transferred to the viewer.

The two street artists who participated in this study are Mike Maka and GHOSTZz. Both create a combination of legal, illegal, and gallery style work, and both self-identify as artists, making them reasonably representative within the art form.

5.3.1. GHOSTZz and Mike Maka
Melbourne based artist Mike Maka, also known by his tag Makatron, is an established artist in the street art community and has worked extensively in Australia and Brazil with additional stints painting in Europe, the United States, and South Africa. Mike's distinctive illustrative freehand style uses recurring motifs of animals, insects, and planets, often blending the inanimate and animate to create characters and images that are simultaneously appealing and monstrous. With formal fine art training including time at an art school in New York, Mike also produces gallery work, utilising the imagery and style of his large scale street work to create domestically scaled paintings and prints.

Mike is currently supporting himself financially from a combination of commissioned street art and gallery work. After a decade of working in another job to support himself financially—often as a bicycle messenger—Mike is very conscious of the luxury of having a full time art career. A member of Everfresh, a crew of street artists with a strong graffiti heritage who are firmly embedded in the Melbourne landscape (Young et al., 2010), Mike began his street practice during the early 2000’s, a time when street art was becoming a “hugely significant cultural form” (Young et al., 2010, p. 12) in Melbourne’s inner city laneways and inner suburbs. Although a time famous for stencil art, a form used by others within Everfresh, Mike’s freehand style developed during this
time to reach his current scale, where street pieces can cover the sides of office blocks or motorway tunnels. Sometimes working in collaboration with other artists, Mike’s work both in Australia and internationally is respected (demonstrated by the lack of tagging or alterations by other artists), and shared photographs appear on a range of street art websites and aggregation services.

Mike Maka, *Rhino*, Facebook, 29 April 2013

Mike Maka, *Zebra*, Facebook, 4 February 2014
The second artist is known here as GHOSTZz, who changed his tag shortly after I interviewed him, following a run-in with the police. After discussion, we decided to keep his original tag for the purposes of this research. At only 18 at the time of the interview, GHOSTZz has been working as a stencil artist in Edinburgh and the surrounding areas for 3 years, and is now beginning to have a real impact within the street art scene in Scotland. Specialising in stylised portraits, GHOSTZz creates detailed multi-layer stencils using digital tools such as Photoshop, then hand-cuts each layer in card before spraying the work. GHOSTZz is more likely than Mike to work in illegal spaces and must carefully manage the relationship between his digital networks and his physical presence to ensure his ongoing anonymity in the eyes of the street-art hostile Scottish police. This desire for anonymity must also be balanced with the need to participate in graffiti and street art festivals around the United Kingdom; with few street artists active in Edinburgh, these events offer a chance to meet friends, create networks, collaborate, and develop skills. The geographically dispersed nature of the street art network of which GHOSTZz is a member means that sharing work outside of formal

GHOSTZz, Stripe, Facebook, 22 January 2014
GHOSTZz, 2012, Gasmask, Facebook, 18 October 2012
events occurs through either the sale or trade of work sprayed on canvas or card, through shared stickers, or online. Both Mike Maka and GHOSTZz have a presence on a range of digital platforms, including Facebook, Tumblr, and their own blogs and websites. They utilise complex persona creation and impression management strategies in order to both protect and promote themselves.

### 5.4. Performance Poetry

As a creative form, performance poetry could be considered the most traditional of the four fringe art practices I am drawing from in this research. Poetry has existed as a performance medium for far longer than as a written medium, tracing back at least as far as the Homeric epic poems in western cultures, and forms of poetry are heard in oral cultures throughout the world. However, performance poetry is currently undergoing a renaissance, similar to that occurring in craft detailed earlier, due in large part to the development of slam poetry in the United States. In the late 1980s, coinciding with an enthusiastic debate about page poetry’s lack of audience appeal from within literary and academic poetry circles, Chicago construction worker turned poet Marc Smith began organising poetry nights in blue collar bars, eventually developing a competitive format that was formalised into what is now known as ‘slam poetry’ (Somers-Willett, 2009).

Somers-Willett describes the immediate difference between a poetry reading, a common enough occurrence for page poets, and a poetry slam as being the interaction with the audience, who are not only active participants in the scoring of the competition, but also much more vocal in their approval or disapproval of the performances themselves. “With the usual expectations of reverence and silence thrown out the window, a different relationship between poets and audiences became possible at a slam -- one that was highly interactive, theatrical, physical, and immediate” (Somers-Willett, 2009, p. 4). The need to obtain vocal audience approval, while still adhering to the rules of the
competition (including for length), means slam poets seek to create a direct, emotional connection with their audience, and doing so requires turning the reading of a prepared poem into something resembling a theatrical performance.

The emergence of the slam poetry scene in the United States, with the inauguration of the National Poetry Slam in 1990, spread internationally during the 1990s and early 2000s, including into the United Kingdom and Australia where the two poets introduced below are based. Because the competitive nature of the poetry slam was not universally liked or accepted, but there was a desire to diversify both audience and poets through a more popular and accessible format, a parallel development of performance poetry, or spoken word poetry, can be seen. Somers-Willet distinguishes spoken word from slam poetry in terms of both the non-competitive nature of the former and its “competing commercial and artistic interests, especially as they play out in contemporary media and through associations with hip-hop culture” (2009, p. 12). However, this commercial focus is relatively unique to the United States, and so therefore the commercial distinction is not relevant to this discussion. Although both Ben and Maxine competed with success in slam poetry competitions in their respective home countries, I describe them here as performance poets, both out of respect for their own self-identification, and to indicate that their work has been presented in a number of different performance formats, including readings, non-competitive spoken word events, competitive poetry slams, and solo shows. What ties these different types of live events together is their focus on the performative aspects of poetry, and the expanded relationship between audience and poet. Yet, live performance is not the only way that the audience can engage with the work of a performance poet. As Somers-Willet (2009, p. 18) explains, poets may also sell CDs or DVDs of their work, chapbooks or printed collections, and be involved in television, radio, or web shows. They may also host their own websites.
and social media platforms, as explored in this research, and post audio or audio-visual recordings of their live performance to hosting sites such as YouTube or Vimeo. This diversity of formats—written, live, recorded, mediated, immediate—results in a complex relationship among the text (although not unheard of, free-styling is rare in performance poetry with most poets memorising prepared work), the performance, the poet and the audience.

5.4.1. Ben Mellor and Maxine Clarke
Maxine Beneba Clarke is a Melbourne based performance poet and writer, who describes herself as “an Australian writer and slam poetry champion of Afro-Caribbean descent” (Clarke, 2014). Maxine’s writing covers a range of topics, but tends to be politically driven and most often deals with themes of race, migration, Australian politics, feminism and the intersection between these issues. Having completed a double degree in laws and creative writing majoring in poetry, Maxine was able to support her early writing career with legal work. She describes the “wise” decision to do a double degree as knowing “I want to write, but I also want to eat”, and her job in the Department of Human Services allowed her to avoid some of the usual trials (low wage, unskilled, tenuous employment) of developing a career as an artist. Despite studying poetry at university, and taking part in regular readings, Maxine was not exposed to spoken word or performance poetry until she entered a writers centre competition in 2007. Maxine chose her poem based largely on length rather than theme, as this competition had a 60 second time limit, and performed a piece called Sewn Shut about female circumcision. Despite worrying as she got up that the theme of the piece might not be well received—“It was a Christmas party after all!”—Maxine won the competition, and her belief in the strength of performance to empower both poet and audience was cemented.
Maxine moved to Melbourne in the late 2000s and became an active participant in the poetry slam scene, saying “I did it for three or four years quite intensively… You could probably go to a poetry slam several times a month, which was what I was doing at one stage”. However, she has since pulled back from the slam subculture, “because for me it was never about the ‘win’… It was just this forum in which you could perform yourself as well as hearing fifteen other people perform their work”. As well as blogging her own poetry since 2008, Maxine is editor of spoken word at *Overland* literary journal, poetry editor of *Social Alternatives* academic journal, has published in a range of both literary and popular press magazines and collections, performed at writers and arts festivals, and has two published poetry collections. When I spoke to Maxine in December 2012, she was an up-and-coming writer and poet, but 2013 saw tremendous success. Winner of the Victorian Premiers Award for an Unpublished Manuscript for a short story collection, Maxine since signed on to publish this collection, a memoir, and a novel with an important Australian publishing house. This level of success complicates the categorisation of Maxine as a fringe artist. However, as our interview took place prior to the award which led to her increased visibility within literary circles, the analysis stands. Additionally, following the development Maxine's artist persona offers an insight into the challenges of balancing newfound fame with the existing expectations of her audience.
Maxine Beneba Clarke, *Shock success*, Facebook, 31 August 2013

Maxine Beneba Clarke, *Bookstore*, Facebook, 5 March 2014

The second performance poet involved in this research is Manchester, UK-based Ben Mellor, hereafter referred to as Ben to distinguish him from the tattoo artist Benjamin
Laukis in the text. Ben describes himself as a writer, performer and educator (Mellor, 2013), who writes and performs “poetry, theatre, and experimental performance”, works with hip hop and jazz musicians, and runs workshops. He has self-published a poetry collection Light Made Solid and both text and audio versions of his touring show Anthropoetry. University educated in creative writing and winner of the 2009 BBC Radio 4 National Poetry Slam, Ben was exposed to poetry readings and performance in his teens, and was drawn to the poets who “had a bit more of a presence and charisma”. A school assignment led Ben to performing his own work at a London Young Poets competition run by the Poetry Society, where he was runner-up. This experience, plus his overlapping interests in theatre and music, ensured poetry was a performance medium for Ben, something he has developed ever since. Ben comments that “I do think that poetry is primarily an aural medium… I don’t read very much poetry, although the stuff I do read is stuff I can hear when I read it”, and explains that although he understands that it has a place, he does not enjoy “avant garde, experimental, or very intertextual, academic, kind of hard poetry”. Instead, he explains that “the modern spoken word scene incorporates storytelling and it incorporates hip hop to a certain extent, and it incorporates stand-up, and I prefer something [like spoken word] that’s more directly accessible”.

Ben's work, which covers a range of themes from the political to the personal, draws from both popular culture and the poetry cannon to comment on current events and issues that he is personally invested in, creating a “meeting of low brow and high brow” that he sees as powerful, potent and enjoyable. Performing his spoken word work at festivals in the United Kingdom (including the 2012 Edinburgh Fringe Festival where I interviewed him) and Australia, Ben also contributes to radio programs, performs at a
range of stand-alone poetry and spoken word events, and writes for literary
publications.

Ben Mellor, *cover*, Facebook, 17 March 2013

Ben Mellor, *Jacket*, Facebook, 11 November 2013
5.5. Conclusion

Known here by a name of their choice, each of these artists was generous with their time and their stories, reflecting on their experiences both as artists and in their use of digitally networked spaces and platforms. By introducing the eight participants here, I hope to have set the stage for the following analysis of their performance of the role of the artist through professional, personal, and intimate registers. Their narratives provide an insight into careers unique to each individual, yet allow us to identify patterns of experience with enough commonality to provide new ways of interrogating the phenomena of online identity creation. It is with the utmost respect and gratitude to each of these artist participants that I have engaged with their practice and the material provided in the following analysis.
6. The Professional Register

The self-presentation by the artist as a ‘professional’, a working artist whether paid or not, I am calling a performance in the Professional Register. In the following discussion, I use the term professional as a synonym for occupation (see section 4.7.1), but the working artist may also see their role as vocational. The performance in the professional register of the artist’s online persona was the primary focus of my discussions with each of the eight participants in this research project. This focus was a result of my questioning: throughout the interview discussions, I asked the participants to describe narratives of experience related to their creative practice. In responding to my prompts, the artists reflected on their own practice and the ways they used social media to support their self-identification as an artist. The range of experiences, anecdotes and reflections offered by the participants are here represented through the five superordinate themes: strategy|happenstance, visibility|self-protection, specialisation|diversification, self|collective and work|play (see section 4.6 for the subordinate themes that led to these thematic pairings). These themes represent continuums—not binaries—of experience. These categories are not oppositional silos, and the same artist often related one story that fit into one category, and a second that fit into its partner. Some artists reflected on elements of all five themes, while for others there was a focus on a particular group of themes to the exclusion of others.

I work through each of the thematic pairings in the following analysis. Wherever possible, I have used the artists’ words to describe the experience of operating in the professional register of performance. Descriptions of and reflections upon experiences in physical spaces are included along with reflections on the experience in digitally networked spaces; the two do not operate independently from one another after all, and
were often discussed together by the artists themselves. The key concepts of persona studies (as outlined in chapter two) include subjectivity and agency, presentation and representation, performativity, and mediation, and are integrated into the discussion where appropriate to give theoretical and conceptual strength to this interpretative analysis. As well, I draw upon theories of the artist as subject, the myth of the artist, reputation and typologies of the artist, the creative labourer, and the fringe artist, in order to illustrate the performance of artistness by the participants in this study.

6.1. **Strategy|Happenstance**

The first superordinate theme that emerged through my data analysis process is strategy|happenstance. This thematic pairing incorporates discussions of planning and chance in the artist’s professional life. The role of strategy and happenstance in the professional register was one discussed by all the participants, although their reflections on this theme came from quite different types of experiences. For some, there was a strategic nature to interactions with audiences, clients, customers and other artists (here I use strategic to mean deliberate and planned on the part of the artist, with a particular result in mind). For others the use of specific social media sites or particular types of media forms were part of a strategy for persona development. However, these same elements were also discussed in ways that suggested happenstance (I use happenstance to describe events or activities that are coincidental or unplanned by the artist), the taking advantage (or avoidance) of uncontrollable situations or behaviours of others. I argue that the strategic decision-making on the part of the participants is demonstrative of the agency inherent in persona creation that occurs through digitally networked spaces. Even when that agency is limited by structural forces, such as constraints imposed by society, culture, politics, or technology, the artists are still working to perform their persona in particular ways to particular audiences. Strategic choices make
up what Mansfield calls “dynamic self-creation” (2000, p. 63), where the artist adopts or negates specific elements of artistness in order to support their claim to the label of ‘artist’. Likewise, by capitalising on coincidence—here illustrated by audience members recording and uploading live performance for which the performer does not have a recording—the artists harness the role of happenstance in their persona creation. In a sense, this use of others’ labour is reminiscent of produsage, what Bruns (2013, p. 243) defines as the “collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement”. The artists are capitalising on the capacity of their digital networks in creating their personas. The artist works at impression management to perform their professional artistness through their persona, through the uploading of photographs, the reposting of content posted by others, or the deliberate exclusion or negation of certain types of content.

A consistent theme across the two primarily visual art forms in this study was the decision to photograph art works, and then selectively share those images online. The decision making process the artists go through when documenting and sharing their work was discussed by tattoo artists Amanda and Benjamin, and street artists GHOSTZz and Mike. After reminiscing about the first piece of street art he created, GHOSTZz comments “it’s actually still there, my first ever stencil […] it was rough and horrible”. Although he has documented the piece for himself with a number of photographs stored on his personal computer, GHOSTZz stated that he would not make those available online because he felt that the quality of this first attempt would reflect poorly on his developing reputation as a street artist. While those images of GHOSTZz’s early works were only two or three years old, Mike Maka has a much longer history: Mike has been working as a street artist for well over a decade and is therefore much further along in his artistic career than GHOSTZz. When we spoke,
Mike was attempting to create a more consistent visual presence by going through a process of culling images from his website gallery. However, this desire for consistency needed to be balanced with other considerations, such as ensuring his reputation as an established international artist was maintained. Of his early work, Mike comments that “the only thing that I really like about it is that it shows that I’ve been to a lot of countries, worked in a lot of places”, and for that reason he is leaving images of a number of works which are not up to his current technical or conceptual standard in order to show his development over time and his international work.

Benjamin and Amanda used similar strategies when posting images of their work to create online portfolios. As tattoo artists lose control and possession of their work as soon as it is finished and the client walks out the studio door, and as the signing of tattoos is incredibly rare, the creation of a photographic portfolio of work is necessary to show the artists’ skill and style. Amanda talked about how important it is to have this portfolio available online, commenting “people are really visual. If they don’t see it, they can’t imagine it, and if they haven’t seen you do it, then they generally don’t ask you to do it”. This direct relationship between portfolio and tattoo requests is something both Amanda and Benjamin play on, with Benjamin stating “I try to focus on photographing pieces that will help my portfolio, as far as going the way of trying to specialise in particular styles”. Amanda took this further, saying “I deliberately put out what I want to get back […] Whatever I put out online I seem to get more and more requests for”. As part of a strategy to encourage particular types of tattoo designs—those types of tattoos that the artists find rewarding, challenging, or enjoyable—Benjamin and Amanda select and post images of similar designs and styles, and exclude images of tattoos they complete that do not conform to the desired style or styles.
Similarly, poets Maxine and Ben make strategic decisions about the types of material they share online. Although Maxine has been running her poetry blog since 2008, she made a deliberate decision early on to post only the text of her poems, rather than posting audio recordings or videos from her live performances. She states that she thinks “it’s been a wise decision, just because I feel like so much of spoken word is actually being there, and actually being in the room and experiencing it, rather than through a screen”. Maxine’s strategy of restricting online access to her work to its text format only was designed to channel people to her live performances in order to see and hear her poetry the way she wished it to be experienced. Although Maxine trialled including audio recordings of some of her poems on her blog a few months after we spoke, the vast majority of the material she posts online remains text only. Here, Maxine is operating as something along the lines of Barthes’ (1977, p. 146) “Author-God”, imposing onto her audience an interpretative structure by limiting their access to elements of her work in digital space. Although Barthes was concerned with the author...

Amanda Cain, *Pet tattoos*, Facebook, 13 December 2013
constraining the meaning of a text, this constraining of format is also a function of Maxine’s role as both performer and author of her poetry.

By contrast, it is possible to hear audio of Ben’s spoken word performances online, and see his performance via video clips posted to Vimeo or YouTube. This is a good example of the artist mixing happenstance with strategy: Ben has not recorded or uploaded any clips himself, but takes advantage of others’ labour by collating a ‘top ten’ list of recordings on his website. Of his use of the web, Ben comments “I think I use the web quite haphazardly at the moment. I’m trying to be a bit more organised about how I do things”. In contrast to Maxine’s considered strategies to the creation of her online persona, Ben’s approach is closer to the happenstance side of the thematic pairing, taking advantage of coincidence—the uploading of a recording of a particular poem that Ben wished to highlight. Indeed, Ben complained that those who record and upload parts of his performances tend to focus on the same pieces, leading to a situation where there are multiple recordings of a small number of pieces. Although not yet in practice, Ben does have plans to make multi-platform, integrated recordings which “have the potential to become viral” and these recordings would operate as both a creative medium for Ben and his collaborators as much as they would assist in name recognition and reputation development.

Ben’s use of recordings uploaded by audience members and festival organisers has an additional function here, helping him demonstrate his artistness through the co-creation of an artist’s reputation as discussed in section 3.1.2. Through the inclusion of recordings of the performance of a range of poems, Ben is working to create a corpus of work (admittedly incomplete) by which to judge his role as an artist. By titling this a ‘top ten’, Ben hints to a much greater corpus, of which these ten performances are the best. This incomplete corpus meets Foucault’s (1991, pp. 101–120) criteria for a body
of work created by an artist: the ten poems show a similar level of skill, are coherent, have stylistic unity, and are all performed by Ben, therefore within the bounds of his experience. Furthermore, by using recordings uploaded by others, Ben also demonstrates that others have accepted his self-designation as artist. The labour involved in recording and uploading a performance validates Ben’s artistness.

Ben Mellor, *10 of the Best*, blog, 17 January 2012

The role of strategy in an artist’s performance in the professional register can also be seen in the way that digital networks are used for the maintenance of both personal and professional relationships. Amanda describes the three main platforms she uses (Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook) as “a good source of inspiration and also networking”.

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She connects with other artists via digital networked spaces to keep up to date with the work they are doing, but also to keep track of the physical location of people whose work she admires. Tattoo artists travel between countries and studios frequently, and this online network allows Amanda to set up guest spots in international studios before leaving home. Additionally, as a tattoo collector herself, Amanda travels to places where particular artists are based in order to get tattooed by them. She commented that whenever she plans a trip “usually I have a hidden agenda to get tattooed”. The strategic use of digital networking platforms to maintain an international network of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) to others within the industry allows her to mix the professional and personal, as she does while travelling in physical space.

For creative forms that are oftentimes marginalised within the traditional art world, particularly for the performance poets and the craftivists, another type of strategy has been used. Both Ben and Rayna work to ground their own practice in the history of their art form as a strategy to respond to this marginalisation. By grounding their creative practice in history, the artists work to demonstrate the artistness of both their own work and the practice in which they work. Rayna has an ongoing project to create archives of craftivist practice, including the work of 18th century suffragettes, and activists for peace from the 1960s and 1970s, to show that the current enthusiasm for craftivism has a historical basis. She believes this is necessary, stating “because I’m trying to encourage crafters to be a bit more risky and dangerous, part of that is saying there is a really strong history of this, it’s not like we’re inventing this whole new idea”.

