Locating the Self in Web 2.0: explorations in creativity, identity and digital expression

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Abstract

An overarching assumption of Internet usage is that it allows users in everyday life as well as users in public institutions to engage in spheres of media communication. The development of Web 2.0 is facilitating greater interactivity for mainstream Internet users. This is resulting in everyday users and public institutions developing new forms of communication. Some of these forms involve improvisation in communication patterns whereas others require a degree of innovation in developing new frameworks for communication. To explore how individuals and institutions are engaging in Web 2.0 involves considering the dynamics of creativity, identity and forms of expression in digital culture. In this paper I discuss the shaping of the Web in relation to the case of the British Library and a study of student-led research projects.

Introduction

In this paper I explore how individuals and institutions are locating themselves and engaging in Web 2.0 activity. An overarching assumption of Internet usage is that it allows users in everyday life as well as users in public institutions to engage in spheres of media communication. To explore how individuals and institutions are engaging in Web 2.0 involves considering the dynamics of creativity, identity and forms of expression in digital culture. In this paper I first discuss the shaping of the Web in relation to questions of self in cultures of communication and consider creativity within various cultural scenarios. I move on to define and discuss Web 2.0, the self and culture. These sections provide a framework for the case studies, which are then presented, first the case of the British Library and second, the case of student-led research projects. The paper concludes and suggests further areas of research.

Shaping the Internet and the World Wide Web

Abbate (2000) argues that the Internet is constantly developing in line with its developers' commitment to flexibility and diversity. She points out that the communicative characteristics of Internet are constructed

through a series of social choices (ibid.).[1] The development of the Internet as a communication tool was enhanced by the creation of the World Wide Web (WWW). A key aspect that shaped the WWW was the way Berners-Lee designed it on universalistic principles in order to build an environment that enabled people to discuss diverse issues from a range of perspectives in an open and accepting way (Berners-Lee, 1999, p.226). He sought to develop decentralized systems, whether they are systems of computers, knowledge, or people so that:

We don't find the individual being subjugated by the whole. We don't find the needs of the whole being subjugated by the increasing power of the individual. But we might see more understanding in the struggles between these extremes (Berners-Lee, 1999, p.228).

This founding idea highlights how Berners-Lee conceptualised and wanted to address the relationship between individuals and collectives or systems. He sought to facilitate freedom in communication by ensuring that the WWW enabled individuals to send content (through packets) anywhere in a network. The emergence of Web 2.0 sometimes termed the Social Web facilitates cooperation and sharing amongst users: users can be individuals within their networks and institutions with a remit to ensure access to culture and knowledge generation. The emergence of a new communications environment based on the co-presence and convergence of mass media and new media is shaping the way individuals and institutions are engaging in communicative fora (Harrison & Wessels, 2005; Wessels, 2008). The expansion of types of media means that analysis needs address modes of participation at both individual and institutional levels. The question to address is: how are actors in Web 2.0 engaging and locating themselves in Web 2.0? This central question raises subsidiary questions of:

- How are public institutions changing communication?
- How are individuals engaging in Web 2.0?

The use of the WWW by broader society raises the issue of the social relations in which technology is mobilised. Robins and Webster (1999) argue that the Internet mediates capitalist social relations and its use is extending market criteria and conditions into all dimensions of social life. They say that it threatens to penetrate even deeper into all realms of life, such as leisure and identity for example (Robins &

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[1] These choices are organized socially through a process of production, narrative, and participation in theatres of innovation in which actors from various constituencies interact to produce change. The social and cultural dynamics of economic and technological change are therefore influential in shaping the ways that technologies, as social artefacts, are embedded within the social relations of society (Wessels, 2009).

Webster, 1999, p.7). This dynamic feeds into the way the Internet is mediating the relationship between the individual and the whole. One problematic is the contradiction between commercialization on the one hand and Berners-Lee's vision on the other hand, which raises issues in the positioning of the self in the Social Web and socio-cultural life. This problematic is significant in that it raises questions about the role of institutions in mediating culture in digital communication on the one hand, and on the other hand, it raises questions about how individuals are engaging in culture and communication digitally.