Grounding craftivist practice in history also works to alleviate criticism within the sometimes extremely conservative craft community, saying “when people say to me ‘that’s not what craft is’, I go ‘well, a. Fuck off, you can’t tell me what craft is, and b. Fuck off, that’s not even true! Look at this, look at this, look at this’”. As a format,
performance poetry, particularly when in a slam format, receives similar criticism from the more conservative page-only poetry scene. Ben takes an approach that is similarly resistant, incorporating poetry history into his own work; he states that “something I’ve started doing more of recently is doing poems that reference or are even a direct pastiche of more classic ‘proper poems’”, where ‘proper poems’ are those by famous page poets. Ben’s strategy here is to incorporate more traditional forms into his contemporary performance format, which includes music and beat-boxing along with spoken word. By mixing the traditional with the contemporary, Ben hopes to encourage a non-poetry audience not only to engage with his work, but also potentially gain access to page poetry forms as well. This has an additional strategic advantage: by demonstrating his knowledge and experience with traditional poetry, Ben helps to counter the criticism that performance poetry and slam poetry are populist and therefore of lesser value than page poetry.

6.2. Visibility|Self-Protection
The second thematic pairing that emerged during the data analysis process is visibility|self-protection, which encompasses experiences of impression management to provide access to parts of the artists’ lives, while controlling audience access to parts of the artists’ lives that they would prefer to keep hidden. All eight artists spoke about the need to have an online persona of some kind in order to ensure visibility, whether with audiences or other artists. However, this was balanced by the need to protect themselves, whether by denying the connection between the artist identity and the legal identity as with street artists, or by trying to maintain some level of control over the spread of images and other material. The need for public visibility of a professional identity can be related to the conceptualisation of the artist as a creative labourer: in order to demonstrate to your audience that you are an artist (whether that audience is
made up of fans, peers, critics, or the state through census documents), you must be seen to be engaging in artistic labour and connected to other artistic people. The sharing of evidence of making art, along with the final art work, is perhaps the core of the experience of the creation of the persona for these artists. Where the artists posted images or descriptions of the ‘artist at work’ in their online personas, the role-play shifted from performance to performative: the artist does not just make art, but here is an artist because they are making art. The artist is doing artistness, a performative act rather than an expressive one. Within this participant group, however, the impression management undertaken by the artists for the most part made invisible the labouring elements of the art making process. By showcasing only the final outcome, or by focusing on the process as a part of the work itself so that the performative labour becomes a part of the art work rather than solely the process by which a thing is made, the artists created personas that largely ignored the labour involved in their creative practices. The visibility and self-protection thematic pairing gives insight into how the artists experience the performance of their artistness, along with the decisions taken on where and how that performance might be seen.

The ubiquitous nature of social media for persona creation is evident in the fact that all eight artists reported using multiple sites. Facebook was the most common and frequently used by the artists, although there was diversity within the group: poet Ben reported infrequent use and a desire to quit the platform completely, while tattoo artist Benjamin stated that despite an initial hesitancy ("oh, fuck Facebook!"), he now uses it all the time, “now we’ve got Facebook on my phone, constantly”. However, Facebook alone is not enough, and Benjamin goes on to say “I just try and keep certain things that I’ve set up, like Instagram, Facebook and Tumblr, updated as much as possible. Just so that when people see the new work that I’m doing, they might get interested, and they
might see a certain piece and think ‘oh, that’s cool, I might get something like that. I’ll go see him’. The need to update frequently—Benjamin posts images of new works on at least a weekly basis, and often much more often—is part of this need for visibility. It is not enough to have a large number of images; in order for a profile to remain visible within a network, it must be active and regularly updated. Amanda agrees that this level of visibility is necessary, and uses multiple platforms to maintain her presence with customers. She believes this makes it easier for tattoo clients to choose an artist: “Because most tattooers are out there on some platform showing off their work, you don’t even have to go around and meet people. You know, all our portfolios are online, you can get a feeling for what people do”.

Amanda Cain, Profile, Facebook, 18 February 2014
Amanda Cain, *tattoo artist*, personal website, 18 February 2014

Amanda Cain, *Tattoowanderlust*, Instagram, 18 February 2014

Amanda Cain, *tattoowanderlust*, Tumblr, 18 February 2014
Tattoo artists have additional requirements to maintain visibility within the industry: attendance at tattoo conventions, and appearances in tattoo magazines. However, Benjamin and Amanda had very different opinions about these off-line promotional options. Benjamin is a frequent convention attendee (at least six in 2012), and regularly wins awards for the tattooing work he produces on-site. These awards are then reported through his personal social networking sites, as well as on the convention sites. Frequently, he has been also a featured artist in magazines, with short interviews matched with photo-spreads of his work. By contrast, Amanda is more selective in both the conventions she attends (only one or two a year) and the publications in which her work is featured. Amanda states “other than the social networking sort of thing, I’m not really into putting my work out there”, and discusses her inclusion in two recent magazine features as a favour to the editor in one case, and a studio profile in the other. She explains this selective visibility by stating “I’m not after the fame”. In contrast, Benjamin believes that the publicity he receives drives his client base and, as someone who only just finished his four year apprenticeship, is necessary to build his profile. He stated that he aims to be “well respected in his field”, but that he prefers people not to know his face—this is a difficult balance to achieve considering that he is often photographed with his awards or for the magazine features.

The need for visibility is what drives Ben’s use of a professional website, matched with a mailing list and a Twitter account. The website, although set up using WordPress blogging software, is relatively static, but Ben sees this as a place for people to contact him who do not have other contact details (indeed, the website was the forum that I used to contact Ben about his participation in this project). He comments that “I try and at least keep my most recent project up on the front page, and you can access my book, my CD if you want to buy it, and that’s all I feel I need to use it for now”. Twitter is where
Benjamin Laukis, *austattooexpo*, Facebook, 9 September 2012

Ben is most active in building his visibility, using it to promote last minute bookings and connect with people; he comments that he sees it as “kind of an electronic business card”. Since our interview, Ben has started integrating his Twitter and Facebook usage, using tweets to link to event invitations, write-ups and discussion posted on one of his public Facebook pages. The ubiquity of the platform has overtaken his reservations as to his presence there, although he still filters his visibility through his preferred profile on Twitter.

Interestingly, Maxine takes the opposite approach, using Facebook to drive the audience for her poetry blog. She states “I’ll do a blog post and then I’ll put a link on Facebook, and I get a lot of traffic from Facebook and people reposting things. I guess that for me that’s the main method of promoting my work. This has had unexpected results for Maxine, whose blog site crashed shortly after she posted a poem titled “angry brown men r gonna burn london to the ground” in response to the London riots of 2011. One of her Facebook friends, a fellow poet, passed the link on to an old school friend,
comedian Tim Minchin. Maxine explains “I got sent a message on Facebook saying Tim Minchin has re-tweeted your blog post! I was just… you know, he has 100,000 people [followers] on Twitter!” This stands out to Maxine as a real visibility success story, and the attention and feedback received on the comment stream of that poem gave her an opportunity to engage with her international audience.

Maxine Beneba Clarke angry brown men r gonna burn london to the ground, Slamup, 9 August 2011

Maxine Beneba Clarke Tim Minchin comment, Slamup blog, 10 August 2011

The focus of this research was on the subjective experience of the artist – in this case Maxine – and the audience of the artists’ persona is therefore outside the scope of this study (as explained in section 2.1.2). However, it is clear here that Maxine’s audience plays a clear amplifying role for her persona. This poem found a much larger audience than other pieces of her work because the link was tweeted by a celebrity with his own, much larger, Twitter following. It can be reasonably assumed that many people would have engaged with Maxine’s work for the first time as a result of Minchin’s supportive comments, and the affordances of the web facilitated this engagement: the hyperlink in Minchin’s tweet connected his audience directly with Maxine’s work. Maxine’s
provocative poem caught the attention of a reader sympathetic to her message, who then used his own influence to widen her audience.

The provocative nature of the poetry that Maxine posts online is reflected in the online personas of other artists who aim to enact change in their communities—craftivists Rayna and Casey. Rayna states this outright, asserting “I put my work on the internet to provoke, so I expect to be provoked back”. Having started her Radical Cross Stitch blog over a decade ago as an extension of her work as an environmental blogger (the cross-stitch blog quickly became her core focus when she saw how valued it was internationally), Rayna’s visibility within the community was higher in the early 2000s when there were fewer craftivists online. She comments that “because I was one of the, to use the term ironically, pioneers in that area of the internet, a lot of people coming into it were looking at my work as an example of how to do things, because I put a lot of tutorials on my website because I’m trying to encourage people to do stuff”. She describes this early visibility leading to her being contacted for advice by Sarah Corbett, who is based in London and is now one of the most established and renowned craftivists worldwide. Although now restricted in her practice by her role as mother to three children, Rayna continues to maintain an online presence as a provocative craftivist through her blog, Facebook pages, and Twitter profile.

Casey’s focus on the reclamation of the word ‘cunt’ from its use as a particularly negative insult, to reflect “its rightful place in our lexicon as a descriptor of things warm and lovable”, both aids and hinders her visibility. On the one hand, the word itself gains a lot of attention when it is used, but the restrictions placed on the use of ‘offensive’ words by the corporately owned social media sites she uses (Facebook, Twitter, Blogger and iTunes) make it difficult to keep the public presence she desires. Although she has set up pages on Facebook with the word cunt in the title, other users have reported them
as offensive, and they have been shut down. Similarly, the queer feminist podcast she started with two friends, titled Cunts in Space, cannot be linked to from Facebook or listed on iTunes for distribution. Casey comments that “there’s so many restrictions on the internet […] and I’m starting to compromise”, although she does so unwillingly. One way of getting around the restrictions involves Casey’s use of the Craft Cartel profile to promote and distribute other parts of her craftivist practice. Originally conceived as a collaborative project between Casey and Rayna, the Craft Cartel built a substantial presence on Facebook. Now being run almost exclusively by Casey, she describes using the site when organising protests against the incarceration of Russian punk band Pussy Riot. The visibility that Craft Cartel offered provided the justification for its use: “I did it under Craft Cartel, because Craft Cartel has all the followers, and we’ve done workshops before, and it was the easiest thing I could think of”. By using the existing visibility of the Craft Cartel name, Casey was able to organise craftivist activities with a sympathetic audience.

Casey Jenkins *Craft Cartel Massive Pussy Riot fence*, Facebook, 6 August 2012
The use of social media to drive some element of visibility for these artists was a common experience, but there was also a consistent theme of self-protection that countered the ubiquity of social media. For street artist GHOSTZz, this self-protection is experienced primarily as a distancing of the artist’s legal identity from the street artist known as GHOSTZz. When an artist is working in a largely illegal creative practice such as street art, this need to separate the legal identity of individual from the artist subject is a requirement built on the need for personal safety. He comments that “the police have been taking pictures of my work recently, but that’s just something that they do. Around here they’ll build up files”. The negative attention of the Scottish police needs particular self-protection strategies; one early attempt to do this was simply not signing work. The logic behind this is that if GHOSTZz was caught for a single piece, the lack of signature or tag would mean that it wouldn’t be possible to connect him to other examples of his work. GHOSTZz abandoned this strategy, stating “the only reason my work has my name on it is so that other people can’t claim it”. Interestingly, despite this fear of the police holding a file of his work just waiting for the opportunity to arrest him for vandalism, when GHOSTZz was questioned while working in a legal space there were no legal consequences. This run-in with the Edinburgh police did drive him to change his tag to prevent future illegal practice being traced to the GHOSTZz name.

Another way to ensure that the strategic requirement for self-protection from the legal repercussions of illegal work is met occurs in the choice of images of the artists themselves. Although possible, it is difficult to find pictures of either GHOSTZz or Mike Maka at work, with spray can in hand or linked with the labour of their artistic practice, in any of the social media or blogging tools they use. Where these images have been uploaded by the artists themselves as in the images below, their identities are
hidden either by obscuring the face digitally, as with GHOSTZz, or because the face is covered by a protective mask, as with Mike Maka. This choice of images reflects offline behaviour of obscuring the face from the public when working. GHOSTZz recalls a time when, pushing his own comfort zone, he went out painting in the early afternoon, saying “I just put my hood up, [sprayed the stencil] then went flying off”. He also comments that he now prefers to work at night, saying “I like it to be dark, but not too dark”. GHOSTZz does include images of ‘works in progress’, and of stencils in the process of being cut, but these largely exclude his physical form, in a sense denying the possibility of their use as proof of his role in their creation.

This contrasts with what can be seen in Mike Maka’s image, where although his face is obscured by the protective mask it is still clear that he is working in broad daylight. In this case, the photo shows him working in Brazil, which has a different street culture from GHOSTZz’s home town of Edinburgh. Mike was told by other artists that “they just paint in the day, even if it’s freeways or main streets, because … it’s just more dangerous at night. …Here [in Melbourne] it’s the opposite, you wanna paint at night because there’s less people around, and less chance of getting caught”. Therefore, the
inherent physical danger involved in being a street artist that creates a need for self-protection is contextual to the geographic area in which the artist is painting, but the need to distance one’s legal identity from one’s artist’s identity online is more fixed: the international audience of the online persona determines a faceless self-presentation.

There are other less obvious and sometimes practice-specific forms of self-protection at work in the artist’s professional register of persona creation. Amanda chose to leave her first tattooing apprenticeship due to inadequate training, commenting “I knew what I was learning wasn’t right”. Similarly, the tattooing of public skin (hands and face) can raise questions of artists, and Benjamin states categorically “I’ll refuse tattoos that I think are stupid. I believe that if you want to get your face tattooed, you should already have the majority of your body covered”. Sometimes, the choice of social media platform plays a role, with GHOSTZz commenting that his first experience of Tumblr was “a site for stealing things from other people”, a comment mirrored by Amanda, who despite her use of the platform, was hesitant initially: “I was kinda sceptical about doing that because of the way that the imagery is seen and used and people have so much more access to it with reblogging and not crediting artists”. This also connects with Mike’s experience with Instagram, where an image of a wall he painted in South Africa gained nearly 18,000 ‘likes’ after being shared by an aggregation account, but because he was not credited as the artist, those potential fans or followers were not able to connect with him directly. The view of the artists on their use of these sites, and the presence of their work on them, is summed up by Amanda who calls them a “necessary evil”.

6.3. **Specialisation|Diversification**

The thematic pairing of specialisation|diversification emerged from the data analysis to describe the artists’ reflections of both their choice of online platforms on which to create their personas, and of the range of creative practice that they presented through those personas. The desire to create a strong artist persona in the professional register of performance was reported as leading to two contradictory experiences: the need to specialise in order to present a consistent persona, and the need to diversify in order to appeal to a range of potential audiences. This contradiction mirrors the conflict inherent in the two core discourses of artistness outlined in chapter three—the artist as heroic genius driven by inspiration (specialisation) and the artist as the creative labourer who responds to market demands (diversification). Some of the artists described the experience of needing to balance both elements of this thematic pairing, while others located themselves firmly in one camp or the other. The size of this sample makes generalisation problematic, but the data suggests that even within these fringe art forms, the more socially acceptable and financially viable the art form, the greater the focus on specialisation. For the participants working in art practices that generate little income but do attract criticism from those outside the art world, such as illegal street art or craftivism, diversification was most common. When, in Mike’s case, the illegal street art leads to commissions and gallery shows, a shift towards specialisation in style occurs. Likewise, where there is an established progression for artists to follow that takes them from enthusiastic amateur to professional earning some form of economic reward, as within performance poetry where awards, invited performances and publishing deals all stem from a consistent image of excellence, the artist may work to create a more coherent style within their developing body of work.
Tattoo art seems inherently diverse in the variety of styles and imagery. Additionally, tattooing is a commission-based, highly-commercially focused industry, which is driven by the need to meet client desires. This would seem to run counter to the trend described above, where diversification is a function of the creative industries discourse of meeting market demand. Notably, both tattoo artists participating in this project describe themselves as specialists. Benjamin’s desire to work solely in realistic and portrait tattoos leads him to turn down other types of tattoos, and he comments that “portrait is sort of like the hardest thing to do. I just like rendering 3D shapes rather than flat”. Amanda states that she does “about 95% custom work”, and that this is a welcome change from her early experience in the industry: “when I first started tattooing people were really set on one thing. […] They’d looked at all the flash, that was the one that they wanted. You could not talk them out of it, right down to the colours having to be exactly the same as the ones on the wall”. Now however, “most of the time people are really open to changing their ideas in order for it to work better”. Likewise, Benjamin comments that it was “pretty easy” to convince a recent customer to go from a single, mid-size tattoo on a forearm to a full themed sleeve, demonstrating that the specialist tattoo artist can maintain a sense of control over the types of work they produce. One potential problem with this type of specialisation is that the artists cannot easily deviate from the style for which they are known. Amanda gives an example of this in relation to her painting practice: “They [clients] don’t understand that you can do other art that’s not based on tattoos. And if you put something like that up in the same kind of realm as your tattooing work, they just don’t get it”. This means that Amanda is not able to include art work outside of her tattooing style in conjunction with her tattoo artist persona, even if the medium itself is different, without confusing her audience of potential and current clients.
Both Ben and Maxine discussed specialisation within the spoken word scene. Maxine’s focus on politically motivated poetry, which aims to raise awareness of issues and produce change within the community, influences the way that her audience view her as a person. She states “people don’t seem to realise that, because I’m a political writer, 99% of the time I’m writing because I’m pissed off, because I’m saddened by something”. The end result of this public presentation is that she realised she is seen as an “angry crazy woman who just rants about everything!” Here Maxine’s persona is ‘giving off’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 73) a different impression of her personality than she had planned for, as the content of the poetry becomes a stand-in for her personality. Her realisation that this was how she could be viewed by her blog audience came after meeting a fan at a spoken word event, who commented that he “expected me to be more fiery” in person, which she decided she was “okay with”, and found quite funny.

Maxine’s specialisation in the spoken word poetry format also has implications for her professional persona, as she comments that “I do think spoken word isn’t largely taken seriously by the literatzi if you will, you know, the literary establishment.[…] They still see spoken word as that thing they do out there in pubs, for the popular audience,
they’re not educated, they’re not schooled in the ways of poetry”. As someone with a double degree in poetry and law, this criticism is one about which Maxine seemed to feel particularly strongly. Ben also discussed the marginalisation of his preferred form, and took the discussion further by contrasting the poetry world to the hip-hop community. There is some overlap between the two, with the rhythms and styles of rap and poetry informing one another. However, the core reason why Ben has not transitioned to being a hip-hop MC—despite his involvement in beat-boxing and spoken word—is that “it is one of the worst stigmas to be comfortable and middle class and educated and trying to be a rapper”. Maxine also has concerns with poets adopting forms used by those within the hip-hop community, arguing “they have that privilege of being able to write something that’s rap that also pushes into spoken word, so they can compete on a level with people doing more traditional poetry forms”. She feels that the language and style of rap “belongs to the streets”, and although many who make the shift from hip-hop to spoken word are middle class and tertiary educated, she would feel like “a complete fraud” if she adopted a similar approach. As such, her use of Jamaican patois which draws on her West African heritage is a more legitimate specialist language form for Maxine to use in her spoken word performances than if she were to adopt hip-hop phrasing, language, or styles.

The need to diversify in order to develop a wider audience is a consideration that Casey has had to deal with. She comments that “the things that I do, they are exclusionary, and it’s a problem. I don’t want to not use the word cunt, and water it down and make it more inclusive, and I think it’s mainly that you’ve got to do lots of different things. […] So that [cunt making workshop] is certainly not going to appeal to everyone, and it will close a lot of people off, but then hopefully something else that I do will be open to more people”. Casey’s desire to diversify her offerings is also related to her general
feelings about the wider activist community, where “you just have to be imaginative and creative to have an impact now. You have to do things in a different way”. By creating a number of different craftivist projects, and coming up with creative ways to engage in activist activities, Casey is able to broaden the appeal of her craftivism past those who are attracted to the more radical cunt-based activities. This approach is also taken by Rayna, who states that her work “operates in two levels: it’s working in traditional craft spheres but bringing different political ideas into it, and then working in non-traditional craft spheres and bringing craft into it” By diversifying her practice this way, Rayna is able to bring her political ideologies and desire for change to the more conservative craft community—using traditional cross-stitch and embroidery techniques but loading them with political messages—and can bring new craft-based activities to the range of activist communities of which she is a member—using fence stitching and collaborative quilt-making to protest political issues.


Rayna Fahey, *What else could go here?*, Radical Cross Stitch blog, 13 February 2013
GHOSTZz aims to diversify his practice also, although not through changing the type of imagery he uses; rather he works to ensure that his practice operates as both street art and in more portable format such as canvas or card. He explains “I make that a promise to myself, either way I go, doing just street pieces or just canvas pieces, I do want to do the opposite at the same time. If I do work on canvas, I do want to do street pieces or I don’t feel like I can call myself a street artist”. Here GHOSTZz is identifying a desire to balance the need to diversify—painting on canvas allows an artist to sell their work and potentially make a living—with a need to work in a particular format: if a street artist stops working illegally, their credibility becomes suspect. In order to maintain his professional persona, images of both are incorporated into his Facebook site, and he often complains about not having enough time to do both. Mike, whose reputation is sufficiently developed that he is able to make a living from his art practice (including being commissioned to produce street art by building owners), feels that the range of artistic styles included in his work are both strengths and weaknesses. “Strength in the way that, especially in the past, I’ve been able to take on different types of jobs and make the client happy and I’ll be happy, because my art can be so diverse”, but also a weakness in that he’s unable to present a strong, recognisable public image where “every time you see it you know it’s him”.

6.4. **Self|Collective**

The thematic pairing of self|collective engages with narratives of the artist as an individual and as a member of communities. Those communities are both those made up of other artists, and the networks of fans, followers, friends, and family that develop around an online persona through digitally networked spaces. The artist has historically been conceptualised as a solitary figure, and it is this heroic genius, working (and starving) alone that drives the myth of the artist as described in chapter three. The individuality of creative practice, as observed in Cordell’s typology of Victorian artists, is also the basis of Foucault’s development of a corpus of work, and is at the centre of discussion of Pollock’s artistic subject. Despite these discourses of individualism, the experiences described in this research demonstrate that, at least for these artists, their practice oscillates between the self and the collective. When performing in a
professional register, the artist’s online persona must adapt to the requirements of both
self and audience, self and client, self and network, self and community.

For poets Maxine and Ben, the act of presenting work to an audience is one that is
simultaneously a deeply personal experience and a profoundly collective moment. As
performance poets, their work does not function without an audience to receive it, and
like theatre actors, they are physically present at the moment of reception. Maxine
spoke of her first performance in a poetry slam where she performed a piece about
female genital mutilation, describing the experience of competing as “empowering, and
also, in terms of poetry, we don’t normally think of it as a political thing. You know,
standing up with a microphone, it’s the ultimate democratic act”. Here Maxine is
equating her performance poetry with rhetoric or activism, while identifying the
individual agency that is required to work to enact change. In taking part in this
performance, Maxine both empowered herself and felt as if she contributed to a larger
political process. By presenting her work online through her blog, she continues that
contribution, with her poetry speaking directly of current political issues in an effort to
promote positive change. Ben also draws strength and inspiration from his engagement
with his audience: “If I get a good response, which I have been getting, then my
confidence just increases with it and obviously it’s really important to me to keep
throwing out new stuff and increasing the quality of what I’m making”. Ben also sees
spoken word poetry as a way to increase the accessibility of a niche art form, drawing in
a new audience by capitalising on the incorporation of storytelling, hip-hop, and stand-
up comedy. By connecting these elements together for his audience, Ben challenges his
own creative development, while connecting with and expanding the audience’s
understanding of poetic form. Maxine sees the sharing of her poems online as an
extension of the spoken word performance, even though they predominantly appear in
text format. She says “it really has been a way for me to talk to people and push the poem beyond the page or beyond the stage or to actually say ‘this is something I want to talk about’”. By engaging with people leaving comments, and allowing the sharing of her work, Maxine creates a space to extend her audience’s interaction with her work in a way that is not necessarily possible during a live performance event.

The essential connection between tattoo artist and client, where the client provides the canvas on which the artist works, also complicates the relationship between the artist and the other or the group. Amanda comments that due to the commission-based nature of tattoo art, the desire to create a particular type of art work must be balanced with the desires and requirements of the client. She explains “I want the person to be happy with it, but they’re also advertising my work on them, so whatever I put on them I want it to be something that I’m proud of, and reflect what I do”. Conscious of her responsibility to ensure her clients are happy with the tattoo they will likely wear for the rest of their lives, Amanda will not impose her own creative preferences onto the clients without their consent. However, she also needs to ensure she is happy with the tattoo as well, that stylistically and technically it contributes positively to her artistic corpus. The need to balance these two drives can lead Amanda to turn down work: it is better to refer a potential client to another tattoo artist than produce work that could damage Amanda’s reputation. This need to balance client desire with personal creative satisfaction is further complicated by the need to have “your creativity on tap”, coming up with new ideas and designs on demand. Amanda feels for her it is particularly challenging to create new tattoo designs and draw samples or stencils on a daily basis, as “being creative isn’t a process like any other job”, and for her, inspiration does not always come when needed. Here, Amanda is channelling part of the myth of the artist: although the inspiration no longer needs to be divine in origin as it was pre-Enlightenment, the
creative impulse that pushes an artist to work is still fickle. Considering the highly commercial nature of the tattooing industry, Amanda’s reclamation of this element of the myth of the artist can be interpreted as a way of demonstrating artistness when her role could be considered equivalent to a skilled trade.

The collaborative nature of tattoo can also be seen in the community focus of craftivism, with both Rayna and Casey focused on connecting with others and building networks and relationships through their practice. For Rayna, this extends to the way she writes online, and she comments that “a lot of the language is about ‘us’ and ‘we’. It’s really community based language, it’s sort of speaking as a member of the community rather than ‘hi, I’m an expert on this stuff, so you should do what I say because I’m cool’”. Discussing her early efforts, Rayna states “I used Facebook and then Twitter and then things like Etsy and communities and Flickr to find people mostly, not necessarily to organise them, but certainly finding them and getting people involved and finding their work and finding ways to promote one another”. This collaborative focus took advantage of Rayna’s visibility to build an international network of craftivists.

Casey uses the idea of the community in a different way by using the collective identity of Craft Cartel: “I think the internet is about puffing yourself up and making yourself more powerful and more worthy of being taken notice of, so it gives the impression that you’re a whole group of people, a movement”. As the default coordinator of a range of projects with different online identities, Casey uses these to bolster one another, describing the various online personas as “just several identities who love each other”. This is similar to the way that Mike uses the Everfresh Facebook page. Drawing on the collective identity of the long established street art crew allows the group to post both individual and collaborative events and achievements without appearing to be too
heavily self-promoting. By tapping into the networked nature of these online spaces, both Casey and Mike work to develop validation systems for their practice because in Mike’s words, “it’s a bit of a community thing”. In a sense, both artists are functioning as their own cultural intermediaries, using the capacity of social networking sites to disguise who is posting to do the work that galleries, critics, publicists, and agents would do in the traditional art world to promote events, artists, or artwork. Benjamin’s reposting of publicity materials from the awards he wins at conventions from the conventions’ websites is also a way of capitalising on this functionality online. These strategies allow the individual artist to extend their reach by engaging with the weak ties that make up their persona’s online audience. The artist is able to build on their professional reputation while endeavouring to perform some level of impression management by not seeming to be too self-promoting.

6.5. Work|Play

The final thematic pairing of work|play describes the relationship of the artists to their professional identities, and the ways that they see themselves when reflected back from their clients, audience, or fans. Here, some artists describe experience that cast the role of the artist primarily as a job, a way to earn a living, while for others their creative practice appears as a source of fun or play. A second element of this thematic pairing relates to the labour involved in the creation of an online persona—as with their role as artists, this can also be seen as work or play, or a combination of the two.

Amanda describes a particular tension inherent in tattooing, where despite her self-identification, she may not be seen as an artist at all by her clients: “I think that a lot of people still see us as just another tradesperson, you know? ‘You give me a quote, I’m giving you the money, and you’ll get the job done’”. The upside for tattoo artists is that
they do, at least, get paid for their work. For street artist Mike Maka, getting to the point where he can get paid for his work has been “a slow kind of process”, while poet Ben comments “I haven’t really figured out how to do that, how to finance this work, how to get people to pay for something that is ostensibly kind of free”. Ticketed performances, whether as part of a festival or standalone events, are too rare to support a performance poet, and the sale of books or CDs is equally problematic. For those trying to make a living from a creative practice that exists outside of the traditional economic system of the art world, monetising one’s art is a complex practice.

The alternative approach, where financial gain is not the aim, can be seen in Casey’s practice. Casey stated outright that continuing the craft market run by Craft Cartel wasn’t of interest to her “because it was based around the commerce of it, making and selling stuff, and the stuff that we were making wasn’t very … sellable”. Rayna agrees that craftivism isn’t a self-supporting career option: “If I was trying to pay my rent, I wouldn’t be selling radical cross stitch patterns!” Whether through the influence of post-modern thinking in artistic practice, or as a way to alleviate some of the less desirable aspects of being an artist (particularly an artist on the fringes of the traditional art world such as those involved in this research) there is also a consistent theme of art as play or as a source of fun. The closest anyone came to openly identifying this point was Ben, who, in discussing the way that he mixes traditional poetry forms with his own performance elements drawn from music and comedy, says “You get to indulge your baser instincts while at the same time congratulate yourself on being clever. And so it’s enjoyable on different levels”. This sense of enjoyment, of play, of not taking yourself, your practice or your self-presentation too seriously ran underneath discussions with Rayna, Casey, Maxine, Ben, Mike, and GHOSTZz. It could be this struggle to find a way to continue to work, or to support themselves financially, that
leads to the focus on enjoyment; unlike for tattoo artists Amanda and Benjamin, there is no guaranteed income from each art work created, so alternative forms of reward are required.

Engagement with memes related to the role of the artist emerged as another form of play. Both Rayna and GHOSTZz created or shared versions of the ‘What I really do’ meme, which includes panels of images of a variety of perspectives on a profession, captioned with descriptors such as ‘What my mum thinks I do’ and ‘What I think I do’. Responses in the comment stream indicated that the audience found the images funny, and a few friends went on to create their own versions of the meme based on their occupations. Playing with stereotypes and making fun of the professional identity that the artist is performing draws on and attempts to counteract the marginalisation of the role of the artist as flakey, degenerate, or lazy. GHOSTZz’s contribution included a panel titled ‘What the police think I do’ featuring a tagger, while Rayna’s ‘What I really do’ panel showed someone filling out funding applications. This type of resistant depiction of the role of the artist directly comments on the socially constructed role of the artist in a playful, non-confrontational way, reframing artistness and artistic labour.

6.6. Discussion

As can be immediately determined from the analysis above, performing in the professional register of artistness is experienced as a balancing act. The participants primarily enacted elements of the creative labourer through their online personas, while the presentational and behavioural constructs of artistness that make up the myth of the artist played a less significant role.

One way this performance of the creative labourer was achieved, was through the strategic selection of imagery to build online portfolios as with the tattoo and street
artists to demonstrate skill, productivity, and an understanding of their market. Here, the participants are performing the artistness required to meet Frey and Pommerehne’s (1989) criteria for the identification of an artist by demonstrating the quality of their work and the time they spend creating art. Likewise, Ben’s collation of performance recordings uploaded by others, Maxine’s sharing of excitement of a celebrity engaging with her work, and a number of participants’ celebrations of awards won and positive reviews garnered can be connected to the need to demonstrate professionalism through external validation. This is a performance of the artist’s reputation and the recognition of the participant as an artist by both their peers and by the wider public. These experiences link to Codell’s (2003, pp. 111–112) characterisation of the professional artist in Victorian England, whose identities were marked by connection to established art societies as well as market acumen and the ability to sustain a career over time.

Through these presentational practices, the artists mark themselves as skilled, hardworking, prolific, and recognised in their field both by other artists and by the cultural gatekeepers more usually associated with the traditional art world such as award committees and reviewers.

The performance of professional elements of artistness is particularly significant when considering the fact that the artists who participated in this project are involved in creative practices on the fringes of the traditional art world. In performing elements of artistness drawn from the discourse of creative labourer to their audiences of fans, followers, friends, and family through digitally networked spaces, these eight artists validate their self-identification as artists by demonstrating their professional status.

The other side of the balancing act experienced while performing in the professional register required an engagement with the behavioural and representational expectations of artistness associated with the myth of the artist. Although the elements of artistness
that are drawn from the myth of the artist were less prevalent in the participant’s performance in the professional register than those drawn from the discourse of the creative labourer, there were still aspects of the myth that can be identified in the data. The two craftivists can be seen performing elements of artistness associated with the myth of the artist, particularly in terms of being provocative, and challenging established norms of thought and behaviour: both Rayna and Casey create work that aims to challenge systemic inequalities in social structures. Maxine and Ben’s politically motivated poetry can also provoke their audiences to think differently about a topical issue. The desire to engage, to provoke, to challenge, was a recurrent experience for these artists, and this experience led to profound feelings of empowerment through creative practice when the participants felt that they were able to affect change in their audience.

The experience of creating a persona online also led participants to try and find a connection to their audience of micropublics. In some cases, this was through an artist’s decision to diversify their practice in order to reach more diverse audiences, while for other participants it was about emphasising the role of the community in creative practice through language use and by supporting other artists. Again, these presentational practices can be connected to both the creative labourer and the myth of the artist. The decision to diversify shows an understanding of the market conditions in which even the non-commercial art forms practiced here are operating. However, the connection to other artists and the development of community networks demonstrates the participants are performing professional artistness with a wider understanding of the artist as a social construct that is performed in particular contexts. The connection to, and engagement with, others who also perform artistness reinforces the validity and strength of the elements encoded by all who identify as artists within the network.
The professional register of the performance of artistness is primarily interpreted here as the artists performing their occupation. Because of this, it is not surprising that much of the participants’ experience of persona creation draws on the role of the artist as a creative labourer. The persistence of the myth of the artist is also evident in the presentational practices described above, and the diversity of elements or identity pegs (Farquhar, 2013) that are associated with the myth become more easily identifiable in the personal and intimate registers of performance analysed in the following chapters.
7. The Personal Register

The participants in this study performed elements of their personas in three ways, which here are conceptualised as registers. These registers encompass different elements of the social and cultural construction of artistliness, and the way that the participants experienced these registers forms the basis for the analysis in this study. The second of the three registers—personal register of performance—extends the artists’ personas past that of professional artistliness, and gives their micropublics insight into the personality and values of the person behind the creations. The extent to which the eight artists involved in this project performed within the personal register varied significantly, and depended on whether they maintained separate ‘artist’ and ‘personal’ presences on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. At one end of the continuum of performance is Rayna, whose community focus and varied activist and political causes leads her to perform primarily within the personal register, while at the other end, Benjamin rarely extended his persona past that of a professional tattoo artist. As with the professional register of performance, the artists’ experiences can be interpreted through the themes of strategy|happenstance, visibility|self-protection, specialisation|diversification, self|collective, and work|play. The strategy|happenstance thematic pairing sees a focus on the selective integration of the personal into an artist’s persona, as well as an enactment of the vocational in the decision to become an artist. The role of happenstance includes experiences of ‘falling into’ a creative practice. The second thematic pairing of visibility|self-protection includes protecting personal reputations, while taking the occasional risk in performance to increase visibility. The specialisation|diversification thematic pairing investigates the range of creative practices the participants engage in through their personas that sit alongside their primary art form. The experience of engaging with a diverse audience drives the analysis included
in the self\collective thematic pairing, while the experience of creating a persona, and working with other artists, makes up the work\play pairing.

In conducting this analysis (as discussed in section 4.6), I depend on the demonstration of experience I encountered when listening to the artists’ performances online. This dependence is necessary as although our discussion during the one-on-one interviews did touch on uses of social media not related to their creative practice, the primary focus of my discussions with participants was that of professional artistness. The personal (and, in the following chapter, intimate) registers of performance are presented as much through screen shots as through transcript extracts. The inclusion of this material is therefore an extension of the possibilities offered by phenomenology to study experience. By expanding the analysis to other domains of experience that augment the face-to-face interview, I provide insight into what the creation of online persona is like for these artists in ways that would remain unseen should the focus be solely on their own subjective descriptions of that experience.

The fact that these artists extend their persona past the performance of professional artistness is demonstrative of the fact that ‘the artist’ is a socially constructed role that people inhabit for the purpose of validating their social position. When placed in a situation where the role of the artist shares a performance space with other roles, as in the situation created by digitally networked social networks, the overlapping nature of these performances is suddenly visible to the entire network. After all, these artists are not performing artistness twenty-four hours a day. As Maxine says, “poetry is like 25-30% of my life”, with the remainder of the time taken up with other writing forms, being a mother, sister, daughter, partner, or engaged in other forms of employment. All of these roles can be performed through the same spaces—in Maxine’s case, on Facebook—or can be segmented from one another, where a blog, website, Instagram or
Tumblr account will be focused primarily on the professional persona, and another social networking space is either more mixed, or is primarily personal. By considering the personal register here, it is also (somewhat contradictorily) possible to see the performance of some of the more personal elements of the socially constructed role of the artist—moving past the perception that artists are people who make art, and instead drawing on the descriptive elements explored in section 3.1.1. Here we can see the performance of bohemianism, of eccentricity, of liberal political views, anti-consumerism or anti-capitalism, belief in human and animal rights, and selective (socially acceptable) degeneracy, as is expected of artists working in early 21st century western liberal democracies.

7.1. **Strategy|Happenstance**

The starting point for each of the interviews was the discussion of creative beginnings—what I call their artist’s origin narrative. The origin narrative is a performance of artistness, but not necessarily of professional artistness: these are personal stories of the artist’s first connection with creative expression through art. The role of strategic decision making, and its relationship to a less considered approach closer to happenstance, is clear in the development of the artists’ careers, and the ways that they present themselves using the personal register of performance. In discussions about the ways they came to be artists, Amanda, Ben, and Mike all spoke of their creative practice in vocational terms, as something they came to as a child, and see their current practice as grounded in their personal history. Amanda commented that “I was always drawing as a kid”, going on to say “I didn’t know what sort of medium I wanted to work in, but I always wanted to do something creative”. Ben mirrored this with “I always wrote stories from quite a young age” to explain his early interest in words and writing, while Mike stated that “I’ve been doing art since I was in kindergarten”. This connection to
the vocational aspect of art draws strongly on the historical myth of the creative genius, a construct which, from within Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* forwards, has been constructed as someone born to the role. Vasari describes Giotto in particular in these terms, stating as a young boy Giotto was “induced by nature herself to the arts of design, he was perpetually drawing on the stones, the earth, or the sand some natural object that came before him” while tending sheep for his father (Vasari et al., 2005, p. 2). In the narratives of art as a calling described by the artists in this study, we can see elements of both strategy and happenstance. The happenstance of being ‘born to art’ or ‘creative from childhood’ justifies and validates the choice to become an artist. By enacting this role, by drawing on it to describe the decision to become an artist, there is also a strategic alignment with the socio-cultural expectations of artistness, that artistness is something that is a part of the artist from birth.

The fact that these artists described early art experiences as within school settings (something presumably that would have been a part of a taught curriculum) makes this demonstration of artistness more obviously a part of a social construct. Unlike Giotto, schooling facilitated these children’s creative beginnings and therefore the vocational element of their choice of career is somewhat suspect, at least as it relates to childhood experience. GHOSTZz’s recollection of “boring” school art classes did little to facilitate his decision to become a street artist however; rather, it was his independent discovery of illegal stencilling as a young teen that focused his attention on the possibility of becoming an artist.

The expectation that art is vocational—that people are personally drawn to art, or particularly suited to being artists—is grounded in the myth of the artist. The expectation is so strong that it can be surprising when this connection is not made, as in the case of Benjamin. Entering the industry through happenstance, by being asked to
become an apprentice by his own tattoo artist, Benjamin distanced himself from this conception of art as a calling. Although he admitted to a past and current history as a graffiti writer (something he called his ‘other persona’ which he would not discuss), he considers his tattoo art as separate and conceptually closer to Realist traditions in painting. His conceptualisation of his place within the art world seems to be divided between the illegal graffiti writer, whose hidden identity is not really that of an artist, and the tattoo artist, who despite not working in paint, is still the more legitimate, still more representative of Benjamin’s artistness. This contradiction likely has deeper connections to the politics of the overlapping, yet still distinct street art, graffiti, and tagging worlds; unfortunately Benjamin’s choice not to discuss this limits this analysis.

Happenstance, as experienced as falling into a creative role, is also seen in Rayna’s story of becoming a craftivist. Having previously worked in politics and community activism roles, Rayna became an artist almost by accident. After seeking a solitary and sedentary pastime with which to entertain herself while on bed-rest during pregnancy, Rayna’s decision to take up cross-stitch led her to seek alternatives to the kitschy and formulaic patterns in commercially available books and kits. She comments: “here I was thinking that for the first time in my life I was doing something that wasn’t political, but of course I was”. Rayna is an activist who became a craftivist, and this is a distinction that is very clear to her. The connections between making, environmentalism, politics, and feminism are embedded in her creative practice, and are both the subjects and the objects of the work itself.

By engaging with craft practice as a way of allaying boredom, Rayna has created a path to artistness that overthrows not only the vocational constructs associated with the myth of the artist, but also the gendered political and economic restrictions that have traditionally been associated with art practice. As discussed in section 3.1.4, craft
practice is marginalised in comparison to art forms such as painting, music, or sculpture. This is particularly true of women’s craft such as needlework, which has primarily been seen as decorative rather than artistic (Buszek, 2011; Parker, 2010).

Through her engagement with craftivist practice, Rayna has taken what could have remained a hobby—her cross-stitch—and transformed it into art, complete with gallery shows. Rayna does not claim to have been drawn to art from childhood as did the other participants, dismissing the vocational element of the myth of the artist; rather she emphasises the accidental nature of her engagement with art creation. Additionally, Rayna’s description of the experience of becoming an artist emphasises that that the artistic element of her making is less central to the artwork than the political message it embodies. This demonstrates a rejection of the artist as gifted, or uniquely talented, and instead works to democratise creative practice. These two significant elements in Rayna’s experience of artistness are tied closely to her chosen practice: craftivism endeavours to encourage wide participation, has low entry requirements in terms of pre-existing skills, and can be taken up by those without previous art experience (Bratich and Brush, 2007; Buszek, 2011; Corbett, 2013).