Considering the Self and Creativity

Turkle (1984) sees WWW (as part of ICT) as a resource for modern consciousnesses trying to make sense of the world as well as a medium for projecting selves and identities. Turkle argues that the interface between the computer and cyberspace symbolizes identity and it can be the basis of new aesthetic values, new rituals, new philosophy, and new cultural forms (1984, p. 166). She says that the windows interface is a symbol for thinking about the self as a multiple and distributed system (Turkle, 1997). In a similar vein Poster (1990) posits that human identity is constituted through structures of communication, which raises the issue of how modes of information structure the development of identity in socio-cultural life. Theorizations of social identity suggests that identity is best understood a process (Jenkins, 1996). Jenkins (ibid.) argues that individual identity, which is embodied in self-hood, is made meaningful through an individual's interactions with others in the social world. In regard to the conceptualization of the self there is debate about the relative influence of social structures and personal creativity in the development of the self. Cohen (1994) argues that the 'self' is creative. He posits that individuals develop senses of themselves in culture. However, culture is not a determining factor in shaping selves but is the meaningful fabric through which human endeavour and selves are constructed. This cultural realisation of the self raises questions about the ways in which selves engage with social dynamics. Socio-cultural mores, institutions and technologies constitute the social environment and context in which selves engage - as well as - providing some of the resources for modes of engagement. This sense of dynamic culture as a fabric in the development of selves involves understanding creativity in relation to the formation of knowledge and identity.

Liep (2001) defines creativity as 'activity that produces something new through the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices and forms' (ibid., p.2). This type of action is found along a continuum that ranges from small-scale everyday activity to intensive creativity concentrated in a single period or place. One aspect of creativity is the way novel ideas are understood and taken up in social

environments – with some cases involving innovation and others improvisation. Innovation refers to a radical transformation to process and product whereas improvisation hints to conventional explorations of a set of possibilities within a framework of rules. Creativity produces various outcomes for society in that the new artefacts and practices it produces can be put to various uses, both positive and negative, when judged in relation to normative and moral positions.

Creativity relates to modernity in a specific way. Miller (1994) argues that the continuous change of modernity sets a precedent for humans to be creative because they, and their social formations, must 'forge for [themselves] the criteria by which [they] will live' (Miller, 1994, p. 62). In the West, where modernity emerged, these conditions are linked with the rise and continuation of capitalism. The competition of the market place saw the emergence of entrepreneurs who sought to change the means of production to create new commodities to satisfy new desires. A further aspect of this social change is that engineers and scientists became a creative dimension within society. In parallel artists were freed from patronage giving them the freedom to develop novel and individual styles to compete in the market. Within these conditions creativity took two forms: one of secular and rational scientific discovery and one of a more emotional and spiritual creativity within the worlds of artistic work (Liep, 2001).

These changes take different forms and are articulated differently within a world system. However, in general terms in late modernity cultural production is decentred, which is undermining the authority of cultural elites (Chaney, 2002). This is seen in the way in which consumers are creative in constructing lifestyles (Chaney, 1996) and everyday aesthetics (Featherstone, 1991). There is a rise of new professionals who focus on the consumption of novelties, events and the aesthetic experience creating new distinctions and sensibilities (Liep, 2001). In some cases this is understood in terms of vernacular creativity, which seeks to bridge vernacular culture and popular art (Lubbock, 2005). In this context, creativity is part of a range of popular and everyday contexts (Lofgren, 1994). The term 'creativity' has to some degree been adopted by the business community to support managerial strategies in pushing for ongoing innovation. However, commentators from cultural studies have moved beyond these universalistic cognitive ideas of creativity within management spheres. They point out to the importance of cultural resources (Negus & Pickering, 2004) and networks of social practice, collaboration and negotiation (Becker, 1982) in most types of cultural creativity. New media, including Web 2.0 is part of cultural resource and networks, and it is a communication medium that spans across individual users and commercial users as well as public institutions as users.

However, although the market and individuals are key actors in everyday creativity, the role of public institutions in open and democratic society remains significant. The rise of the public sphere in the emergence of capitalism and modernity created an arena for public debate that expanded into the need

for an informed public (Wessels, 2009b). The expansion of the vote and education were part of a broader trend for more inclusive engagement in cultural activity organised within a framework of the nation state (Roche, 2000). This trend led to the founding and development of public institutions such as museums and libraries for educational and cultural purposes (ibid.). Recent developments in how knowledge is defined and represented have led public institutions to reflect on their practices (Karp & Lavine, 1991). Public institutions have moved away from the construction of objective reality towards more open spaces for debate, experimentation and confrontation (Cameron, 1971). Part of this move involves understanding institutions in relation to the communities in which they are located and with which they interact (Karp, Kreamer & Lavine, 1992).