The thematic pairing of strategy|happenstance in the personal register of performance connects to more than simply the artists’ origin narratives however. Like Rayna, Casey described using digital networks strategically in order to promote particular activist causes, but also acknowledged that what works at one point in time loses its effectiveness. Describing her early use of social networking, Casey comments “Facebook came in, and when it started, if you started an event or something, it had a lot of impact. A lot of people would see it, and it was kind of unique because not everybody was on board I guess”. Now, however, Casey is frustrated by the fact that she is competing for online attention with organisations that can pay to promote their
events on Facebook, something that she is unable to do due to the cost involved. Whereas previously it was possible to anticipate the potential audience of Facebook status updates and event notifications, changes to the way the site operates means it can be difficult for Casey to know whether information posted will reach the intended audience. For an independent artist without the wealth to compete with commercial operators for the attention of the online audience, the capacity of social networks to connect with the public is becoming increasingly inhibited. The pace of change in digital networks leads to an adaptive strategic approach to persona development, while performance in the personal register shifts between platforms as new options are adopted and new micropublics are created. This adaptive approach I believe is more pronounced in the personal register, and the use of Facebook is an excellent example of the way that performance registers shift. Originally designed as a site for connecting with existing and potential friends and classmates for Harvard University students (Phillips, 2007) (where the persona created would primarily operate in the personal register), the ubiquity of the site has led users to seek new spaces that are not as affected by context collapse and are therefore perceived to be more private or intimate, in which to connect with friends. However, they do not leave Facebook entirely, but instead keep their profile active either as a more impersonal space (functioning in a similar fashion to email) or as a (near compulsory) digital identity placeholder. This movement between platforms demonstrates a mix of both strategy and happenstance—the choice of performance space for the personal register may be necessitated by either a strategic decision to adopt a particular space, or a function of the happenstance involved in an uncoordinated migration of a particular micropublic, or a combination of the two.
7.2. **Visibility|Self-Protection**

In considering how to present themselves in both physical and digitally networked spaces, the theme of visibility|self-protection has particular relevancy for the personal register of performance. This thematic pairing describes how the artists negotiate their relationships with their various audiences to ensure their personal identities and reputations are protected. Amanda’s first foray into professional tattooing led to her protecting herself by simply exiting the industry for a time; her choice to leave her first apprenticeship was based on her knowing “I wasn’t learning the right information, so my conscience got a hold of me, and I got the hell out of there”. By seeking a different tattoo artist to apprentice under, a process which took a number of years to accomplish, Amanda sought to protect herself from the consequences of inadequate training. This process of self-protection was reflected in Maxine’s description of her first competitive poetry performance, where her risky decision to perform a poem about female genital mutilation was rewarded not only with positive audience feedback, but also first place in the competition. By choosing a poem on a topic that had the potential (and intention) to discomfort the audience, and performing it in front of people with whom she had no previous relationship, Maxine risked the dismissal or outright rejection of other poets and the audience of the competition. The payoff for the risk-taking allowed Maxine to continue making risky choices, rather than pull back to protect herself from further negative response: “I think if people had reacted in a really negative way, I still would have gone on to keep doing what I was doing, but I think it would have been a good while before I got up in front of the mike again”. These experiences of balancing visibility and self-protection through risk and reward during the pursuit of an artistic career connect to the expectation of the artist as someone who pushes boundaries. Amanda’s decision to reject a rare opportunity to apprentice as a tattooer, and Maxine’s decision to present a poem on a controversial topic while being completely unknown to
her audience, both represent a willingness to take risks in their creative practice which could have had long term negative implications.

Both Mike and Ben deliberately avoided performing in the personal register in an attempt to control which audience members have access to their personal lives. Ben minimised his use of Facebook in large part because of his distrust in the company behind the network, as well as the network’s capacity to maintain the privacy settings he enables. Rather than give all his Facebook friends access to both his professional and public lives, or maintain silos of access to different types of material, Ben instead limited the extent to which he engaged with the Facebook platform as a whole, stating “I really don’t trust Facebook’s privacy policies anyway”. His core networking platform was Twitter, where his public account meant that everything that he posted was publicly available. This decision allowed him to negotiate the visibility/self-protection considerations by removing the element of chance and the necessity of nuance to his engagement with an imagined audience. This restriction mirrors the way that Mike’s use of Facebook functions as a denial of intimacy by limiting his engagement with others via the site. Mike explains: “I have rules where I don’t comment much on other things, I don’t socialise that much, I don’t have too much of my personality come across with that approach”. This decision not to engage with the personal via his Facebook profile relates to Mike’s belief in the necessity of mystery in an artist’s persona, because “I guess it’s not necessary and I’d rather have a vaguer, kind of abstract idea, and that’s how I use Facebook I suppose”. Mike is deliberately performing and maintaining the artist’s mystique, a process aided also by his deliberate exclusion of his face from his profile as discussed in the previous chapter. This rejection of personal connection is also a rejection of the purpose for which the networking site was designed, as both Mike and Ben desire to keep the focus on their performance as professional artists.
These processes of self-protection, both in physical and digitally networked spaces, can be contrasted by Casey’s desire to increase visibility of herself as a representative of a marginalised social group. Identifying as queer, she has sought out others like her online, and found a distinct lack of voices of people like her. Her efforts to counteract this drive her engagement with social and digital media. “I feel like there’s a real lack of queer female voices out there. I know I would devour anything I could find, and there’s a lot of crap out there, and I would watch it and listen to it just because it’s gay women. So I was like, I could do something and even if it was really crap, people would still be interested in it, but not if they can’t even access it”. Casey struggles to gain and maintain visibility when using platforms with complicated terms of use, such as Facebook and iTunes, which tend to censor and/or remove her work. In order to get her podcasts and blogs to stay online, she has to balance her desire to stay true to her beliefs about the reclamation and use of particular language with a requirement to rename according to the policies of the commercial sites on which they appear: Cunts in Space becomes Queer Feminist Podcast. Casey’s desire to push boundaries and to increase the visibility of a marginalised social group can therefore be hampered by the very platforms on which she performs her persona. Her artist persona, and the craftivist practice in which she is involved, can place her too far from mainstream acceptability. Even the expectation of boundary pushing by artists does not sufficiently excuse her use of particular language and imagery in corporately managed online spaces.

The visibility Rayna has achieved within her digital networks is something she is able to capitalise on in order to promote the wide range of causes in which she is invested. The overlapping philosophical underpinnings of the various groups and causes that Rayna supports increases the likelihood that the people involved in her various personal networks will be interested in more than one specific activity. Therefore, she promotes
and facilitates interest in permaculture, environmental protection, animal rights, ‘green’
political causes and groups, and feminist groups along with her role as a craftivist. By
posting links along with personal commentary, Rayna provides access to a particular
position on an event or news item. Additionally, she will distribute invitations to a range
of events widely within her networks; rather than directing these invitations only to
those directly involved, she promotes cross-community networking within her contacts,
increasing potential participation and encouraging people to extend their activist
activities past those that led them to connect with Rayna. Here, Rayna primarily
presents herself as a facilitator or hub rather than as a professional artist. By
demonstrating knowledge of and involvement in a range of activist activities, Rayna is
validating her craftivist practice; in essence, Rayna is showing her audience that she
practices what she preaches.

Amanda uses the breadth of network she has amassed as a tattoo artist to support a
cause close to her own heart: that of a pug rescue organisation. As an artist who actively
recruits pet portrait tattoos, Amanda will share posts from the rescue organisation
requesting new homes for rescued pug dogs throughout Australia, along with images of
her own dog playing at pug-specific events or relaxing at home. By personalising her
tattoo artist persona in this way, Amanda not only provides fans and followers with
some insight into her personal life, beliefs and interests, but also uses her existing
network to support (and increase visibility for) an organisation in which she believes.
This performance of the personal may also help her develop her professional artist role,
giving potential clients a sympathetic tattoo artist to contact if they wish to get a pet
portrait tattoo.
7.3. Specialisation|Diversification

Linked to this relationship between visibility and self-protection is the thematic pairing of specialisation|diversification. In the personal register of performance, these two terms refer to the experience of presenting a range of different types of art practice through
their artists’ personas. Although each of the artists involved in this research had a primary professional practice, they each also had side projects. As examples, Amanda comments that “Even now, I’m itching to do other creative stuff” and uses her digital networks to sell paintings and prints as well as promote her tattoo artistry; Ben is in a band and a theatre group, complimenting his spoken word poetry practice; Maxine spent 2013 writing a novel, a collection of short stories and a memoir along with a print publication of her poetry work. This diversity of types of creative practice sits alongside the professional register of performance online, and the digitally networked nature of the platforms utilised facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the artists’ personal interests than would be possible otherwise. The capacity of social media sites to facilitate context collapse (boyd, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011) is often framed as a negative, as the conflicting roles being played overlapping in the same performance space can lead to constraints on identity work or audience confusion (Vitak, 2012). In the experiences of these artists, the capacity to perform different elements of their creative selves in a single space felt as both positive and negative. Although artists engaging in multiple forms of creative practice is by no means new, the integration of different types of creative identities is more visible through digital networks, and as a result, what could be considered ‘hobby’ practice—for example Amanda and Benjamin’s painting, or GHOSTZz digital music—is presented in the same space as the primary performance of artistness.

The need to diversify in terms of creative practice may be linked to the tenuous nature of employment found in these art forms; by publicly engaging with different creative forms, the artists are able to increase the chances that they will be able to forge a career in the arts. The risk of specialisation was identified by Maxine, who stated “poetry is a risky choice, and spoken word [or performance poetry] is such a niche area of poetry”.

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Studying both poetry and law at university allowed Maxine to obtain skilled work while building her skills and confidence as a poet and writer, while the success she saw in 2013 in a range of writing formats—winning a major award for a collection of short stories, publishing contracts for her novel and memoir, plus more scholarly non-fiction writing and her poetry work—demonstrates the effectiveness of diversifying one’s creative practice, at least in this one case. The publicity that comes with each new success allows Maxine to build a stronger and more visible persona as an artist.

However, it was also acknowledged that the need to diversify one’s offerings within the digital networks is also important. Ben, for example, commented in regards to Twitter that “I think you become a very boring person to follow if you’re only ever promoting your own stuff, so I try and post thoughtful reflections about things, or amusing 140 character anecdotes”. What Ben is identifying here is that in order to create an engaging persona that is interesting, attractive or useful for others to follow, it is necessary to use it for more than simple self-promotion. Performing in the personal register goes some way to providing this level of interest, by diversifying the content past that of the artist’s primary creative practice and into other art forms, or, as discussed under the visibility/self-protection theme, other interests of importance to the artist.

Rayna acknowledges the multiple roles she plays even in her Curriculum Vitae, a document which is usually highly tailored to a specific identity. She comments that “it says ‘mother artist crafter gardener lover activist. I pull from all of those things depending on who I’m describing myself to’”. Here Rayna’s experience of persona creation directly connects with Goffman’s (1959) conceptualisation of role-play as discussed in section 2.1.3, where individuals enact different fronts depending on their situation. Diversifying her identity this way works for the multifaceted career she is building, where her activist, artist, and environmentalist priorities feed into and draw
from one another. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the concept of specialisation online
was criticised by Rayna, who described the nature of some craft communities as insular
or cliquey. Explaining that those who considered themselves craftivists, or at least
‘feminist’ makers, sometimes seemed to be ignorant of the history of craftivism and
feminist thought, she said “If you’re into making pretty little bows for hair clips for
little girls to wear, then you can quite easily miss the awesome”. The capacity of digital
networks to allow greater diversity is therefore only of use if the artists themselves take
advantage of this capacity.

7.4. **Self|Collective**

In the personal register of performance, the self|collective thematic pairing describes the
artists’ experiences of connecting to their audiences in ways that go beyond their
enacting of professional artistness. These experiences connect with ideas of visibility as
described above, and demonstrate the different ways that a persona can be enacted
through physical and digitally networked spaces. Of particular interest for this analysis
are the moments when the artists described their online persona being interpreted in
ways that were at odds with the ways that the artists saw themselves. Maxine was
perhaps the most explicit about this, telling a story of an audience member who joined
her and her fellow performers for coffee after a live poetry performance:

> Afterwards he said to me, ‘you know I read your blog quite a lot, and you’re not
> how I thought you would be’. And I was kind of ‘really, what do you mean?’’, and
> he said ‘oh, I just expected you to be a lot louder, and lot more… I don’t know, I
don’t know what I expected, I expected you to be a lot more fiery’. You know, I
> hadn’t considered the fact that I don’t put all of my poetry on my blog, and a lot
> of the poetry that I write, because it’s a blog, is stuff that is very political or stuff
> that aims to get people talking about it, and I went back and looked at my blog
> from the perspective of someone who’s never met me, and I thought, ‘Geee…
> Angry crazy woman who just rants about everything!’ Yeah!

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The persona that Maxine has created via her blog had been interpreted in a particular way by this audience member, and this was at odds both with the way that Maxine presents herself in physical space, and with the way that she understands her own identity. In addition, her Facebook page offers audiences a more holistic understanding of Maxine as an individual, and there Maxine performs a much broader artist persona. On Facebook, Maxine’s humorous interactions with friends, and commentary on politics and current events, sit alongside her links to her writing and performance and discussion of her professional success. She commented: “if you know me, [you will know] you’re not going to come to dinner and have me yelling at you”, and her Facebook profile allows her audience of ‘friends’ to get to know Maxine better.

Connecting also to ideas of diversification, a number of artists identified frustration with the complexities involved in performing a diverse persona. Most clearly, Amanda commented that “I constantly want to be able to do art for myself, for my joy of doing it, but I just don’t have the time, because I’ve gotta put so much more energy into getting everything ready for everyone else”. Balancing the requirements of a primary creative practice that is by necessity collaborative, and requiring considerable time spent on preparation (through drawing designs, or making stencils) with the desire to diversify her creative output means that often Amanda simply does not have the time or creative energy to focus on her self-expression at the exclusion of the collective. Rayna likewise has to balance the competing interests of her own creative practice with those of a community or collective, explaining “having to balance the needs of children, the needs of me, and the needs of my community—because I’m a really active member of my community… So friends have needs, sometimes friends need time out so I’ll take their kids for the day”. Rayna described an average day when she was trying to complete a piece of work, and with child care, household duties, community duties and
so forth, her ‘work time’ devoted solely to craft work was counted in minutes cobbled together between other responsibilities.

Just as Rayna presents her personal life as part of a professional performance, so too do others see direct relationships between their art as created collectively, and their personal self and wellbeing. Casey comments that her involvement in craftivism and the opportunity it offers for self-expression through engagement with others (in this case particularly in workshop settings) gives her the sense that she’s ‘existing more honestly’ which in turn improves her self-esteem. In contrast to her involvement in a range of collectively focused activities, Casey sees her blog (www.cuntisnotadirtyword.blogspot.com) as “where I present myself as an individual, whereas everywhere else I’m part of a team”. Identifying that for Casey, the attraction of collective forms of representation might be linked to “insecurity, or a sense or inadequacy or something”, the blog allows her to focus purely on herself. Maintaining both collective representations and an individual space allows Casey the reassurance of a group persona and the space for personal growth and creative development in her individual artist persona. Early 2014 saw Casey launch a personal website as well—www.casey-jenkins.com—which brings together her various art, craft and activist activities, but this second site is much more professional in its presentation than the older blog site. Whereas her blog posts commentary on interactions with family and friends, as well as Casey’s personal responses to the attention her recent performance piece *Casting off my womb* has received, the website includes crisp imagery and contact information for media interviews. This shows a deliberate separation of professional and personal registers of performance while maintaining connections between the self and the collective.
One aspect of artistness that sat underneath a number of the artists’ discussions was that of the artist as an individual hero, as someone to look up to or to act as a saviour. Drawn from the myth of the artist, and visible in the earliest biographies of artists from Vasari (2005), the construct of the artist as a hero who overcomes great odds to create art for the betterment of others became absorbed into the bohemian narrative of artistness (Codell, 2003; Gluck, 2000) and is demonstrative of a sense of magical virtuosity (Kris and Kurz, 1979). This particular discourse, which sits thematically within the self|collective pairing, is less frequent or overt in contemporary discourses of artistness, and so its emergence here is unusual. As an example of this, Mike talked about his artistic interventions in Brazil and South Africa in ways that cast him as a hero, saying that his work in the favelas and slums was particularly enjoyable because “it’s seen as a source of pride in the community” to have street art decorating buildings. This is clearly present in his photography and digital sharing of the work also, which oftentimes includes local residents in the frame. This sense of collective empowerment is matched by others’ sense of personal empowerment. Both Maxine and Casey describe their creative work as empowering: Maxine in relation to her live performance on stage (“There’s so much power in being given a room full of people”), and Casey in terms of the power of the internet to enact change (“It was really exciting to feel like you can get yourself noticed. That was my first taste of internet power”). Here the artist can be seen not only heroic in terms of having exceptional skill or divine inspiration, but heroic in the sense of having a profound impact on their own and others’ lives.

7.5. Work | Play
The final thematic pairing of work|play in the personal register of performance can be seen through the artists’ engagement with the process of persona creation, where the time and energy involved in maintaining an online presence is experienced as labour.
As both social and professional platforms in many cases, the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr can be interpreted both as work and play spaces. Ben, whose online presence is predominantly professional by design, comments that “these platforms end up becoming sort of sticks with which to beat myself for not having updated them enough”, identifying that he sees his online persona creation process as work. This likely relates to Ben’s belief, as outlined in relation to diversification above, that an online persona must be engaging and contribute something of value for people to want to connect with it. By placing this type of explicit expectation on his own online performance, Ben places expectations on himself each time he contributes to his persona, stating “keeping everything up to date takes me away from being creative”. As the majority of his use of digitally networked platforms is professional in focus, Ben’s connection to play is through innovative use of words rather than playing with images or internet memes. Ben was aware of and admires other writers and poets who used Twitter for creative work, but he had not made use of these spaces for his own creative expression.

For others whose use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr crosses more frequently between the professional and personal registers, such as Rayna, Maxine and GHOSTZz, there is a greater sense of enjoyment and play with digital media. This can be seen through the engagement with memes, personal photography, and the liking and sharing of anecdotes, links and clips not related to their artist practice. This type of play meets Eberle’s (2014, p. 215) definition that describes play as “apparently purposeless, voluntary, outside the ordinary, fun, and focused by rules”. By engaging in the types of fun activities listed above, the participants are engaging in playful activities for a range of purposes, but the one that came across most strongly is also identified by Eberle: “Play helps us blow off steam” (2014, p. 217).
Given the visual nature of the most popular digital networking platforms—particularly Instagram, Tumblr and Facebook—it is not surprising that most of the artists shared photos of their personal lives. Farquhar (2013, p. 452) describes the use of personal photos as identity pegs, as a way of indicating membership to particular types of social groupings, and to indicate hobbies, interests and values. Although the images uploaded by the participants in this project could relate directly to their work (as discussed in the preceding chapter), the inclusion of photos of special events, family members, or friends also demonstrates the place of play in the personal register of performance. Both Rayna and Maxine posted images of their children playing, often with a short comment or accompanying humorous anecdote, and these are often very popular with their networked audience of followers, friends, family, and fans. As an extreme example of this, Rayna posted an image of her eldest daughter posing for International Woman’s Day in 2012. The photo was liked and shared by Facebook friends, crossed platforms onto Tumblr, and reached peak penetration around three months later when it was shared by the then very popular *Texts from Hilary* humour profile. Likewise, photos of nights out with friends showing varying levels of alcohol consumption (possibly the quintessential Facebook image prior to the widespread use of selfies) appeared on many artists’ sites. Platform specific behaviour such as liking, rating or reviewing films or musical acts (on Facebook) or the sharing of others’ images on Tumblr and Instagram varied considerably between the eight artists, and demonstrated different levels of engagement with the sites: for young street artist GHOSTZz whose Facebook page was updated several times a day, this type of play seemed second nature. For others, the sharing of humour columns from newspapers, blogs, or comic strips was more common. All participants invested some time into liking, ‘favourite-ing’, commenting and sharing status updates and other contributions from members of their networks, whether artistic or otherwise. Although this type of behaviour can be considered a type of social
grooming (Tufekci, 2008) which is required of all participants in digital networks, the playfulness of much of the content adds to the sense of fun, and to the sense of enjoyment in the experience for the artists.

The work|play experience of persona creation within the personal register of performance is indicative of the capacity of artists to use digitally networked spaces to perform selectively their personas to suit their own ends. Those participants who primarily viewed these spaces as professional did not engage with the more playful opportunities offered by social networking sites, even if they did participate in the social grooming required to maintain their networks. However, those who did both play and work in these spaces were often rewarded for their efforts, with posts receiving comments, likes, favourites, and shares. The experiences that connect to this thematic pairing are not related to any particular demonstration of artistness, but do show that willingness to play within the personal register is rewarding not just in terms of the artists own sense of enjoyment in their persona creation, but also in terms of widening their audience and potential influence.
7.6. **Discussion**

The personal register of the performance of artistliness extends the artists’ persona past that of professionalism. By enacting elements of the existing expectations of behaviour and self-presentation associated with the myth of the artist, the participants in this project are drawing from and contributing to the socially constructed role of the artist. Rather than relying on the outputs of their creative practice—whether performance, imagery, or physical objects—to build their reputation, the participants are here performing a more holistic version of their personas for their networks of fans, followers, friends, and family that overlap in both physical and digital spaces. This demonstrates that engaging with a range of performance registers is valued by both performer and audience.

However, it is important to recognise that the participants often kept areas of their online persona as purely professional through platform choice, and did not perform in the personal register in these spaces. For Maxine, Ben, and Casey, this was achieved by the maintenance of a professional website. Benjamin kept his Facebook presence as a public page rather than a personal profile, and in late 2013, Maxine took this approach also, diversifying her Facebook presence into a personal profile and a professional page. There was also acknowledgement from the participants of deliberately shifting spaces to take advantage of shifting audiences. Amanda joined Tumblr as that was where her audience was increasingly located. Also, as a space such as Facebook becomes increasingly seen as a professional networking space, performances in the personal register might well shift to other online sites, such as Instagram. Benjamin commented that he was excited about the capacities offered by the Instagram messaging system that had been released shortly prior to our interview. More specialised messaging services, such as Snapchat, may also offer affordances for the performance of a persona in the
personal register without affecting how a wider audience perceives the performance of professional artistness. This form of audience segmentation works to alleviate the more troubling aspects of the context collapse common to digitally networked spaces.

Interestingly, the overlapping nature of these digital platforms where content from one site is shared or posted to another, is indicative that in many cases context collapse is not as significant a concern as some scholars have previously maintained, at least for these participants. While some boundary management does take place, the bleed of the personal register into professional spaces can be seen through the sharing of hobbies and the activities of interest groups that adds depth and breadth to an artist’s identity. In the case of Rayna’s focus on environmental, feminist, and left-wing political interests, her artist’s persona draws on expectations associated with bohemianism. The integration of a personal interest in pug dogs—as pet, as rescue, and as artistic subject—demonstrates a cohesive and systematic interest in animal rights for Amanda that strengthens her stated professional desire to tattoo owners with images of their pets.

The enactment of specific elements of the myth of the artist that can be seen in the experiences detailed above also demonstrates the persistence of the myth on legitimising the artist’s social role. The need to be seen as pushing the boundaries—whether behavioural or artistic—is demonstrated through risk taking in terms of diversifying one’s creative practice past a core artistic activity, dealing with controversial or provocative themes, or through choosing to deny personal connection. This last is a performance act in and of itself, and in Mike’s case at least, a deliberate act aimed at maintaining the mystique he associates with an artist’s persona. By performing in the personal as well as the professional register, the participants are expanding their personas past that of ‘someone who makes art’ and enacting wider, more diverse forms of artistness.
8. The Intimate Register

The third register of performance that I have identified being performed by the participants in this study is the intimate. I have conceptualised this register of performance as encompassing the way some of the artists shared particularly personal stories of relationships and parenting, or enacted elements of the myth of the artist related to degeneracy or deviancy. These narratives transcend those categorised as personal as described in the previous chapter, by shifting into the realm of sharing normally associated with only a select few: immediate family, lovers, or very close friends. Likewise, the content of these performances was outside the bounds of professional artistness, even when what was shared was directly connected to the artist’s creative practice. Not all the artists I interviewed for this research performed within the intimate register, and only Rayna and Maxine (both mothers) spoke of operating at this level of intimate sharing during our interviews. However, online listening (following Crawford, 2009, see section 4.5.2) gives some insight into the process of the experience of performing within the intimate register.

In this register of performance, the thematic pairings that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts were less easily distinguishable from one another. What could be discussed as part of the visibility/self-protection theme, such as answering questions as to one’s sexual preferences, clearly also functions within the self|collective theme as it demonstrates a willingness to connect within online networks and engage in appropriate in-group behaviour. The limited discussion of the experience of performing intimacy through the interviews, and the fact that not all of the participants engaged in an intimate register, also complicates this analysis. In his analysis of intimacy on
Facebook, Lambert (2013) suggests a possible reason for the limited engagement in intimate self-disclosure, arguing that multiple identity contexts are dissolved through Facebook profiles, where close friends and family share access to a performance space with colleagues, distant school friends, and those whose friend requests were accepted out of a sense of obligation rather than a desire for a closer connection. This context collapse (boyd, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011) leads to the creation of “a kind of intimacy middle-region, in which extremely private and personal intimacies are excluded, while more convivial emotions are included” (Lambert, 2013, p. 42). The performance of artistness through the professional and personal registers can clearly be situated within this intimacy middle-region, presenting as it does the artist as a productive, talented, socially engaged individual whose practice contributes to both community and economic wellbeing and whose persona conforms to socio-historical narratives of artistness. The narratives of experience related to performing in the professional and personal registers overwhelmingly present the artist in a positive light, and are themselves most often positive, excluding the intimate, the private, in a focus on the convivial. My analysis indicates that performing in the intimate register does not automatically mean that the artists are presenting themselves in a negative light, or that the performance of artistness here is likewise negatively framed. Rather, the inclusion of intimate self-disclosure, and the sharing of the private, creates a new space in which the more controversial elements of the myth of the artist—the degenerate artist, the deviant artist, the starving artist—can be expressed. Because of this, it is clear that the intimate register of performance is distinct from the personal and professional registers, allowing for the development of a particular construction of the artist that draws on and enacts modes of behaviour and experience that connect to the socially constructed expectations of artistness not seen elsewhere. The transgressive elements of the myth of the artist, including antiauthoritarianism, illegal behaviour, mental illness, or mildly
degenerate behaviour such as excessive drinking or drug taking, are performed through the intimate register. Performing at this level of intimacy emerged as a distinct occurrence within the data gathered for this research, and these performances showed some content characteristics not seen in the professional and personal registers. As such the inclusion of the intimate register of performance is necessary despite the fact that the analytical structure of the previous two registers described in chapters six and seven is less fixed.

8.1. Strategy|Happenstance

The thematic pairing of strategy|happenstance, as it relates to planned and deliberate actions on one hand, and capitalising on coincidence on the other, was significantly less apparent in performances in the intimate register. However, Rayna, who operates one of the most comprehensive and diverse online presence of the eight artists I spoke with, did discuss the role of happenstance in the sharing of intimate moments. Having unexpectedly given birth to twins in 2011 (she had been assured on multiple occasions that she had a single pregnancy, so had a midwife-assisted home birth) Rayna chose to share the experience via her blog. She states that “when my twins were born, because it was such an interesting story, I did share that story with the world, and share images of them”. She gave a detailed account of the births, a profoundly intimate event, along with images of the babies in hospital and at their homecoming. She was careful to point out that she in no way sees herself as a ‘mummy blogger’—a term used to describe women “who describe their personal experiences and feelings that at least occasionally relate to their children” (Chen, 2013, p. 515). Rather, her inclusion of the birthing story was in part to explain why she hadn’t been posting as frequently—the blog post starts with the comment “You must forgive the quiet around here”—and in part because she felt it was simply an interesting story.
BEEN SOME SERIOUS MAKING GOING ON

You must forgive the quiet going on here recently. Those of you who follow this site/facebook/twitter would've been aware I was pregnant. Well, not no more! For a shorter version of the tale with less gory detail and more humour and profanity, have a read of Casey's re-enactment. Otherwise, here's the tale in all its excitement...

We've got two!

Woke up to contractions on the morning of the 18th. They were steady at about half an hour apart most of the day. So I spent it in bed saving up energy, snoozing, playing mindless computer games etc. Tara — our 3 year old — decided to put nail polish in her eye so Karl nipped her to the doctor in the morning. Can never all be about mum!

My contractions picked up around 6pm and by about 9.30 the midwife was around and I was down to 5 min gaps. All was going pretty normal until about midnight when I started to feel really frustrated because it felt like I really wasn't progressing. I didn't have any control around my groin. Couldn't relax or push or anything. It felt numb, like I'd had a local anaesthetic. But it sure as hell hurt everywhere else, despite the awesome relaxing power of our birthing pool.

Before my labour I'd spent a fair amount of time meditating on the birth of my first child. Since that was such a dream birth I wanted to be able to visualise it happening again! But it turned out that preparation came in more handy in helping me identify when things weren't progressing like last time.

At about 1am I started to really feel like there was something wrong and started talking about getting me to a hospital. My waters still hadn't broken so the midwife suggested we try breaking them first and see if that moves things along. So we gave it a go, but they were so tight they wouldn't break. Spent another hour in the pool and then tried again. This time they broke and it made a massive difference. 5 mins later we gave birth to a baby girl!

Had some nice time cuddling her in the water but it was a bit hard to bring her up high on my chest as her cord was really short. About 5 mins later I started getting more contractions and really had the need to push. I figured it was just the placenta and deciding that I was well and truly over it just pushed it out. But when it came out it only went halfway and stuck. I reached down to feel what was going on and it felt really hard. My midwife got me to pull my hips up so she could have a good look. Her first panicky thought was that I'd pushed out my uterus since it was so hard. But then we both saw a foot!

Rayna Fahey, Serious Making, Radical Cross Stitch blog, 2010
As the other parent involved in this research, Maxine shared stories of family life, both in the interview and through her personal Facebook page. In describing how her use of Facebook gives a better understanding of her life than her poetry blog, Maxine described telling personal stories: “you know I gave my daughter a peach and she thought it was an animal, and refused to eat it because it was furry”. Maxine’s two children feature frequently on her Facebook page, primarily through the recitation of funny conversations or anecdotes, but also through personal photos. Occasionally the narratives relate to issues of race or gender, connecting with Maxine’s broader political and cultural beliefs, but, as with the peach story, they can simply function as a view of her position as a mother.

Maxine Beneba Clarke, Sexpo, Facebook, 29 November 2013

8.2. Visibility|Self-protection

At a time when the sharing of sexually explicit material online is garnering extensive, primarily negative, and occasional puritanical, media coverage (Clark, 2013; Davies, 2013; Fresco, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2013), the intimate sharing of GHOSTZz and Casey is of particular interest when considered under the theme of self|collective. Using the question and answer social network ask.fm, GHOSTZz has on two occasions offered to answer any question asked of him. This site has garnered particularly
negative media coverage due to its anonymity, connection to online bullying, and reported involvement in a number of suicides (Clark, 2013; Davies, 2013; Lerner, 2013; Van Grove, 2013; Younger, 2013). Having linked his ask.fm profile to his stencil art Facebook page (set up under his new tag), GHOSTZz is true to his promise; he answered every question. There were a handful of questions from other street artists about technique and inspiration in his work, but the stream predominantly focused on queries about his non-heteronormative sexual preferences and experience, drug taking behaviour, and other intimate aspects of his personal life, all common to the ask.fm experience. It could be argued he was protected from the implications of this sharing through his use of a pseudonym. Nevertheless, the questions and answers were still available on his publicly accessible Facebook fan page, a site to which anyone who can access Facebook can view and follow, and through which GHOSTZz also performs his artistness in the professional and personal registers. The comfort with which GHOSTZz engaged with this level of intimacy in a public setting, especially when balanced against other artists’ denial of intimacy (particularly Mike and Ben, as described in chapter 6), may well be generational—GHOSTZz is the youngest participant in this research project by at least a decade, and sharing of intimate details of one’s life could be considered normal behaviour for an 18 year old male. However, the decision to share this type of information online may also reflect a desire to appear to conform to, or at least play with, the degenerate artist trope, where artistic genius is accompanied by personal excess and deviant behaviour. Despite the fact that the Victorian beliefs in the connection between mental, moral, and physical degeneracy in the everyday person (as discussed by Julie Codell (2003)—see section 3.1.3) have largely been eradicated, the connections between deviant behaviour and creative genius remain strongly associated with the artist’s persona. Therefore, through his strategic allusion to personality quirks or activities that suggest “extreme or inconsistent behaviors, an exquisite and perverted
sensibility (hyperaesthesia) often resulting in paranoia or depression, [and] originality” (Codell, 2003), GHOSTZz’s performance in the intimate register can be interpreted as referencing this particular trope as constructed in the history of artists’ representations.

This example also demonstrates the role of the collective in persona creation—GHOSTZz was not offering up details of his sex life on a whim, but rather responding to direct questions.

By contrast, Casey’s use of carefully framed nudity online is, despite the intimacy of both the image and the artwork that led to it, clearly a political and creative tool. In presenting images of her *Casting off my womb* installation, where she spent a month knitting with wool inserted into her vagina (or in her terminology, cunt), Casey aimed to draw attention to the menstrual cycle while also engaging with feminist ideas of craft, women’s work, and the objectification of female genitalia in the 21st century. Updates appeared on her and Craft Cartel’s Facebook page—one simply said ‘bleedy’—and photos of the installation nearing its completion include Casey, naked from the waist down, knitting from wool emerging from inside her body. This particular project shows that the intimate and the professional can overlap in profound ways, and the different registers of performance are not clearly distinguished from one another.

The performance involved in this piece occurs on a number of levels. First, the artwork itself was a performance, with Casey sitting in a gallery space, engaging with her audience who were pushed to view the project as art (as opposed to craft or simply very strange behaviour) because of the nature of the performance’s location. Here, Casey was clearly performing in the professional register, as discussed in chapter five. Secondly, the performance was remediated through film, and initially played on broadcast television, then distributed internationally via YouTube. Casey also re-performed the piece by sharing images and narratives of the experience of the creation
of *Casting off my womb* on her Facebook page, blog, and Twitter account, connecting to her audience through the personal and intimate registers of performance. This level of visibility offers Casey’s audience insight into not only her professional artistic practice or her personal political beliefs, but also her intimate physical body.

Casey Jenkins, *Day five*, Facebook, 23 October 2013

Casey Jenkins, *Bleedy*, Facebook, 24 October 2013
8.3. **Specialisation|Diversification**

As discussed in section 6.3, in the professional register of performance the specialisation|diversification thematic pairing operated in two key ways. Firstly, the narratives of specialisation illuminated the ways that the creative practice in which some of the artists engaged was limited to a single product in order to simplify the artistness on display. Secondly, other artists performed a diverse range of creative styles to allow for a more diverse range of audiences to engage with the artist’s work. In the personal register, these same ideas of specialisation and diversification in persona creation were analysed in terms of the types of other activities in which an artist would engage (see section 6.3). These activities could be limited to supporting a particular type of artistic theme or product, such as Amanda’s engagement with pug rescue and play groups supporting her pet tattoo speciality. The activities could also be broad and wide-ranging, such as Rayna’s engagement with political and environmental causes relating to her craftivist practice. In the intimate register, the specialisation|diversification thematic pairing can be seen through the range of activities in which an artist engages, most notably through the tasks involved in parenting.

Poet Maxine and craftivist Rayna both balance childrearing with their creative practice in physical space, sharing their writing and making spaces respectively with their children. Both women also incorporate their children into their online persona, performing the intimate role of parent in the same digitally networked space in which they present themselves as artists. Rayna’s blog post and subsequent discussion of the birth of her twins, as explored in the strategy|happenstance thematic pairing above, is one example of this, as is Maxine’s story of her daughter refusing to eat a peach because its furry skin reminded her of an animal. However, in addition to these performances of intimacy, there is a wider allusion to the artist, particularly the female artist, as someone
who is required to balance the specialised tasks of their creative practice with the diverse tasks of the parent. This balancing act between the role as parent and the role as artist is explored by Alison Bain (2004, pp. 183–190), whose research determined that female artists who are parents often create their art in fragments of time and space. Although having a separate studio in which to make art was considered an integral element of the artistness for the women in Bain’s study (all of whom were visual artists), holding down a joint role of artist and mother means that the ‘studio’ is often a space shared with other family members. Likewise, household responsibilities mean that time is also fragmented, with art being made between other tasks such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning. Bain’s findings are reflected in the narratives of experience described on Rayna and Maxine’s Facebook pages, where their children are a mix of responsibility, distraction, muse, and source of pride.

Maxine Beneba Clarke, *Procrastinate*, Facebook, 13 September 2013

Much of Rayna’s work is based on the intersections of femininity, motherhood, and production. To address this issue, for her 2012 exhibition, she created a 6 minute film
titled *The Making and Baking of Banners and Biscuits* (Fahey, 2012). The clip features timelapse footage of Rayna involved in a diverse range of home based activity, as she works, mothers and entertains over two and a half hours. The audience watches through a static frame of her living room as Rayna entertains her children, changes a nappy, feeds the children, cuddles the children, talks on the phone, talks to someone off camera, and returns time and again to continue her embroidery. Rather than seeing the artistic process as inviolate or sacred, occurring only within the bounds of a studio space, Rayna presents a version of artistic production that is haphazard, interrupted, and embodied.

Encouraging people to consider the labour involved in the production of handmade goods, Rayna’s depiction of creative labour “was born out of a desire to contribute to the conversation about the value of handmade” (Fahey, 2012). Although Rayna is content to name the products of her labour ‘art’, when describing herself she alternates between the labels crafter, maker, and artist. For this film, she has chosen the latter descriptor. In our discussion of her identification with the different labels, she says that she mostly identifies as a crafter, but also commented “It depends on whether I want to
have the conversation or not… I’m an artist—it’s just quicker”. Describing herself as an artist for the purpose of this clip can be seen as an attempt to give legitimacy to the work that she is producing. Identifying as an artist—a role that has significantly more social value than that of a crafter or maker as discussed in section 3.1.4—transfers that value to the end product of her labours. Becker (1982) describes a circular definition of art and artist, where art is what artists make, and where artists are people who make art. This definition is what is at work here—as an artist, what Rayna is making must therefore be art. Labelling herself an artist publicly through her blog and the description of the piece on Vimeo where the clip is hosted, also provides an explicit link to the purposes of the film. Through this piece, Rayna is validating her own self-identification as an artist and providing justification through that self-identification for the things she creates to be considered art. Additionally, Rayna is encouraging debate on the value of handmade over mass-produced, and drawing attention to the marginalisation of women’s creative practice, traditional mediums, and work within the home.

It might be tempting (at least to those who are not parents) to assume that the level of activity and interruption seen in the short film was staged for the purpose of making her point more explicit, that the artistliness on display was in some sense a theatrical performance for the camera. However, in our interview Rayna revealed how little ‘uninterrupted creative time’ she is able to have as a mother of three young children. Describing an exemplary day, one where “I’m really trying to get work done”, she begins not with calm creative time, but instead washing and dressing her children, who have been woken and fed by her partner before he leaves for work. She then tries to feed herself, laughing that “my children notice that I’m eating so they think it’s their turn to eat again”. After a short burst of housework, “by about 11, we should all be fed, clean, dressed and ready to go”. At this point, she may be able to begin working on her
stitching. “As soon as I do the first stitch, someone will poo”, requiring an interruption for nappy changing, which come in pairs, as she is the mother of twins. Continuing to describe a day full of stops and starts, childcare, visits from friends and neighbours, and household management, she says there’s only two times during the day when she is able to work in a focused, continuing manner—firstly during afternoon quiet time after lunch, and secondly after 11pm, when the children are in bed and the house has been readied for the next day. This experience of making art is wildly different from the stereotype of an artist in a paint splattered studio space, working furiously for days or weeks on end, or for as long as the spark of creative inspiration lasts. Instead, Rayna’s experience mirrors that of the artists who worked from home while caring for children in Bain’s (2004) study.

Maxine did not speak specifically about the ways she manages her work and home life, but some understanding can be reached by listening to her online persona. With one preschool aged daughter, and a son at primary school, Maxine’s writing time seems to be primarily focused during the day when the children are at preschool and school, and in the evening. The requirement to perform also at live events, usually scheduled for evenings and not designed to be child-friendly (poetry readings, events and competitions are often held in pubs or bars), has a limiting effect on Maxine’s capacity to attend. Sharing child care with the children’s father, who does not live with them, does seem to provide some additional time to devote to writing and performing, but the children’s father is conspicuously absent in the construction of Maxine’s artistness.
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE INTIMATE REGISTER

Maxine Beneba Clarke, *Overheard*, 14 December 2013

Despite the diverse range of activities that are performed online through Maxine’s persona, including those which result in intimate sharing, her use of different networked sites allows for a level of specialisation in individual spaces. Indeed, a short time after landing her publishing deal, Maxine set up a second, fully public, Facebook profile so as to separate the professional and intimate aspects of her online presence. This public page focuses only on Maxine as a writer—she describes herself on this page as “an Australian writer and ranter of Afro-Caribbean heritage”—and in encouraging her existing Facebook friends to like the new page, said “If … you want to keep hearing about my kids running rings around me but don’t give a rats about my words, just stay over here”. This acknowledgement of the divergence between the purpose of the two spaces on Facebook, one public and professional, the other semi-private and intimate, demonstrates an awareness of the ways that a persona can operate in different performance registers, and the context collapse that can occur as a result. What is interesting is that although the public page is focused solely on writing, Maxine regularly shares what she posts to the public page on her personal Facebook profile where it receives a much larger audience. Indeed, the audience for Maxine’s personal profile is considerably more involved in responding to these posts than those on the public site. The issue here may well be an overlap of audience, where Maxine needs to
extend her professional audience past that of her personal Facebook network in order to make the most of the two separate spaces. However, the appeal of the intimacy engendered by very personal stories about children, parenting struggles, and even interactions with police, also allows Maxine’s Facebook friends a chance to feel very
connected to her. This is certainly something I encountered myself through the process of listening in to her online persona via her Facebook page, to the extent that I had to remind myself when meeting her in public that although it feels to me like we are personal friends, she is not nearly as invested in the relationship as I am.