The move is part of the rise of multi-culturalism and the acceptance of difference and diversity within society. The way in which knowledge, cultural and material artefacts are understood is more open to different interpretations and contestations. These dynamics shape the way in which institutions are representing knowledge and culture. This context requires them to balance the conservation of knowledge with the provision of frameworks for validating knowledge. To achieve this institutions seek to include a range of voices and perspectives into the way they select and represent culture. This involves them ensuring access and participation for everyone. The cultural context of late modernity is therefore one that in which individuals and institutions are negotiating the ways in which they understand themselves and others - and both are in effect - reflexive (Giddens, 1991). This condition provides a context for creativity in that creativity often emerges within and between fabrics of cultural activity that are characterized by discontinuities and discrepancies that foster searches for new meaningful connections.

Reflexivity links with creativity because creativity involves 'the recognition of a novel analogy between previously unrelated field' (Boden, 1994, p. 32) that emerges in open spaces, gaps and interstitial zones (Rosaldo, et al., 1993). Creators and their social groups are motivated by desires grounded in their experiences and spaces they inhabit, which suggests that creativity is located in realms of the habitus (Friedman, 1994 as cited by Liep, 2001, p 8). A further dimension of this is that creativity follows a dialectic process in which public representations become deeply personal symbols that give identity and direction to subjects (Barth cited by Liep, 2001). The experiential aspect of creativity and the response to creations shows how novel ideas products and services become accepted. For instance, in the field of science, peer groups judge scientific creativity in relation to explicit paradigms. In relation to cultural creativity, the acceptance of a 'creation' rests with the dispositions of others within cultural life-worlds. The more open the cultural engagement is with cultural innovations the more creativity extends beyond intellectual and aesthetic play to the desires and emotions of ordinary experience (Liep, 2001).

Web 2.0: the self and culture

The openness of the Internet allows it to be shaped by users who, through their own use, become its producers too. For instance, nodes are easy and cheap to establish and, through open co-operation, a variety of spontaneous applications resulted in e-mail, bulletin boards, chat rooms, the modem, and hypertext. The concept of Web 2.0 as 'social computing' serves to highlight the idea of a second-generation of web-based communities that aim to facilitate (co-)creativity, collaboration and sharing amongst users (Frissen, 2008). Frissen (2008) points out that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes Web 2.0 as the 'participative web' because its new intelligent web services enables users to be more active on the Internet. The defining feature of most Web 2.0 services is a cluster of dynamic social networks (Frissen, 2008).[2] The relatively low cost and ease of use means that Web 2.0 services are opening up new ways for mainstream Internet users to share, adapt and create content (ibid.). The socio-cultural development of Web 2.0 is therefore potentially offering new modes of participation in a communications environment (Wessels, 2009).

The socio-cultural context of Web 2.0 involves going beyond the reflexivity of consumption in the formation of identity (Lash & Urry, 1994) and the 'aestheticisation of everyday life' (Featherstone, 1991) to exploring the forms of reflexive production and consumption in the exchange of knowledge for the formation and expression of identity. This involves addressing the differing ways institutions and individuals engage in self-defined creativity in relation to their processes of identity formation as they engage in, and produce, digital expression and knowledge. Social actors accomplish cultural change as they engage with the world around them, which is manifested through ordinary and extraordinary experience and ordered through routines. The concerns of everyday life in late modernity are articulated and constituted through what Dorothy Smith (1988) calls the 'materiality of consciousness'. She argues that consciousness is realised through artefacts, technologies and symbolic forms, which provide the means for overlapping physical and virtual environments, asserting that 'the simple social acts of tuning in, ringing up, and logging on can therefore have complex meanings for subjects' (Smith, 1988, p.86). She is referring to the way these practices constantly overlay and interlace both the situated and the mediated worlds of late modernity (Moores, 2000, p.9).

Chaney argues that the way actors adopt, use, reject – namely select performances, services and artefacts

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[2] Web 2.0 encompasses a wide range of applications, such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, podcasts, social bookmarking sites, auction sites, online games and peer-to-peer services. These services allow users to publish, distribute and share pieces of content (e.g. blogs, Flickr, YouTube); to work or play together (e.g. Second Life, Habbo Hotel) or to create a collective body of knowledge (Wikipedia). Furthermore they facilitate users to attach their own interpretations to bits of information in the form of 'social bookmarks' or 'tags' (e.g. de.li.cious) and to produce and share reviews and preferences (e.g. Amazon, Last.fm, TripAdvisor). Particularly successful are social networking sites, which offer an attractive and accessible platform for users to interact and to share social capital (e.g. Facebook, MySpace) (Frissen, 2008).

from the culture industries – is how practical understandings are institutionalized' (Chaney, 2002, p.53). The media environment is intimately linked with everyday life and its elements are mutually constitutive of the mediated and situated life that is characteristic of late modern life. However, as Silverstone (2005) shows, this does not mean that media and its cultural content are straightforwardly adopted, rather the process by which both the forms of media and its content are interpreted and embedded in social life constitutes its form within broader media and cultural frameworks and environments.   These broad dynamics raise questions regarding the nature of creativity in socio-cultural life and about how senses of self are realised in networks that mediated the self and culture – in other words, where are selves located in creative activities that shape the Web and produce novel forms of communication.

Case Studies self-expression and engagement

To address the above point requires that research addresses the ways institutions and individuals engage in self-defined creativity in relation to their processes of identity formation as they engage in, and produce, digital expression and knowledge. The British Library as a public institution is engaging in innovative projects in which identities and knowledge are developed and expressed in digital forms. This process involves a rethinking of the process and framework of cultural work. Individuals too, in their everyday lives are positioning themselves and finding ways to engage creatively with knowledge in the expression of identity. A two-year study of a 120 final year undergraduate students in a British University explores perceptions of self in Web-related activity. The study shows that the process of creativity in individual contexts involves re-imagining and reflection of senses of self and communication as students develop new forms of expression.

The British Library

The British Library is developing Web 2.0 in a variety of ways[3] and it is aiming to foster participation and

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[3] Thus for example, users of the British library narrate their experience of the British library in relation to their own areas of research on the 'my story' website (http://www.bl.uk/about/annual/2006to2007/mystory.html). The library also has several blogs that extend from a general blog (http://www.bl.uk/blogs) to more specific blogs such as the curator's taking liberties blog that is a site for struggles for liberty (http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/takingliberties). The 'breaking the rules' blog supports the: 'Printed Face of European Avant-garde 1900 to 1937' exhibition (http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/breakingtherules). They also have an active network Facebook http://www.new.facebook.com/pages/The-British-Library/8579062138), Facebook 'fan page' (http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-British-Library/8579062138) and Facebook network of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2373820409). Other innovations using Web 2.0 include the British Library's sacred texts mashup with Google Maps: http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/map/map.html   and   a   notes   feature   on   Turning   the   Pages   2.0 (http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/virtualbooks/index.html).   The British Library also linked a flickr group linked to the Ramayana exhibition (http://www.flickr.com/groups/ramayana_now).

engagement online. As the British Library seeks to shape and use Web 2.0 it has to think about its identity and role as a public institution and how it can frame that work using Web 2.0. This rethinking of identity, role and process is illustrated in the Greek Papyri Digitisation Project. The British Library holds over 3000 Greek papyri in its Western Manuscripts collection, of these manuscripts, over 250 papyri feature 'literary' texts, while the majority of them bear 'documentary' texts. Digitising these manuscripts and interoperating with similar digital collections and related projects are part of the emerging digital research infrastructure of the British Library.

Papyri are distributed over many collections in different institutions, which create a problem in developing knowledge because many papyri are only meaningfully understood in larger numbers. For example, the British Library holds over 260 papyri of the 'Zenon' archive[4] with the other major holdings of the archive being at Ann Arbor, Florence, Giessen, Manchester, and New York, and approximately half of it is in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo. The dispersal has certain benefits, but it has also retarded the systematic study of the Archive. Those working at the British Library think that the integration of their digitally available texts with digital surrogates will contribute to a significantly enriched and popular resource in the study of Papyri.

To digitise all Greek papyri the British Library is integrating existing content metadata and developing protocols and services to synchronise these. It is also developing a toolkit that will allow the addition of user-generated content, such as transcriptions aligned to the surrogates up to glyph-level.   The transformation of access to cultural artefacts and processes of knowledge generation through digitization is involving a re-imaging of links between the role of the British Library and the role of the users in creating a new service. The diagram below shows the responsibilities of the British Library, which include conserving, reserving and curating – key aspects of its identity. It has to work these traditional aspects of its identity into a new environment of cultural creativity and intellectual practice.