8.4. Self|Collective

The performance of intimacy in terms of the thematic pairing of self|collective can be analysed as a performance of particular parts of the myth of the artist that could be interpreted as negative. One continuing theme of the myth of the artist is that of someone mad or deviant in their behaviour, as introduced section 3.1.1. This construction of the artist as mentally ill can be seen in the valorising of real artists, as with the focus on Van Gogh’s mental instability. The persistence of this element of the myth of the artist can also be seen in the depiction of fictional characters such as author Melvin Udall (Jack Nicholson) in *As Good As It Gets* (1997), who suffers from debilitating obsessive-compulsive disorders, or the character of Nina (Natalie Portman) whose sanity comes under threat during her preparations as prima ballerina in the film *Black Swan* (2010). Indeed, the suffering for one’s art, whether physically or mentally, is taken for granted in the traditional art world, and artists are excused any manner of socially unacceptable behaviours as a result. It is perhaps then not surprising that in their efforts to “preserve their symbolic marginalization (social, economic or cultural) and their mythologized alienation” (Bain, 2005, p. 29), some artists identified with this element of the myth of the artist. In doing so, the artists mark the self as different, important, or alienated, while also connecting to wider understandings of the collective artistness.
The performance of this element of artistness in the intimate register can be seen in a small way through the interviews. Amanda commented that “I’m pretty introverted, so instead of going out to play in the playground in primary school I would stay inside and draw pictures of birds”, identifying a tendency as a child to withdraw and isolate herself in order to concentrate on her art work. Similarly, Casey discussed a strong sense of insecurity as a young adult that meant she stayed one step back from actually making art (in her case, playing music) by dating musicians but not participating herself, despite having the necessary skill. Both Benjamin and GHOSTZz mentioned that they had diagnosable conditions, anxiety and ADHD respectively, and that this contributed to the way that they engaged with their creative practice. Benjamin commented that his anxiety made him uncomfortable speaking about being a tattoo artist, and that his desire to keep photos of his face out of his online presence was driven by a strong desire for personal privacy. Benjamin’s success in this aim is questionable, as he has been featured in tattoo magazines and is photographed often when he wins awards at conventions, with these images then uploaded into his Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram feeds. GHOSTZz keeps his identity hidden for other reasons (as discussed in section 6.2) but commented that his ADHD meant he was unable to engage with school-based art classes which bored him. This means GHOSTZz is largely self-taught.

GHOSTZz’s identification with the deviancy and degeneracy aspects of the artist’s myth are also visible in his online intimacy performances. As discussed in relation to visibility/self-protection, GHOSTZz was open about sexual experience, drinking, and drug-taking behaviour, although it could be argued that the type of self-reported behaviour described was normal for a young man in his late teens in the United Kingdom. What is less usual is his lengthy posts about his general state of mind.
As can be seen in the screenshot below, GHOSTZz is not only performing a professional artist in the sense of someone who self-identifies as such, while making art, but also performs a particularly intimate insecurity about his place in the world.

8.5. Work|Play

The final thematic pairing of work|play has revealed the relationship between artists and their audience in the professional register (see section 6.4) and the way that the artists engaged with the process of persona creation in the personal register of performance. However, in the intimate register my analysis revealed a particular element of the myth of the artist, that of the unrecognised, persecuted genius. As discussed in section 3.1.1, the construct of the artists as ahead of their time, misunderstood, or otherwise
marginalised by the art establishment or the public is a consistent trope that continues over time. Indeed, many of the most ground-breaking movements in 19th and 20th century Western art history have challenged the established art scene, suffering years or even decades of censure and disgrace before being accepted into the canon—consider the early years of cubism, expressionism, minimalism, or pop art. The fact that much contemporary art is expected to be cutting edge and challenging allows those whose practice is not applauded to adopt a position that they are simply ahead of their time, misunderstood.

The artists in this study did not go so far as to present their practice as radical or ground-breaking, but there were narratives that allowed for an indirect association with this part of the artist’s myth, where the artist as a worker was not fully appreciated, in a way that provides a particularly intimate insight into the person behind the persona. The clearest demonstration of this performance came from GHOSTZz, when he detailed his experiences with the Edinburgh police. When I interviewed GHOSTZz, he had had a couple of run-ins with the local police as a result of his street art practice, which exists for much of the time as an illegal practice, but he had never actually been caught in the act. In one case he had been chased down by police dogs, but managed to get away to safety, and as a result of this encounter, experienced a sense of both literal and figurative persecution in the pursuit of his art. In our interview he expressed a firm belief that the police had a file of images of his work. He believed that if he was ever caught in the act of painting, this file would be used against him, and he would be charged with vandalism for all the works that had been documented as belonging to the GHOSTZz tag. A few months after our interview, while working on a designated legal wall, GHOSTZz was interrogated by the police, had his personal details taken, along with his tag and images of the work he was spraying. The link between his legal and
artistic identity had now been made. Given the hostility of the police officer during the encounter, and the accepted belief within the street art community that files of tags and illegal work were kept on each artist, GHOSTZz feared that now his legal identity was in the system he would be arrested for vandalism. Thankfully for GHOSTZz it appeared those fears were unfounded, as the police left him alone once they had confirmed the wall was a designated legal street art space. However, the long-term implications of the encounter were enough for him to change his tag, losing his connection to the artistic
identity he had built up under the name GHOSTZz. His interim Facebook name of FTP Stencil Art (short for Fuck the Police) indicates his discontent with the situation.

Casey’s response to the online feedback to the widespread dissemination of a news clip of the *Casting off my womb* performance piece also connects to this sense of being unrecognised or misunderstood. The critique of the piece was largely framed around visceral reactions—“eeewww, gross” was a common response in both comment streams and on Twitter—but the work itself was also critiqued as not being ‘art’. Casey’s response to these critiques often demonstrated her frustration with the online audience’s lack of understanding of what she was trying to achieve. When the YouTube clip of *Casting of my womb* from SBS2 was picked up by news sites and blogs internationally, Casey lost the capacity to engage in impression management or audience segmentation for the work. In responding to the critics through her semi-private Facebook page, to which the bloggers, journalists, and internet commenters would not have access, Casey was able to share her experience of not being understood with supporters, friends, and fans who would support her. Casey’s frustration with the often less than complimentary presentation of the work by major online news organisations can be seen when she reposted their stories. Supposedly liberal media sites such as *The Huffington Post* or the Australian women’s interest site *Mamamia*, both of which might be expected to treat the performance piece with a larger degree of respect (even if not support) than would be seen on conservative blogging sites, raised questions as to the legitimacy and suitability of the art performance. The latter site titled their short article introducing the SBS2 video “This woman is knitting from her vagina. Because ART.” (Waterland, 2013), where the second phrase confers to the reader that the activity may not meet the requirements to be judged as ‘art’. Likewise, Casey criticised *The Huffington Post* for its inconsistent coverage of her work, commenting that the news site went from
labelling a piece NSFW (not suitable for work), to including it in a feature to celebrate Women’s History Month in the United States.

On a lighter note, in a rare moment of intimate sharing Amanda also expressed this feeling of being misunderstood or persecuted, although not nearly to the same extent as seen in GHOSTZz’s narrative or Casey’s experiences. Leaving Australia for a trip to Japan, she posted to a comment to Facebook that she’d “never been stared at so much!” as she had while in Melbourne Airport. Despite the fact there was no way for the starers to identify Amanda as a tattoo artist in this context, she interpreted the stares as related to the tattoos she wears, and so the experience of mild persecution remained.

Amanda Cain, *Airport*, Facebook, 10 January 2013
8.6. Discussion

The performances in the intimate register discussed here further demonstrate the capacity of an artist to enact different elements of the artist’s identity for different purposes through multiple physical and digital performance spaces. GHOSTZz can be seen to draw on the deviancy and degeneracy elements of the myth of the artist in order to validate his claim of artistness. As a street artist, someone whose very creative practice is itself most often illegal, GHOSTZz is in a position where deviancy is not only socially acceptable but also desirable. It is therefore unsurprising that his artist’s persona includes these elements alongside other demonstrations of artistness such as productivity. The persistence of the connection between artistic genius and mental instability is also visible in this small sample of artists, both through the sharing of experience of shyness, anxiety, and attention disorders as related—or even integral—to creative development for Amanda, Benjamin and GHOSTZz.

The intimate self-disclosure of mothering, and its connection to artistness for Maxine and Rayna, could equally be seen as an extension of the artist’s identity and as a negation of preconceptions of artists’ degeneracy as described by Codell (2003). In her analysis of artists’ lifewritings from Victorian England, Codell noted that artists used images and stories of their families, healthy and happy, as a “normalizing discourse …[which] refuted degeneracy by presenting physical evidence of healthy bodies, ancestors and offspring” (2003, p. 103). Including images and stories of their happy and healthy children could therefore help to normalise and legitimise Rayna and Maxine’s creative practice and artist’s role in the same way.

In performing in the intimate register, the artists in this study shared with a broad audience information and experiences that would normally only be shared with immediate family, very close friends, or lovers. In doing so, they performed elements of
artistness that are associated with the myth of the artist, such as deviancy or degeneracy. Having said this, it is important to emphasise that these performances were rare; the intimate was the least utilised performance register of the three. The participants’ limited engagement with the intimate through digitally networked spaces supports existing theory and research into sharing by Lambert (2013) and Livingstone (2008). Because of the different types of audiences that are connected to an artist’s persona, the participants largely limit intimate disclosure. The exception to this limiting of intimate disclosures sees behaviour that has become normalised within the sites on which the persona is being performed. It is common practice for parents to share photos and anecdotes of their children through their Facebook profiles or personal blogs as have Rayna and Maxine, and the asking and answering of sexually explicit questions as was demonstrated by GHOSTZz is commonplace on ask.fm (Lerner, 2013; Van Grove, 2013; Younger, 2013).

The minimal engagement with the intimate register of performance could be due to the fading relevance of the myth of the artist, especially when viewed in conjunction with the concentration on the performance of artistness through the professional and personal registers. As the construct of artistness as proscribed by the myth of the artist becomes increasingly diluted by the conceptualisation of the artist as a creative labourer, the deviancy, degeneracy, and other more radical elements of artistness become less visible in the personas of artists. The persistence of images and anecdotes shared via digitally networked spaces also plays a significant role in constraining the range of performances engaged in by the participants in this study, as can be seen through their strategic sharing of material in all three registers of performance. In determining what to post, what to exclude, and who to include in personal or intimate audience groups, the artists are performing sophisticated impression management. The relationship between the
three registers of performance, the types of artistness performed through the artist’s personas, and the implications of these findings is discussed in the following chapter.
9. Implications and Further Research

This study set out to investigate how artists experienced the creation of online personas, and the ways that they demonstrated their artistness through these personas. My research consisted of an interpretative phenomenological study of eight artists working on the fringes of the traditional art world in tattoo art, performance poetry, street art, and craftivism. By using a combination of one-on-one interviews and online listening, I determined that the participants performed their personas through three registers—the professional, the personal, and the intimate. Within these registers, the participants performed elements of artistness drawn from the two core discourses of the artist’s identity: the myth of the artist, and the artist as creative labourer. The experience of performing artistness was analysed as occurring within five thematic pairings, namely strategy|happenstance, visibility|self-protection, specialisation|diversification, self|collective, and work|play. Through the narratives of experience elicited from the participants in this study, I have determined that elements of artistness are performed strategically and deliberately in the construction of online persona.

This chapter will draw together the findings of the three registers of performance, connecting the analysis to the identity literature introduced in chapter two, and the exploration of artistness laid out in chapter three. In order to illustrate clearly the contributions to knowledge made through this study, I divide the following into two sections. The first section outlines how my research contributes to literature on the role of the artist, while the second section illustrates the role of this study in furthering the development of persona studies and studies of identity and digital self-presentation.
more broadly. The chapter concludes with a discussion of opportunities for further research stemming from this project.

9.1. **Performing Artistness**

Working on the fringes of the traditional art world, the eight participants in this project created personas that validated their self-identification as artists. By selectively enacting elements of artistness from two key discourses—the myth of the artist and the artist as creative labourer—the participants worked to perform a version of the socially constructed role for their audiences.

The two discourses utilised in this research provide a number of identifiable elements that are utilised by the participants. Different elements of artistness were identified through different registers of performance. I first analysed performances within the professional register. Here, the discourse of the artist as creative labourer drives the need to been seen as productive: the artist must be producing artwork in quantity, and must demonstrate that there is an element of skill involved in the creation of that work. These artworks must also receive some form of external validation, through its desirability for others. By performing these elements, the artists are presenting themselves as hardworking, prolific, and recognised as talented by others. In contrast, elements of the myth of the artist can be seen through the performance as provocateur, challenging their audiences, and as politically liberal. By performing these elements of the myth of the artist, the participants demonstrated their artistness not through the production of the artwork, but through the content and intent of the work they create.

In the personal register of performance, additional elements of artistness were portrayed. The provocative and political became reframed, extending past the artwork and into the artist’s personality and interests. These elements of the myth of the artist
offer a way for the participants to connect with this most persistent conceptualisation of the artist, without performing too risky a persona to their audiences: their risk-taking is managed by the socially acceptable nature of their rebellion. The productivity element of artistness stemming from the discourse of the artist as creative labourer is demonstrated by the range of creative practices in which the participants took part.

Performance of elements of artistness from myth of the artist in the intimate register was rare, and the discourse of the creative labourer had no identifiable elements connected to intimacy. Connections to motherhood through sharing and images of children, mild deviancy through identification with drinking, drug taking, the sharing of sexual proclivities, and the inclusions of images of the artist’s naked body can all be interpreted as an intimate performance that also demonstrates connection to a historical construction of artistness.

That the participants in this study concentrated their performances in the professional register, with a lesser engagement with the personal, and minimal engagement with the intimate, demonstrates that these artists are engaged in a form of impression management designed to present themselves as professional artists first and foremost. However, the structural restrictions of the platforms I studied must also be taken into account. As public or semi-public digitally networked spaces, the performances of online persona are subject to context collapse, where multiple roles share a single performance space. Performing for a diverse audience leads the participants to focus primarily on their professional connections, supplementing these at times with a personal touch, but for the most part keeping the audience separated from the intimate elements of their lives. Sites that are designed for more directed communications, like messaging application Snapchat, or anonymous secret sharing applications such as Whisper, may offer artists the opportunity to perform more intimate elements of their
personas. Further research could shed light on the ways that artists use these types of platforms; none of the artists involved in this research indicated they used this type of service.

Although the three registers here are presented as distinct from one another, there are experiences which could be considered performances in two or even all three types of register. Casey’s sharing of the *Casting off my womb* artwork is an example of a performance which clearly illustrates elements of the professional, personal, and intimate. As Casey documented the production of the art work, she was performing the productive professional artist, demonstrating her artistness by making art. By connecting out to wider issues—political issues to do with the representation of menstruation and female genitalia—particularly in the aftermath of the international attention resulting from the SBS2 clip going viral, Casey connected to elements of artistness related to liberal political views, and provocative behaviour through the personal register. Finally, by sharing images of her naked body, and discussing her menstrual cycle and genitals publicly, Casey is performing in the intimate register. This performance could be interpreted as demonstrative of the deviancy element of the myth of the artist, if we take deviancy to mean non-conformance to social norms. The response to the clip of the performance by many bloggers, journalists, and online commentators indicates that to these people, Casey’s performance also illustrates the degeneracy element of the artist’s myth, as she was criticised on a moral basis and had her mental health questioned for making the work.

Other performances also slip between registers of performance. When Maxine posted to Facebook that she was playing dress-ups with her children as procrastination from her writing, she was simultaneously performing in the intimate register by letting her audience know what was happening in her private home, and in the professional register
by demonstrating a state of productivity. Likewise, when she posts poetry to her blog that references her children, she is again performing both the professional and the personal.

The analysis of the performance of artistliness that this study provides offers new insight into the way that the artist as a social construct is enacted by those working in fringe creative practice. Extending this study to include artists working in traditional art forms would further develop these insights, offering scholars of art history and the sociology of art greater understanding of how the performance of the artist’s persona is experienced. The performance of artistliness examined here problematises the definitions of the artist used in policy, complicating existing understandings of the artist as creative labourer by showing the persistence of the myth of the artist in the creation of the socially constructed artist’s role.

Because of the size and make-up of the sample used in this research, I am unable to generalise out to the wider artist population. The use of an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology necessarily limits my findings to the participants involved, and this type of in-depth, qualitative research makes large sample sizes impractical. Focusing my analysis on a small number of artists has led to a depth of analysis and interpretation that would not have been possible had my sample been larger.

9.2. Studying Persona

As the first complete empirical study operating under the framework of persona studies, this research project can function as a framework for other projects that investigate the performance of personal and professional identity. By utilising theories from cultural studies, celebrity studies, sociology, and audience studies, this research works to extend

Taking the interdisciplinary focus of persona studies, I have drawn from celebrity studies, audience studies, and sociology in developing the conceptualisation of persona used here. From celebrity studies comes the focus on the individual as the centre and creator of meaning in contemporary society, where highly celebrated individuals visible through both traditional and new media forms become templates for the presentation of the self. The celebrity becomes more than someone to admire, but rather someone to emulate. With increasing access to the personal activities and experiences of famous people provided by social networking sites, the capacity to emulate the performance of the famous is no longer hindered by lack of access to traditional media forms. By building networks of family, friends, fans, and followers on digital platforms, the everyday individual can connect with and perform for an internationally distributed audience.

Although this persona studies project focuses on the experiences of the individual who creates the persona rather than on reception, there is a necessary connection to the audience for whom the individual is performing. In analysing the different types of performances in which the participants engaged, and considering the imagined audience for these performances, it was possible to determine how the experiences related to different performance registers. The experience of imagining an audience is integral to the performances analysed here, and theories developed within audience studies assisted in this interpretative analysis.

Drawing on concepts developed within sociology, I have framed the presentation of persona as a performance. This performance involves role-play, impression
management, and audience segmentation, and the utilisation of these ideas allows
greater understanding of the way the creation of performance of persona is experienced
by their creators. The influence of Erving Goffman’s work on the study of online
identity is strong and continues to grow; this study furthers this tradition by applying
Goffmanian concepts to the study of persona creation.

From within this theoretical framework, I have developed a description of online
persona as the presentation of the self on and through digitally networked spaces, where
the self presented is an extension of a particular individual, by said individual in
conjunction with their networked micropublics. This definition is applicable well
beyond the study of artists that is the focus of this project. By focusing on the
experience of creating persona—what it is like for people to perform their personas
online—I have extended existing research on online identity past the behaviour of the
participants. Looking beyond what people do when they perform an online persona to
how they experience that phenomenon provides new insight into the use and impact of
new technologies to perform the self. This insight could easily be used to inform studies
of self presentation and online identity which take an ethnographic, anthropological,
celebrity or cultural studies approach.

The methodological innovation in this project, achieved by adapting interpretative
phenomenological analysis from its roots in psychology to serve a persona studies
purpose, and adding the practice of online listening to unstructured interviews for data
collection, provides a new way to study the phenomenon of persona creation. The
traditional one-on-one interview allows the researcher to obtain first-person narratives
of experience, giving insight into what persona creation is like for the participant
involved. By using screen captures to record and build additional narratives, gathered
over a longer period of time (in this case 2 years), the research can interpret additional
insight into the experience of performing the self, adding to the analysis provided through close reading of the interview transcript. Furthermore, this methodological approach works to make explicit the role of the research as interpreter by foregrounding the interpretative process, and ensures that reflexivity is central to the process of data analysis.

There are some limitations inherent with the methods used in this study. Firstly, as noted above in relation to the generalisability of the findings on artistness, the small sample size preferred with IPA research restricts the researcher to discussing only what is discovered about the participants in the research. Although grounded in cultural studies, this approach to the study of persona cannot describe cultures. This limitation is not viewed as a failing, but rather an inherent element of the design of this project. Secondly, as an in-depth, qualitative study, data analysis is time consuming, requiring the researcher to engage directly with the transcripts and other data (in this case, online listening and the collection of screenshots). Computer software such as NVivo that provides a level of automation for qualitative data analysis may well help speed the process, but a phenomenological approach to research does require the researcher’s close attention to and comprehensive understanding of the collected data. Finally, as stated above, the role of the researcher is interpretative. This means that different researchers could reach different conclusions based on the same data.

A final innovation stemming from this study comes in the form of the conceptual development of the professional, personal, and intimate registers of performance. When a single performance space is used to enact a range of different elements of identity, as on a platform such as Facebook, new conceptual tools are required to describe the types of performances in which individuals engage. Although role-play has been a useful way of distinguishing between different types of performances in physical space, the context
collapse seen in digitally networked spaces complicates the way roles are played. The registers of performance provide a way to categorise performances, whether for different audiences, within different contexts, or for different purposes.

The theorisation of persona studies provided by this study will be of use to scholars of identity, whether their focus is on performances of the self in physical, mediated, or digitally networked space. The methodological and conceptual innovations utilised in this project should be of particular interest to researchers of online identity. However, I see IPA as a particularly useful methodology for the study of identity within cultural studies more broadly, offering a clear structure for the examination of experience.

Equally, although the concept of registers of performance was developed in response to the ways that the participants in this study performed their identities online, this too could translate to other types of performances where role-play and similar metaphors do not fully explain the ways that individuals perform the self.

9.3. Further Research

As a result of my study, a number of different research projects could be developed.

Firstly, the study of artistness could be extended past that of the fringe artist. By utilising the same methodological approach, but focusing on artists working within the traditional art world—visual artists, sculptors, musicians, dancers, or writers—a comparative study could offer further insight into the performance of elements of artistness by those whose creative practice is commonly accepted as art. This comparative study would provide both scholars and policy makers with a deeper understanding of the experience of creating and performing an artist’s persona.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to study the way that artists’ performance of persona changes as they move from being on the fringes of the traditional art world to a more
central position. As both Maxine and Casey have had considerable recognition for their work since I spoke to them, the way that they have performed their personas in digitally networked spaces has become more complex. Continuing to study the way that these two artists create their personas over time as their career develops would offer an insight into the effects of external validation and public appreciation on the performance of artistness.

Thirdly, as noted earlier in this chapter, my findings indicate that the centrality of the myth of the artist in the construction of an artist’s identity may be waning. A larger scale study of the elements of artistness present in the online personas of a wide range of creative practitioners would be useful in determining whether this is the case. This research project could operate through an online listening or virtual ethnography framework, relying solely on the performance of artistness in digitally networked spaces, an approach which would allow the researcher to study the presentational practices of a much larger number of artists.

In terms of the development of persona studies, this project will be used as a framework for the investigation of the performance of other types of roles outside of artistness for a large scale research project currently under development at Deakin University. These personas will come from the professions, specifically law, medicine, education, and politics. Taking this study further, I would like to develop a connected project which would utilise the theory and methodology developed here for the study of the performance of social roles such as those made distinct by class, religion, or ethnicity.

9.4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the creation and performance of online personas by eight fringe artists demonstrate the centrality of two core discourses of artistness: the
myth of the artist, and the artist as creative labourer. In developing an understanding of the role of these two discourses in the creation of persona, I have also made significant contributions to knowledge in the form of methodological innovation through the use of IPA and online listening, and by furthering the conceptual and theoretical development of persona studies. These developments in the theory and practice of persona studies further the capacity for scholars to study the creation and performance of the self through both physically and digitally networked spaces.
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Appendix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>register of performance: Professional, Personal, Intimate</th>
<th>superordinate theme: strategy-happenstance; specialisation-diversification; visibility-selfprotection; self-others; work-play; individual-collective</th>
<th>subordinate theme</th>
<th>name</th>
<th>quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional collective</td>
<td>Civility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>I reply to everybody. If I ignored people I wouldn’t get any work. Plus I don’t like, some people I’ve met, who I’ve really all my life of say look up to that are just obnoxious rude arseholes, and I don’t like it that they ignore, so like even if their works awesome I still look at their work now and think, that guys an idiot. So I try a regular person. I’m not famous or anything</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional collective</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
<td>I think the main difference between art and craft from a professional perspective is collaboration. In art, artists tend to be really, it’s about one person, and you know, it’s sort of there, there’s all that competitive stuff, whereas craft is more community based in their work and less competitive, much more collaborative and all that kind of stuff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional collective</td>
<td>Collective experience</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Getting tattooed is such a personal experience. You know if someone’s having a hard time you want to be in tune with that. You want to be able to go, ’do you want to have a break’, or ’hang on a sec I’ll just take my headphones off…’ You know, you’re sharing something together, which sounds a little bit wanky, but you know, it’s a process that you’re both going through, so yeah, I think headphones are a no-go, personally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional collective</td>
<td>Collective identity</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>I think for the public viewing us, we’re like this strong knit crew, almost like a graffiti crew, which is sort of how it started I guess, but more like artwork than graffiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>but I guess it’s a bit of a community thing as well</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>I started the Everfresh Facebook fan page, and everyone can have access to that if they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayna</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>So I used Facebook and then twitter and then things like Etsy and communities and things like that and Flickr and things like that stuff, to find people mostly, not necessarily to organise them, um but certainly finding them and getting people involved and finding their work and finding ways to promote each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Facilitation / Teaching</td>
<td>Community / participation</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>I think that the most empowering thing for people to do is, or for people to be doing something themselves [...] I’d like to sort of I don’t know be a part of facilitating that and also like that makes, I, that happens to me as well you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Facilitation / Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>I was running these trash bag rehab workshops which did just over one year, I did six of them, which were gathering people together and teaching a skill, and we’d do a group project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Facilitation / Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>I wouldn’t have considered myself a maker at that point, but I was sort of a facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayna</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through all that research I’ve become much more aware of how within my craft form, we’ve really dropped the ball in terms of design. So a lot of my current work is about trying to bring the design skill back as well, and trying to get people to think about how it’s not just, as change makers, creative change makers, we don’t, we can’t just think about the medium and the message, we actually have to talk about the technique and really thinking about strong utilitarian yet beautiful stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Multiple selves / collective identity</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Multiple selves / collective identity</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I sort think that the internet’s about puffing yourself up and making yourself more powerful and more worthy of being taken notice of, than otherwise, so that it gives the impression that you’re a whole crew of people, a movement.

it’s just several identities that who love each other.

You just sort of have to be imaginative and creative to have an impact now, it’s sort of you have to do things in a different way.

I still do some illustrative sort of because I’ve got a graffiti background, like I still do some more illustrative, comic book inspired stuff.

the things that I do, they are exclusionary, and it is a problem, and I don’t want to not use the word cunt and water it down and make it more inclusive, and I think it’s mainly that you’ve got to do lots of different things, you know, rather than just one thing, so that is certainly not going to appeal to everyone, and it will close a lot of people off, but then hopefully something else that I do, will be open to more people.

I do make that a promise to myself, like either way I go down, like either way doing just street pieces or just canvas work, I do want to do the opposite at the same time, if you know what I mean. Like if I do work on canvas, I do want to do street pieces or I don’t feel I can call myself a street artist, because it’s called street art.

I see Facebook as being more civil than deviant art for some reason. I don’t know why. With Facebook it’s more than just a profile if you know what I mean. You ken that there’s someone behind it, you know what I mean. With deviant art, you feel like it’s just profile, nothing more.

I use deviantart as well, so occasionally I’ve uploaded there before Facebook to see reactions, and then on Facebook.

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I use deviantart as well, so occasionally I’ve uploaded there before Facebook to see reactions, and then on Facebook.
they have that privilege of being able to write something that's rap that's also kind of they push it up into that spoken word, so that they can compete on a level with people doing more traditional poetry forms. I'm surprised that there isn't more crossover.

You know, I do think that probably audio online is the next step, but I'm really hesitant because, you know I just kind of think, once you're out there in audio, the incentive to

And another kind of theme is, throughout on and on, has been the female form, not so much in the street, doing a little I guess... And it's not so much a perversion thing, it's kind of more ah, just trying to twist ideas, of what is attraction and beauty and occasionally it would be an animal head and a female body, or two different types of animals. Mmm, nature is a big influence as well. Last year I've done a few planets, while I was in Brazil I did a few big planets, and that's kind of a theme, all these floating blob things, where it's almost like three or four paintings in one, and so in some ways that kind of suits my brain where it's, I want to do something realistic, I want to do something that's illustrative, I want to do something weird and you don't really know what it is, or what patterns in it, so that's kind of like a format which I might explore more, especially making them all a little bit relevant to the place

It's kind of a strength and a weakness to be able to deviate. Strength in the way that, especially in the past, I'm able to take on different types of jobs and make the client happy and I'll be happy, because my art can be so diverse. So one thing I'm trying to do, in terms of culling the site, is to make things more streamlined. And that goes for stuff on canvas and walls. So the stuff that I'm doing on walls, I'm trying to make it more like the stuff I'm doing on paper, so that I'm taking up the whole wall with one kind of idea.
| Professional diversification | Diversification | Rayna | my work sort of operates in two levels, it's working in sort of traditional craft spheres but bringing different political ideas into it, and then working in non-traditional craft spheres and bringing craft into it |
| Professional diversification | Innovation | Ben | what's interesting to me is kind of that multi-platform sort of performance, so you know, it's a poem, with music, it's also got video content, so it can be performed as such, with live musicians and projections, but it can also go out in the format of a video, and it can be online and that's kind of what I'm thinking of |
| Professional diversification | Privilege | Maxine | they have that privilege of being able to write something that's rap that's also kind of they push it up into that spoken word, so that they can compete on a level with people doing more traditional poetry forms |
| Professional happenstance | Audience | Maxine | I don't think I actually started like, linking my Facebook to my blog, you know promoting my blog posts on Facebook until about 12 months ago. I was like 'Oooh, I can click and then it turns up on…' [laughing]. And all of the sudden my readership tripled, because people were like, oh, you've written something new. |
| Professional happenstance | Haphazard | Ben | I think I use the web quite haphazardly at the moment. I'm trying to get a bit more organised about how I do things |
| Professional individual | Denial of 'artist' | Rayna | But generally I identify myself as a crafter, above all other things |
| Professional others | Accessibility | Rayna | You can talk really abstractly about rights and freedoms, but being able to do it through a practical example means a lot more to some people. Craft is just as good a one as any. I can create a craft metaphor for just about any moral you can think suggest at me. Particularly like to talk about craft and economics, it's really easy to do that. Craft and making and economics |
| Professional others | Accessibility for audience | Ben | the modern spoken word scene kind of incorporates storytelling and it incorporates hip hop to a certain extent |
I guess that’s the thing about it, because I am writing to initiate change and initiate discussion, it’s a way of me creating a forum, where if people do want to, do agree then they can re-tweet and they can pass it on. And if they don’t agree then they can leave a comment, and um, whereas at a spoken word gig, the manner you engage in, there isn’t much... You know people might come up and say ‘I really liked that poem’ or ...

I think probably my dream audience would be a massive hall full of people who have little to no exposure to poetry at all [...] Just people who have just come with an open mind and no preconceptions. Yeah.

Slam: it really is kind of that you’re at the whim of those one two or three people on that particular day at that particular moment in time depending on how they’re feeling, so, it’s a challenge, because you know you really have to pick something that, you know you have to choose a piece that will appeal.

So it really has been a way for me to talk to people and kind of push the poem beyond the, beyond the page or beyond the stage or to actually say this is something I want to talk about, let’s talk about it.

It won’t even be a stencil yet, it will be just straight from Photoshop or stuff like that. I’ll upload it just to see what reactions, to see if people think it’s good or what

Most of the time I’d say I get stuff from Instagram

when I first started tattooing people were really set on one thing [...] They’d looked at all the flash. That was the one that they wanted. You could not talk them out of it right
| Professional | others | Empowerment | Maxine | down to the colours are exactly the same as the ones on the wall [...] They had no imagination |
| Professional | others | Innovation | Rayna | You know I want to help other people to tell their stories so that in 20 years’ time it’s not going to be like this. |
| Professional | others | Mentoring | Ghostzz | I’m very much interested in ideas of how to engage people in the way that they want to be engaged not making people engaged in the way that politics makes them |
| Professional | others | Mentoring | Ghostzz | the people who browse there [deviantart] are either street artists themselves or know what they’re talking about, so you can get some good detailed feedback from there |
| Professional | others | Networking | Benjamin | there is a cool website called cutsnspray, which I started on as well, when I first started. It’s like a forum where it’s just like just street artists and stuff like that. That’s where I first started, that’s where I uploaded my first stencils and stuff like that. Um, And I owe a lot to that site, because like all these artists were on there were always friendly, always like ‘here’s where you can improve it, here’s’ and things like that, and I’d say without them I’d probably be about half as good as the work is now, because they’ve helped a lot. |
| Professional | others | Mentoring | Ghostzz | people that add me on Facebook are usually other tattooists or people that have been tattooed by me or people who have been referred to me by people I’ve tattooed |
| Professional | others | Online identity | Maxine | I hadn’t considered the fact that I don’t put all of my poetry on my blog, and a lot of the poetry that I write, because it’s a blog, is stuff that is very political or stuff that aims to get people talking about it, and I kind of went back and looked at my blog from the perspective of someone who’s never met me, and I thought, gee... |
| Professional | others | Participatory | Rayna | my practice is about trying to get other people to start doing stuff. It’s about engaging and encouraging other people to participate |
| Professional | others | Validation | Benjamin | It’s won, like it got best small colour at the recent convention [Rites of Passage] |
I think that meeting of low brow and highbrow is so powerful I think, potent. It’s really enjoyable. You get to indulge your baser instincts while at the same time congratulate yourself on being clever. And so it’s enjoyable on different levels.

I want the person to be happy with it, but they’re also advertising my work on them, so whatever I put on them I want it to be something that I’m proud of, and reflect what I want to do.

like I do mostly custom or portrait stuff, so um, there’s this sleeve that I’m doing at the moment, it’s an Alice in Wonderland theme, and it’s one of my favourites.

I think because I had the type of political background that I did, I very much, rather than as a crafter turned activist, I was an activist turned crafter so I was sort of, getting attracted to a lot of the sort of anarchist, punk kind of movements and so there was a lot of crossover between the people who were involved in the Riot Grrl movements and that sort of DIY things who were getting into craft through that sort of way.

I try to keep political ideas or any clear messages out of my art.

if I get a good response from it, which I have been getting, then my confidence just increases with it and obviously it’s really important to me to to keep throwing out new stuff and increasing the, hopefully increasing the quality of what I’m making.

Like the material that I know really well, like I’m really sort of comfortable with, I sort of enjoy performing a lot, because it’s proven and I know most people, like not every audience, but like...

Empowering, empowering, and also I guess, in terms of poetry, we don’t usually think of it as political thing, you
**Empowerment**

**Maxine**

know, standing up with a microphone, it’s the ultimate democratic act

**Individual practice**

**Ghostzz**

like all the design stuff like that, that’s all done by me, um, all the cutting, and getting materials and stuff like that. It’s all done by me

**Inspiration**

**Amanda**

You’re then forced to be creative which can be really frustrating, because being creative isn’t a process like, you know, any other job. You can’t, all of the sudden create something. Yeah, so some days you’ll be able to do a heap of art work, and get the results that you want, and then, you know, I might not draw for a week or two, because I’m just not feeling it

**Multiple identity**

**Ghostzz**

I actually think of Ghostzz as a little like, character, so to speak. I like to think of it as a little person in his own little world. Um, So yeah, I’ve always kept as pretty second person.

**Multiple identity**

**Ghostzz**

when I start designing a stencil, I feel like, you know, I become Ghostzz, and then after it’s ended, and after it’s [garbled], that’s when I return to my normal self

**Online identity**

**Maxine**

angry crazy woman who just rants about everything! Yeah!

**Control of images**

**Ghostzz**

Tumblr came on the scene and it was kinda a site for stealing things from other people and stuff like that, and it was huge sort of dislike for it.

**Responsibility**

**Benjamin**

I’ll refuse tattoos that I think are stupid. Yeah, I believe that if you want to get your face tattooed, you should already have the majority of your body tattooed

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<th>Professional</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
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<td>Self-protection</td>
<td>Control of images</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Self-protection</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
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it’s quite funny actually to me because now I have everything hidden away, everything is done so it’s as safe as possible, but then literally it was 4 o’clock in the morning and I went out wearing just a tee-shirt and jeans, and I had the stencil in one hand and the paint in the other. And CIB went right past me, drove right past me staring at me, and I was like looking, just giving them a look like (cheerful)’hello’, sort of thing. I have no idea how I wasn’t arrested that night. The thing is that I’ve never once been arrested, never, which is surprising, and I’ve been close two times, and I’ve had a dog chase after me once.

Most stuff nowadays is kind of done about 8ish at night onwards. I like it to be dark, but not too dark. So I guess you could say it’s all done still at night.

that was the main reason I didn’t sign it to start off with was for instance if I was caught for one thing without signing, … Well, it’s not like I sign everything now, not the little ones that I do when I just walk past something and decide to put something up, So if all of them had tags in it, I’d probably get in heaps of trouble, because they’re not really signed.

whereas the only reason, for instance like my name, like my work has my name on it, is so that other people can’t claim it.

It’s an odd one when they actually removed it. They said that I would get it back if I uploaded my passport to prove that it was my real name. Which just makes no sense at all, as it was obvious that it was a fake name.

I knew what I was learning wasn’t right. Then I went back studying. I stayed involved in the industry by getting tattooed and hanging out with tattooers, and still trying to pursue it, but waiting for an opportunity that was going to be right.

I don’t really write to entertain people, I write to change
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>specialisation</th>
<th>Exclusion</th>
<th>Casey</th>
<th>a lot of the things I do are quite exclusionary, like cunt making workshops, because you use the word cunt, a lot of people just hear the word cunt and they just shut off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Interesting / not interesting</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>you have to make a lot of cute regular crap that is gonna sell a lot to cover your stall, and I wanted to have interesting things – or things that were more interesting to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>I mean I do think spoken word isn’t largely taken seriously by the literatzi if you will, you know the literary establishment. Um... I think that’s slowly changing, but they still see it as, spoken word is that thing they do out there in pubs, for the popular audience, they’re not educated, they’re not schooled in the ways of poetry, and it suits, I think, the poets of academia to see it that way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>I struggle with the whiteness of the Australian poetry scene. I also struggle with being a female in the Australian slam poetry scene, and I think that this does push you towards the more community...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>They don’t understand that you can do other art that’s not based on tattoos. And if you put something like that up in the same kind of realm as your tattooing work, they just don’t get it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>I think it’s a valid form, but it’s like, ah, page poets have their poetry competitions and I think there should be an equivalent for performance poets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I think probably there are quite a lot of middle class white people who go for spoken word because they don’t quite feel that they’d be taken seriously in the hip hop world, which is probably true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I think there’s more acceptance in the hip hop community of people from different class background as well as obviously different ethnic backgrounds and cultural backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>strategy</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>I think it was pretty easy to persuade her into a full sleeve, and it sort of just went from there.</td>
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<td>she just wanted Alice in Wonderland, like a forearm piece, and I was like 'uh, it would be better if we did... because there're so many interesting characters and yeah. So we started with the rabbit, and went from there.</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>I'll generally try and paint something when I've got a convention coming up just to have merch for that</td>
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<td>Ben</td>
<td>One thing that I'm planning to get moving on when I'm back in, after Edinburgh, is um starting to work with filmmakers on projects, either on making short film poems, or sort of longer pieces</td>
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Some of my work's quite topical, you know, so... Which is good, but annoying in a way because you have to keep on top of it, it only stays current for a while, you know.

I try to do as much freehand as I can, but because I specialise in realism, portrait stuff, you don't just freehand a portrait on... I do think we need a better scene up here for it, but it seems to be more of a graffiti scene up here, rather than street art wise. [...] For me personally, I've never really been a fan of graffiti.

I try to do as much freehand as I can, but because I specialise in realism, portrait stuff, you don't just freehand a portrait on... I do think we need a better scene up here for it, but it seems to be more of a graffiti scene up here, rather than street art wise. [...] For me personally, I've never really been a fan of graffiti.

And people don't seem to realise that, because I'm a political writer, 99% of the time I'm writing because I'm pissed off, because I'm saddened by something.

I'll generally try and paint something when I've got a convention coming up just to have merch for that

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
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<th>Specialisation</th>
<th>Benjamin</th>
<th>it is kind of like one of the worst stigmas to be, kind of, comfortable and middle class and educated and trying to be a rapper</th>
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<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>portrait is sort of like the hardest thing to do. I dunno, I just like the rendering 3d shapes rather than just flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>specialisation</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
<td>Discussing Rone for like, a public image, everybody knows him as the black and white, female face. Yeah, so every time you see it you know it’s him.</td>
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<td>specialisation</td>
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something I’ve started doing more recently, is doing, doing kind of poems that reference or are even a direct pastiche of classical poems, not classical, but more classic ‘proper poems’, you know.

because I’m trying encourage crafters to a bit more risky and dangerous, part of that is saying there is a really strong history of this, it’s not like we’re inventing this whole new idea.

as a consequence a lot of the language is about us, we, you know all that kind of, it’s really community based language, it’s sort of speaking from a member of a community, rather than ‘hi I’m an expert on this stuff, you should do what I think because I’m cool’, you know?

I think the idea is to make videos that have the potential to become viral.

‘oh, should I, shouldn’t I’ you know, start putting audio up, but I do think it’s been a wise decision, just because I feel like that is, I feel like so much of spoken word is actually being there, and actually being in the room at that moment and experiencing it, rather than through a screen.

It also depends on who I’m talking to... Filling out a form, like if I’m putting in an application, I’ll put in crafter, just because I did heaps of statistics at university, [laughs] and I think we need more crafters in the world.

It’s such a niche activity political craft in general but then specifically cross stitch the internet was the only way to organise on a community based level.