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[4]   This is the most important single archive from the Graeco-Roman period yet recovered.
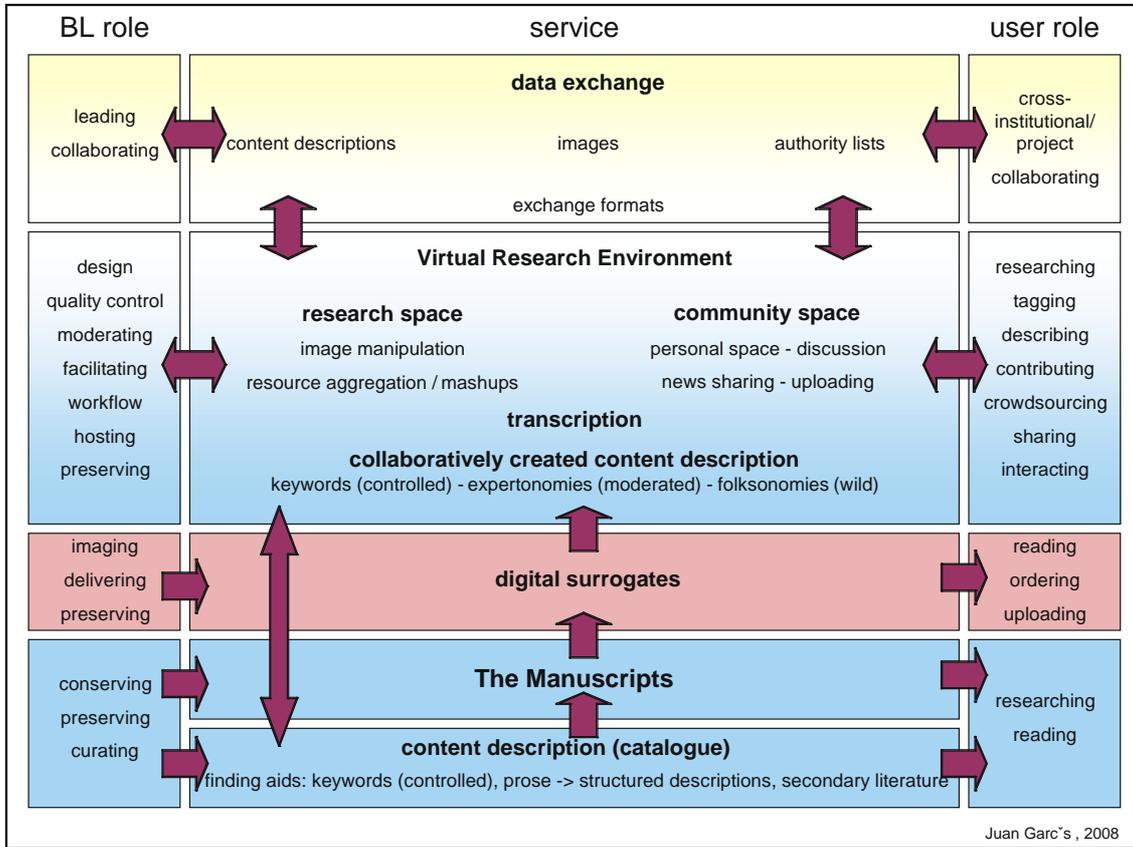
Figure 1: Outline of Framework for Digitizing Greek Papyri at the British Library (Source: British Library)

As the diagram shows the British Library does this by providing an interactive virtual research environment. This space is both a research and community space in which users – whether scholarly researchers or lay researchers - engage in cultural debate and exchange of knowledge. The digital tools allow both the institution and the users to create links between cultural objects and knowledge. In so doing they are creating new knowledge and are transforming the practices of research whilst maintaining the identity of the British Library and researcher identity. Nonetheless, these identities are opening up to other perspectives, and this process is enabling knowledge to evolve. The British Library has to ensure that the development of knowledge is both made more assessable whilst maintaining the quality and rigour of academic practice and curatorship. This example shows how an institution is engaging with Web 2.0 to find ways to link cultural objects and knowledge. The Library is designing Web 2.0 services in such a way to ensure its core activities of curatorship are maintained. Thus it maintains core aspects of its

identity whilst also finding new ways to interact with users and widen access and engagement in knowledge production.

British Undergraduate Students

The other aspect of creativity and Web 2.0 is how individual users are engaging with it. A study of 120 final year undergraduate students at a British University between 2006 and 2008 identified four main themes in Web related activity that reveal how creativity is enabled or constrained through the inter-subjective worlds of students. The main themes are: personalised home pages; online participatory culture; social networking sites; and online cultures as unique cultures.

1. Identities through the Construction of Personal Homepages

The research found that students focus on personalised homepages because they are increasingly popular forms of self-expression and can be seen as 'a self-conscious articulation of self-identity (Bell, 2001). One student argues that: 'during my time at university, web pages such as Myspace and Facebook that offer networked templates for 'DIY' – do it yourself' - homepage building have gone from the obscure to the norm'. Students identify with the trend for personalised websites because, as previous studies on homepages show, there is a bias towards youth in the authorship of personal homepages (ibid.). Giddens (1991) argues that early adulthood is an intense time in identity formation, which suggests that construction of homepages for young people might be a particularly poignant expression of self. Chandler (1998) draws comparison between constructing identity on the bedroom walls of the adolescent home and the construction of homepages with 'wallpaper', posters and other images and mementos.