I’ve got a proper camera that I take photos with, and upload them, and put them on Facebook, but just for Instagram I take photos with my phone and filters can sometimes help with those.

there are so many restrictions on the internet, like I can’t list the podcast on iTunes, and I’m starting to compromise, suddenly realise that there are some things that
### Professional strategy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>I started by blog in, I think it was 2008, and I started at a time when I was trying to get more feature readings</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Casey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic development</td>
<td>I did it under Craft Cartel, because Craft Cartel has all the followers, and thing, and we’d done workshops before, and it was it was the easiest thing I could think of</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic portfolio</td>
<td>I deliberately put out what I want to get back</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic portfolio</td>
<td>I’ll ask them so I know what working and what to push more</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Amanda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic portfolio</td>
<td>people are really visual. If they don’t see it, they can’t imagine it, and if they haven’t seen you do it, then they generally don’t ask you to do it</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic portfolio</td>
<td>whatever I put online I seem to get more and more requests for. So I get a lady wearing an animal hat, and the week later all of the sudden three other people want it. So, definitely people still want a lot of script based stuff, but there’s other guys in the studio who do a lot more of that, so they tend to pick that up a little bit more</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Benjamin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic portfolio</td>
<td>I try and focus on photographing pieces that will help my portfolio, as far as going the way of trying to specialise in particular styles. I still photograph some of the illustrative side, but it’s mainly portrait, realistic stuff</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Ghostzz</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>It’s actually still there, my first ever stencil […] it was rough and horrible. But yeah, that’s the stuff that never goes online. I’ve got the pictures of it on my computer and stuff like that, but like I’ve got so many pictures that I’m like ‘yeah, no, not online…’</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>I made the conscious decision that people would have to come and see me, you know, if they want to see me perform, they’d have to actually turn up to a gig</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>It’s a decision that a lot of people have asked me about. ‘We want to see you, why aren’t you on YouTube’, so that’s why. Because you’d just sit at home and click on YouTube</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
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<td>I mainly use Facebook, but I guess I try to do it somewhat consistently, like every week put up a wall or something. And I think that's kind of the strength I'm building, building an online presence that's seen as somewhat consistent</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Control of content</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like I haven't actually made, consciously made my own videos. It's mostly, like, people have either had a video camera at a gig and then posted clips, so it's of varying quality and you don't have any control over it after it's posted, so it's a little bit frustrating when like, different events all choose the same piece to post on their YouTube channel or whatever.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Control of work</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
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<tr>
<td>And I was kinda sceptical about doing that because of the way that the imagery is seen and used and people have so much more access to it with reblogging and not crediting artists. But at the same time like it's a necessary evil you know?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Denial of intimacy</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have actually registered a Ben Mellor page, but I haven't got anything on it, I haven't even got a photo on it yet, and because the way that I use Facebook is quite public anyway, I don't really use it that privately, or if I do want to use it privately then I'll send a direct message to someone and I won't... I tend not to put much really personal stuff</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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<tr>
<td>I guess there's one thread of using it to promote stuff, and kind of let people know like, when I'm doing things, especially like since we've been up in Edinburgh we've had some last minute gigs come through, we've been given some slots with our band and stuff, which haven't been, you know, we didn't have flyers for, so we've been publicising that through Twitter</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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<tr>
<td>I have a mailing list as well, so I try, I try to send out a newsletter every month, but it turns out to be about every three months really, depending on what's going on</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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<td>I kinda only got into Twitter recently, but as a way of connecting with people, and it's kind of an electronic</td>
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Like I started off with a list of about a hundred people, and just sort of slowly building, but with people's consent. Who actually give me their email addresses at gigs and stuff. But that's, that's quite a good medium I think, and it's more targeted I think. And, it's really easy to unsubscribe. I don't know whether to just make that account public, and accept everyone, and just remember that I don't know who I'm speaking to, and to be wary of that, which is a bit difficult because sometimes you forget. 

Because most tattooers are out there on some platform, you know, showing their work that you don't even have to around and meet people. You know all our portfolios are online, you can get a feel for what people do. Other than the social networking sort of thing, I'm not really into putting my work out there, so, the last interview I did for Inked magazine, um, I know the editor, so that's why I did it. And then, the Tattoos Downunder one, it was a shop profile, so, um. Yeah, I'm not really, unless I'm somehow involved with the editors or whoevers putting it on, I'm not really that into... I'm not after the fame. 

I kind of try and at least keep my most recent project up on the front page, and you know, you can access my book, my
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Ben</th>
<th>CD if you want to buy it through that, and that's all I kind of feel I need to use it for now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>you know, it's still useful, now, to kind of put it on your CV and you know, um, I'm still using it on my publicity for my show this year, you know, three years on, so. It's valuable in some ways, I think um, it got me another, area on radio four or five, their spoken word program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I just try and keep my certain things that I've set up like Instagram, Facebook and Tumblr, I just try to keep them updated as much as possible. Just so when people see the new work that I'm doing and they might get interested, and they might see a certain piece and think oh that's cool, I might get something like that, I'll go see him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>I was just in Perth over the weekend, and I was only there for like two days, and I had probably half a dozen people approach me just because I had tattoos. Making new friends... (laughs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>I would like to be well respected in my field, but I don't like people knowing my face really. I don't like to be approached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>It's just a exposure type thing. The more exposure you get the more interest you're going to get which is going to translate to more work. It's all a package I guess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>So it was more just being seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
<td>Facebook is an odd one, it's almost like a business kind of thing, rather than a profile, to be honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional visibility</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
<td>I've seen like, for instance, the police have taken pictures of my work recently. But that's just something they do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### BIBLIOGRAPHY

|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|------------|--------|
| Around here they'll usually, you know, build up files, especially with taggers, um yeah. | And I think that Facebook was a large part of that, I mean, I know when I first moved to Melbourne, people would say ‘did you go to the reading at Passionate Tongues’ or ‘Did you go to the reading at the [garbled..]?’ and I’d say ‘how am I supposed to know about it, and they’d say ‘get on Facebook!’ because that’s where it’s all promoted. | he had re-tweeted saying I’ve found this amazing poem, please don’t troll the comments and, and so, you know, about 20 people or so logged on and left comments on this poem, but it was kind of discussion rather than disagreement | I got sent a message on Facebook saying Tim Minchin has re-tweeted your blog post. I was just […] [laughing] I was just, you know, he has 100,000 people on twitter | I think the main thing about it is, for me, it was more I hadn’t done any, I hadn’t been asked to do any feature readings, and I’d done a bit of open mike here and there, but this was a way of going, ‘okay, I know there’s going to be 50 people in the room, and I know that I’m going to get 3 minutes’, and it’s way of getting my name out there and showing people my stuff, and weighing against what’s already out there in some way, shape or form. | I’ll do a blog post and then I’ll put a link on Facebook, and I get a lot of traffic from Facebook and people reposting things. So yeah I guess that’s, for me that’s the main method of promoting my work at the moment | it has been amazing in terms of you know exposure | And so what I’ve noticed about coming back from four months is that things aren’t as busy for me, and because of that –that and I haven’t got much money – but um I’m pretty confident that within a month or two months, it will...
be very similar to before I left, where I was [garbled] different jobs, well-paid jobs, and um, really busy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Mike</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One thing that I would like to do is to have someone else to take care of Tumblr, Flickr and whatever else, so that I can just focus on adding a photo, and press one button and boom, it goes everywhere</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Mike</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So the thing about my other online networking that I don't use is to get something out of it you've got to put a lot of time into it, so to get Tumblr up and running, to get anywhere near two hundred thousand people following you, it's going to take a bit of time to get there</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Mike</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the only thing that I really like about it is that it shows that I've been to a lot of countries, worked in a lot of places</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Mike</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the strength of Facebook is that everyone's looking at it, you're putting your art in the space, and that's where you've got to do it. It's similar to doing stuff in the street. You're putting it out there where everyone can see it</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Mike</th>
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<tr>
<td>then also with the site as well, just trying to get rid of all the stuff that I don't really need people to see</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because I was one of the, to use the term ironically, pioneers, in that area within the internet, a lot of people sort of came into it when they came into their ideas they were looking at my work as an example of how to do things, and also, because I put a lot of tutorials on my website because I'm trying to encourage people to do stuff</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
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<th>Rayna</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I put my work on the internet to provoke anyway, so I expect to be provoked back</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I started a little page for the cross stitch, and all of the sudden my web hits went through the roof</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional visibility</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>when I started talking about craft, it just went insane</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional work</th>
<th>Art as trade</th>
<th>Ghostzz</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>like it always helps when my father was like, he'd drawn from the age he was ten, and he was a painter and decorator and so everything was there really, so yeah.</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>Art as work</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>Art as work</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>Artist as tradeperson</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>Artist as vessel</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rayna</td>
<td>Client preference</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Change-making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Change-making</td>
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<td>Ben</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>experience</td>
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permanent thing that I’m doing for you, I need you to relax, so that I can in turn relax, and you know, we can get the result we both want.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>collective</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
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<td>Community</td>
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I started really researching what was out there online in terms of online communities for people who were using craft to communicate subversive and political ideas, and there was very little and most of the stuff that was there was kind of there was more of the kitschy ironic stuff, which didn’t really find the protest kind of angle that a lot of people clearly were looking for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>collective</th>
<th>Community / participation</th>
<th>Casey</th>
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It’s something that makes communicating easier when you’re sitting with someone else and your hands are busy, it gets rid of awkwardness.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>Activism</th>
<th>Casey</th>
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that’s the whole power of craft and activism, is that it’s perceived as being not threatening because it’s associated with, people really underestimate women and then what women do, and so you can use that against them, it’s great!

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>Diversification</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
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And even now, like I’m itching to do other creative stuff as well.

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<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>Ben</th>
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I was in a band and I was already writing lyrics, and I was in a band with some of my mates and I was already starting to write lyrics for our songs and stuff. I hadn’t really appreciated that that was a form of poetry as well, you know, it just sort of helped me join the dots. And at the same time I was in a youth theatre, and so I was sort of learning to act.

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<th>Personal</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>Diversification</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
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they do have things like inter-arts grants and theatre. IT’s become a lot more malleable than it used to be.

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<th>Personal</th>
<th>diversification</th>
<th>Diversification</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
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On my CV, it says, mother artist crafter gardener lover activist. So yeah. I pull from all of those things depending on who I’m describing myself to. It depends on whether I want ot have the conversation or not.

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<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>diversification</td>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
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<tr>
<td>But other times it’s more sort of just almost like a diary for myself, if that makes sense. Just so I can remember what I’ve done, things like that, and when</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think it becomes, I think you become a very boring person to follow if you’re only ever promoting your own stuff, so you know, I try and post thoughtful reflections about things, or amusing 140 character anecdotes, or yeah... I haven’t yet used it as a particularly creative medium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>to me, traditional contemporary Australian poetry, on the page, is like, a lot of it, not all of it, but a lot of it to me is like, going to a concert hall and listening to somebody whose studied for years played Mozart for three hours with the lights dimmed, whereas good spoken word is like listening to someone play Mozart on an electric guitar, you know with someone on a violin, in a park where you can bring your lunch and a beer and you know, like I just think it enhances the experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>I didn’t know what sort of medium I wanted to work in, but I knew I wanted to do something creative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I was always drawing as a kid, yeah. I’m pretty introverted, so instead of going out to play in the playground in primary school I would stay inside and draw pictures of birds and that sort of thing, and so I’ve always done arty sort of things through my whole entire schooling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It was just a matter of working out what medium I was going to work in. It was always going to be something arty, but just needed to work out what to do</td>
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<td>I always wrote stories from quite an early age</td>
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<td>back when I was a kid, it was video games, stuff like that. I used to be fascinated by how you could create your own designs and stuff like that</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’ve been doing art since I was in kindergarten, and it’s not really something that’s ever not been part of my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>happenstance</td>
<td>Happenstance</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>happenstance</td>
<td>Happenstance</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>happenstance</td>
<td>Happenstance</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>happenstance</td>
<td>Happenstance</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Community / participation</td>
<td>Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Multiple selves / collective identity</td>
<td>Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Accessibility for audience</td>
<td>Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Client preference</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
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<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Controlling behaviour</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
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<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>Loss of control</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Personal | others | Loss of control | Rayna | we made Tara pose, with the solidarity fist, it took us ages to get her to do it, and then that photo has gone so viral on the internet it’s ridiculous, it’s had something like 2000 shares on tumblr and it’s just, it just took off. And I’m like, ‘oooh, sorry Tara!’ [laughs] because she’s like, totally not a
revolutionary feminist, that’s not Tara at all. She may, but not now, she’s much more interested in being a princess.

<p>| Personal | others | mentor | Ben | my English teacher [...] she kind of encouraged me to go off and send it to, I entered it into the Young Poets, because it was that year that the Poetry Society opened up an under 18’s kind of section, so I entered it into the national young poets thing, and was runner up, and so went down to the launch thing in London, and read it |
| Personal | others | Online identity | Maxine | I feel amused by it, I do, in my non um, non-poetry life, you know, at the moment I’m just writing, but in terms of actually employment, I used to work for the department of human services and stuff like that, I do think you know at some point, when an employer Google’s me and don’t like what I’m saying, it’s probably going to have an impact. I mean realistically, I’m unlikely to want to work for that person anyway, but I do kind of often think well, you know, is it, doesn’t stop me from writing something, but I do often reflect on am I going to have to pay a price for this at some stage that is higher than I would like |
| Personal | others | Responsibility | Maxine | I felt a lot of responsibility that these people are here, you’ve got them for half an hour, what are you going to say to them |
| Personal | others | Training | Amanda | Because part of the process is not only what you get, but watching them work and collecting a piece of their art |
| Personal | play | Fun | Mike | while I was travelling the last four months, 95% of it is just me doing stuff just for fun, because I’m not being paid or, and I’ll never see it again, so it’s just for fun really |
| Personal | play | Fun, play | Casey | I sort of want to laugh at it I think, and I think it’s more effective form of protesting and more enjoyable, and if you get angry all the time and shout you’re going to burn out |
| Personal | play | Fun, play | Casey | it’s a bit of a funny thing to do |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>play</th>
<th>Fun, play</th>
<th>Casey</th>
<th>So I sort of like it’s a playful way to get people to express themselves I guess.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Audience reaction</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
<td>I was walking to the shop, past one of my pieces, and there was somebody with a huge grin on their face taking a picture of one of my pieces, and I just walked past, thinking ‘this is weird’, because I’ve never really seen a reaction, because I usually, like once it’s done I walk away, and I don’t usually return to it for like, a week or so [...] it was just the oddest thing ever seeing that. I still don’t know how to explain it really.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Rayna</td>
<td>It’s hard because you know [interruption from kid] having to balance you know the needs of children the needs of me, and the needs of my community, because you know I’m a really active member of my community, so things, you know, friends have needs, sometimes friends need some time out, so I’ll have kids for a day or whatever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>And it was kind of that realisation that you know there is so much power in that, there’s so much power in being given a room full of people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>I wanted to be that person and do that stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>It was really exciting to sort of feel like you can get noticed. And so that was my first taste of internet power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Exhilaration</td>
<td>Ghostzz</td>
<td>But I remember saying to him, the rush is 50% of the worth of doing it, if you know what I mean. Yeah, there’s a huge rush behind it. It’s really difficult to explain it, I don’t know if there is any way to explain it, it’s just one of those things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Frustration / stress</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Horribly stressful, when you break it down like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Frustration / stress</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>I constantly want to be able to do art for myself, for my joy of doing it, but I just don’t have the time, because I’ve gotta put so much more energy into getting everything ready for everyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>Live performance</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>And also I feel like I’m a performer, you know</td>
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</table>
and I come from an oral tradition

I guess until then I’d written political stuff but I hadn’t I hadn’t performed to the general public

my online presence as opposed to actually attending a gig or knowing me, or. Um, and you know, I say that poetry is like 25-30% of my life

So I try not to think about the permanency of it, just coz, it’s a bit stressful

If you know me, you’re not going to come to dinner and have me yelling at you

I feel like I’m existing more honestly or something, and I can kind, or more in line with… you know, I’m not just kind of taking it [...] letting off steam or something you know, you feel like you’re not making huge massive change

and I find it very hard to describe myself, describe my art style

One thing that I struggle with as an artist is self-critiquing I guess, it’s something I’m not that good at

But I actually, I won. I went and I read this poem and I won. And I remember being incredibly shocked

But I didn’t think my work would hold up as well on the page, and I still don’t think it holds up as well on the page. But obviously it holds up well enough that you know, people will buy it

as long as you’re not whack, I think that’s the ultimate kind of marker, is are you any good or not

I don’t really trust Facebook’s privacy policies anyway

I guess it’s not necessary and I’d rather have a vaguer, kind of abstract idea, and so that’s how I kind of use Facebook I suppose

I feel like I’m existing more honestly or something, and I can kind, or more in line with… you know, I’m not just kind of taking it [...] letting off steam or something you know, you feel like you’re not making huge massive change

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and I find it very hard to describe myself, describe my art style

One thing that I struggle with as an artist is self-critiquing I guess, it’s something I’m not that good at

But I actually, I won. I went and I read this poem and I won. And I remember being incredibly shocked

But I didn’t think my work would hold up as well on the page, and I still don’t think it holds up as well on the page. But obviously it holds up well enough that you know, people will buy it

as long as you’re not whack, I think that’s the ultimate kind of marker, is are you any good or not

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I guess it’s not necessary and I’d rather have a vaguer, kind of abstract idea, and so that’s how I kind of use Facebook I suppose
| Personal | self-protection | Denial of intimacy | Mike | I think there’s a bit of a mystery if you don’t know the persons face with just the personal page, I sort of have rules, where um, I don’t really comment much on other things, I don’t socialise that much, I don’t have too much of my personality come across with that approach. And I don’t really have my face on there. Not because I’m that underground or that illegal, I’d rather keep my face separate from my art work, although it’s not really necessary. |
| Personal | self-protection | Denial of intimacy | Mike | he passed out on me three times, and totally freaked me out, and I thought, is this what people do? You know, is this a normal reaction? |
| Personal | self-protection | Frustration / stress | Amanda | I think if people had reacted you know in a really negative way, I still would have gone on to keep doing what I was doing, but I think it would have been a good while before I got up in front of the mike again |
| Personal | self-protection | Live performance | Maxine | So whilst I was really excited about being a tattooer, I knew I wasn’t learning the right information, so my conscience got a hold of me, and I got the hell out of there |
| Personal | specialisation | Marginalisation | Maxine | poetry is a risky choice, and spoken word ... is such a niche area of poetry |
| Personal | specialisation | Marginalisation | Rayna | it’s fascinating how, because it’s you know women’s histories are marginalised histories, and craft history is marginalised history so you know woman using craft to organise and educate is probably one of the most marginalised histories that you can come up with, so finding that sort of information has basically been left to the internet because that’s the only place that it exists, because it’s information that won’t be published |
| Personal | specialisation | Privilege | Casey | I do feel that sort of like the yeah, privileged enclave sort of thing, and get frustrated with it |
| Personal | specialisation | Specialisation | Maxine | I know a lot of poets, it’s entertaining, they love to entertain people, but I guess for me, that was the moment that I thought, you know, I’m a political poet, this is what I’m
<p>| Personal | strategy | Archiving   | Rayna | If you’re into making pretty little bows for hairclips for little girls to wear, then you can quite easily miss the awesome specialisation of making them. |
| Personal | strategy | Change-making | Maxine | It’s all about I guess impact, and hopefully initiating people to think and change. |
| Personal | strategy | Early adoption of social media | Casey | Like with the Howard eBay thing it was when it was just MySpace, and that was, I thought, sort of effective and exciting, and then Facebook came in and when it started, like if you started an event or something, it had a lot of impact, it kind of a lot of people would see it and it was kind of unique because not everyone was on board I guess, and so we got sort of a lot of traction from that. |
| Personal | strategy | Etiquette | Ben | I think people forget about etiquette. The ease of communication, like, makes people forget that it’s still polite to like ask people if they want to like, receive it. |
| Personal | strategy | Legality | Mike | And I’m still doing illegal stuff, but it’s part of that, that where when it’s in the laneways in the city where it’s illegal, but it’s kinda a grey area. |
| Personal | strategy | Permanency | Amanda | I need you to relax, so that I can in turn relax, and you know, we can get the result we both want. |
| Personal | strategy | Personal connection | Amanda | So it’s a good source of inspiration and also networking, um so I have a lot of friends that work in the States and throughout Europe by those formats and organise you know tours for people, trades of art or go overseas and work for them and vice versa. |
| Personal | strategy | Personal connection | Amanda | You can see where an artist has been or where they’re going to be. |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
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I feel like there’s a real lack of queer female voices out there so I really wanted to, so I know that I would devour anything that I could find, and there’s a lot of crap there, and I would watch it and listen to it just because it’s gay women? So I was like, I could do something really crap and people would still be interested in it, but not if they can’t even access it, so that one I really want it to be consumed but at the moment it’s not, like the Facebook page is ‘Queer Feminist Podcast’ and when I figure it all out, I’m going to upload it onto the net so that hopefully the liberal use of the word cunt in it gets missed by the censors and I can still post it places.

I do think that poetry is a primarily aural medium, and that is how I receive it.

I am trying to be more integrated with the whole social media platforms, but I sometimes feel like I’m battling with them you know, like against them rather than with them, you know, and keeping everything up to date kind of takes me away from being creative.

I think that activism has changed, and I think that it’s just because some things have been so effective you know, which have been often by women.

I don’t like Instagram. It’s really annoying to me. It’s not a bad tool at all but it’s just when people take a picture, upload it on Instagram, add a few filters and call themselves photographers.

I don’t tend to have photos of myself mostly because I tend to take the photo. So I can’t be in them [laughs] […] it tends to be the only photos that are about my practice that have got me in them are ones that get taken by journalist photographers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intimate sharing</th>
<th>Rayna</th>
<th>certainly when my children, my twins were born, because it was such an interesting story, I did share that story with the world, and share images of them</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate play</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>I gave my daughter a peach and she thought it was an animal, and refused to eat it because it was furry</td>
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