The aim of one student project was to explore not just how the personal information on websites is presented but why respondents give out information of themselves. The student created a homepage on Myspace (www.myspace.com/192762227) and she invited users to describe their perspectives of their own homepage experience. The ethos of her page was to create discussion about homepages and identity with participants commenting in the guest book. The student drew McCall and Simmon's argument that 'a role-identity is [the individual's] imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position (McCall and Simmon 1978, p. 65). Her research sought to question the assumption that the Web has blurred traditional boundaries between an individual's imagined identity and an embodied and situated identity. She further questions how the post-modernists belief that the

dislocation of the body from the delivery of the desired expression allows for increased freedom of identity formation. Although 'the web is a medium ideally adapted to the dynamic purposes of identity maintenance' (Chandler, 1998, p. 4) it also provokes it because 'people's notion of traditional identity is called into question when experiencing life online and we are moved instead to think about multiple windows and parallel lives online (Turkle, 1999, p. 643).

The student's research found that homepage sites are mostly a process of being 'under construction' because students are constantly updating them and reconfiguring them (c.f. Walker 2000; Chandler, 1998). Furthermore, her findings show that the expression of self and identity is more than the construction of homepage information. She found that the site and the links to other sites are important in the construction of identity. She argues that the relational categories on homepages describe identity as much as personal information does in that affiliations to broader activities or institutions are used to illustrate identity. She saw similarities of these links with 'face-to-face visual cues such as bumper stickers and tee shirt declarations' (Walker, 2000, p. 104). She argues that the activity of linking of the associations on web-pages in relation to reading and producing identity suggests that 'one's identity emerges from whom one knows, one's associations and connections' (Turkle, 1999, p. 258). She sums her research up in Miller's words, which are: 'show me what your links are, and I'll tell you what kind of person you are' (1995, p. 5).

2. Online Participatory Culture

Another theme is online participatory culture. One project from this theme explored online fan culture, looking specifically at fan blogging communities. It focuses on the Doctor Who media fan community blog on LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com). LiveJournal has just under 2 million active accounts (although it is probable that many of these are pseudonym or double accounts) (Sixapart.com, 2006). It has a well-established network of a wide range of fandoms – media and non-media – and this network of networks provides overviews of the majority of the fannish resources on LiveJournal. For example, the *Doctor Who* fandom is a high-traffic community, with 2334 listed members.

The project examines in way in which networking, information sharing and knowledge creation, and identity and virtuality are apparent. The LiveJournal system is comprised of both personal journals and community journals. Personal journals can be created anonymously and free of charge (although paid accounts with extra features are available) and only the creator of a specific journal can operate it and make entries (or posts) to the blog. LiveJournal users with personal journal account can set up

community journals on which any member of the community can make posts. Personal and community journals consist of a chosen username, an entries page and a profile page. The entries page displays the recent posts to the journal in chronological order (see below).

Figure 2: Layout of *DoctorWho* LiveJournal entries page

The profile page gives information about the user or community. It shows users' icons (small images specific to users that are displayed alongside their posts); it lists users' interests including links to lists of journals; it shows which journals and communities users have 'friended' (or in the case of communities, which users are members). LiveJournal users can easily friend or de-friend journal communities and personal journals (although there is a certain etiquette generally observed). This allows users to create an individualised network of interests. It also allows wider systems or networks of journals to form, which in turn allows users to more easily locate and disseminate information, and to broaden their network (Raynes-Goldie, 2004, p. 5).

**Figure 3:** Layout of *DoctorWho* LiveJournal Community profile page

Each post has a link to leave and read comments, which are listed under each individual entry. Unlike most blogging services, which merely list comments in descending chronological order, LiveJournal allows specific comments to be answered directly and groups the 'threads'. This allows users to respond to individual comments to original posts and for 'conversations' to develop and be followed. The research found that the participants of LiveJournal fan communities are active networkers in sharing information and constructing fan based knowledge. Furthermore, through both personal and community journals they express identity virtually through the anonymous personal journals.   The three issues of networking, information sharing and knowledge generation, and identity and virtuality are important in participating in online fan cultures.

3. Why Facebook?

Another theme that emerged was that students wanted to look at their own communication practices. One student conducted analysis into his own Internet usage by examining the websites he had looked at during a week in the 'history' section of his Internet browsing software. He also looked at a particular analysis of one hour of browsing typical of his usual daily Internet activity. The five website he spends most of his time on are: BBC News; TEAM*talk*.com; Windows Live Hotmail; Facebook; and the University

website.

His Internet usage is comprised of two domains, which are work and leisure pursuits. He uses the University website for his studies and Teamtalk Football News for leisure. He noted that corporations dominate the websites, whether they are educational institutions or News organizations. He was, however, surprised to discover that the website he spent 22% of his time on, making it his second most popular web page, was Facebook. He argues that he could not easily bracket this social networking web service into either work or leisure because he felt that it covered most of his life. He therefore undertook an auto-ethnography to better understand his participation within it and how that reflected his interactions in his social life.
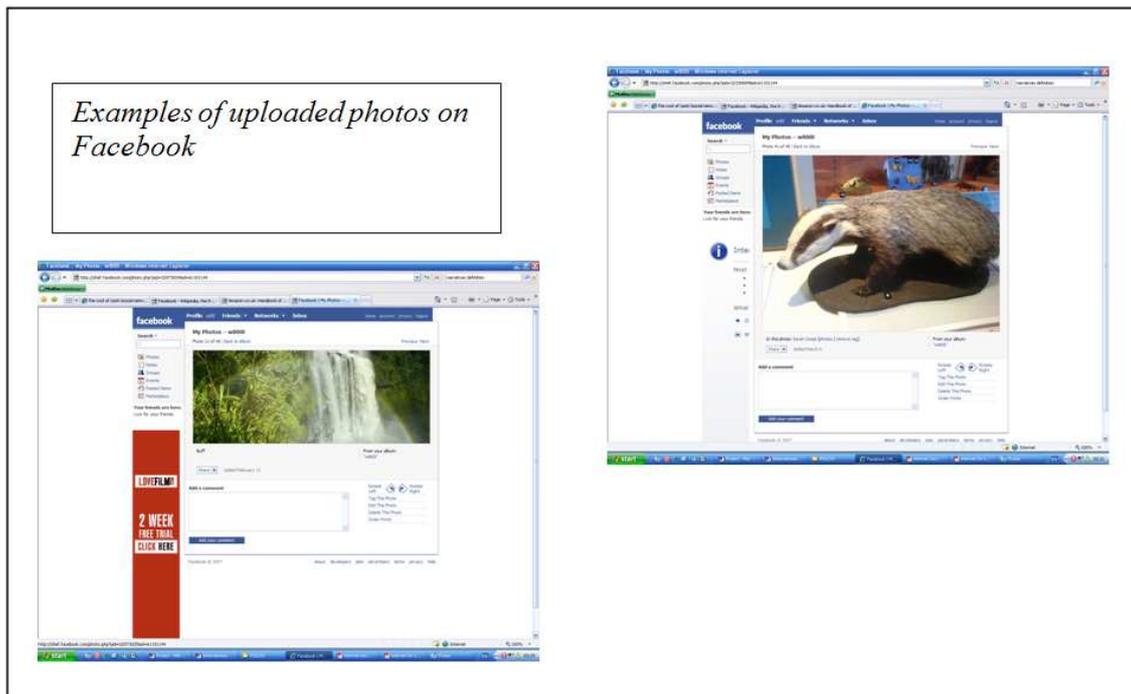
Figure 4: Examples of uploaded photos on Facebook

The student found that not only did he network with friends and exchange photographs and other e-gifts but that significant 'instances' occurred that gave meaning to his use of Facebook. He noted that there were several instances where the site has created a noticeable impact away from the Internet and technological fora. One example is the development of sexual relations initiated through Facebook. Another example is the disqualification of a candidate for the position of Student Union President at

another University because a group the candidate created on Facebook to garner support broke the rules of the elections (www.bathstudent.com, 2007). The student argues that instances such as this highlight not only the impact that Facebook can have on social events but also the need to study Facebook, the Internet, and all facets of 'new media' as integrated into the existing human world rather than imagining them to be separate entities. This example shows that some use of Web 2.0 is part of the ongoing culture of everyday life. Creativity in this context involves users improvising with existing communication tools. This example firmly locates the self in the identity of 'being a student' and shows how Web 2.0 can serve to link the associations of interests that students have.

4. Learning Life in RuneScape: online gaming as a unique culture.

Another student sought to explore whether MMORPGs have a culture that is unique to the virtual world or if it is reflective of off-line life. The student selected MMORPG 'RuneScape' because of its accessibility and lack of need for downloads as well as its status as the fourth most popular MMORPG (as rated by www.NPD.com in 2004). The creators of RuneScape portray it as more than just a game because it is an: 'evolving world of remarkable depth and flexibility' (www.runescape.com). The flexibility is expressed in the players' ability to play their own games because nothing in the game is predetermined. The virtual world of RuneScape can involve fighting, hunting, magic, learning trades, or wandering around socialising or completing quests. RuneScape is advertised as having a strong community. The ethnographic research sought to explore this sense of community by observing whether common values and believes inform behaviour online.

The student found the literature on online games and MMORPG fascinating but felt nervous about becoming a cyber gamer. She felt that she understood the concept but did not know how to participate in the game. She found the initial process of registering and creating a character clear and accessible, with no need for downloads. This gave her the confidence to start gaming without deep understanding of the game. She was an online gaming virgin but found she was rapidly morphing into Xiaphon the II a male ranger from RuneScape.

Figure 5: The design page to construct a character

In her ethnographic account she says her character first had to be 'born' and she had to learn the basic skills before continuing into the full MMORPG world. In 'Tutorial Island' she learnt how to read the map, understand the symbols and acquire basic skills such as running, combat, mining, smelting, fishing, fire lighting and much. She felt that although this improved her knowledge of the technological skills needed within RuneScape, it did not reveal much about the culture of RuneScape.

Figure 6: The castle courtyard in Lumbridge

She wrote that 'after completing 'Tutorial Island', Xiaphon was transported to a busy castle courtyard in Lumbridge… and so Xiaphon's life began in RuneScape.'

In her ethnography, the student found that the gamers' common knowledge and common cultural values gave them a framework for their online activity. To participate in the game she found she had to understand the hierarchy and language of RuneScape and also had to gain an insiders' knowledge of what actions mean and how others perceive them. She argues that her ethnography shows that 'online gamers have a cyber culture which units all the members through common understanding'. She concludes that although RuneScape is located within the public domain so access into the cultural setting is easy, learning about the culture is a matter of trial and error - and patience. She feels that it is important to explore cyber cultures such as those developing within MMORPGs even though cyberspace cannot be separated from its cultural context (Bell, 2001). This is because gamers are in the process of evolving their own cultural space online which has its own language, structures, values, and shared knowledge. This project shows how culture and identity have an internal logic in gaming online cultures that gamers learn and

identify with, and develop through use.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 provides a medium for greater participation in cultural and communicative spheres. It can also foster a more creative engagement with and between social worlds. However, given its networking and interactive character, the way in which individuals and institutions engage and participate in communicative worlds is requiring a certain amount of creativity – both in innovative terms and in terms of improvisation. Furthermore the cultural fabric of this interactive form of communication is opening up the spaces in which 'selves' position and define themselves. Public institutions such as the British Library are developing innovative new services that seek to improve access to cultural resources and foster greater interaction between service users, curators and others in networks of knowledge generation. The British Library's sense of itself - its identity- is influential as it positions itself to develop Web 2.0 creatively. Its sense of self underpins the way it is developing an infrastructure for Web 2.0 - namely its role of curator - to conserve cultural artefacts and to facilitate the production of knowledge, is the woven into the virtual space it is creating.

There is also a variety to individual creativity in various aspects of Web 2.0. The way in which the students through their projects engage in mediated worlds shows that their own senses of self, their interests and patterns of associations are influential in the cultural fabric of their interaction in the Web. In general terms, the student projects show that students are both improvising and being creative in how they engage with Web 2.0. They also show that the take up and participation in these worlds of communication involves students reflecting on their own interests, how they engage in the world around them and how they learn to engage in new cultural worlds. This process of new engagements in communication is resulting in them reflecting on their senses of self and how they learn new practices of communication and participation. The students are experimenting with their identity and the Web, which is one aspect of their creative developments of self, a process that is part of culture.

The research discussed in this paper suggests that researchers, students and/or institutions creatively develop new networks of communication and participation in the cultural activity that generates knowledge of the self and other. These types of ongoing engagements in Web 2.0 indicate that both individuals and institutions are negotiating their relationship between selves and others in the processes of a constant development of identity. To do this, actors draw on commercial and publicly available resources and position themselves through their own creativity – whether by innovating or improvising –

to engage in digital communication. Further research is needed to ascertain what the conditions are for innovation in an interactive production of knowledge in relation to interactions between public institutions and user groups. Research also needs to address how users in everyday life improvise and how those improvisations are drawn from social life in general in developing innovations in communication.

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