

**School of Design & Art
Department of Art**

Multiple-Identity Performance Practice and the Self: All MySelves on YouTube and I

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

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ABSTRACT

In the context of contemporary performance art practice, this research examines how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept. It is comprised of a written exegesis and a performance art practice that is hosted within YouTube's video blogging (vlogging) community and also within a live art setting. In the exegesis I autoethnographically analyse how my practice relates to my self-concept, to gain wider understandings about how the performer's self and practice intermingle in an iCultural context.

Initially, my performance of the Other (Riggins 1997) was motivated by a desire to avoid the self-absorption often attributed to artists who perform themselves (Marsh 2014). To emulate fragmented postmodern selflessness (Grodin and Lindlof 1996), I performed multiple non-autobiographic vlogging personae, each hosted on their own YouTube channel. By acting my personae, I tried to feign the Other and conceal my 'self.' However, acting elicited my personal inner resources (McGaw 1975). Performing the Other also liberated parts of myself that were too confronting to directly voice (Pearson 1996). Thus, my personae represented my real personal identities. Using YouTube's archival potential and social networking allowances, my artist-self storied connective dialogues between my multiple vlogging personae. Because these personae corresponded to my self-conceptual identities, their stories reflected my personal self-narrative (Capps and Ochs 1996). I posit that this practice illuminates an iCultural self that is multiple, yet anchored to a reflexive storying core self.

The relationship I had with my practice exemplifies how an online multiple-identity performance practice enables the individual to engage with contemporary selfhood. Illuminating iCultural selfhood, this study establishes methodological frameworks for other performance artists to engage with contemporary issues of identity.

INTRODUCTION

Costumes clutter the hallway walls, and as we walk along them court jesters, Abba, seventies Bond girls, Napoleon, sexy nurses, to name but a few, gently brush against us. I hand each customer their costume and they retreat into their change-rooms. Tearing the velvet curtains open, the customers emerge from their cocoons transformed. The sweet, quietly-spoken girl becomes the smart-talking, aggressive, machine-gun toting, pinstriped, gangster-girl. The taut ab-tastic, proudly postured popular lad, now dorkishly bobs along, softened by the furry, cuddly teddy bear suit. I wonder if the customers (not being as they were when they walked in) have lost or found themselves in a moment (Godley 2014, Research Journal).

I am a performance artist and I use my body as the primary artistic medium of my practice. With her body/self paradigm, art theorist Amelia Jones posits that the body is sociologically understood as a direct symbol of the self (2006). As a young performance artist, I similarly thought that the body stood for the self. Before beginning this PhD, I used my body within my artwork as an ironic vehicle to critique the self-absorption I attributed to some contemporary art. Feeling that it only appealed to other contemporary artists and not the general public, I viewed some contemporary art as inward looking, or narcissistic. Within this thesis, the condition of narcissism is understood to cause excessive self-focus, which leads the sufferer to withdraw from people/things outside of the self (Freud 1914). Like social critic Christopher Lasch (1979), I viewed such self-focus as a cultural failure, as it meant that one could not be a valuable contributor to the greater good. I nevertheless, kept using my body as the predominant medium of my art practice after I concluded this early body of work that critiqued self-absorbed art and started this practice-based PhD. However, since I wanted to make a cultural contribution with my artwork, I felt guilty about the narcissism that focusing on my body/self potentially created. But I reasoned that I could continue to perform and counteract this guilt by embodying numerous fictional 'Others' that would cloak my 'real' self beneath, and therefore avoid my narcissistic self-focus. In this context, the 'Other' is

understood as anyone an individual perceives as different from their self (Riggins 1997, 3). In this exegesis the term 'Other' is capitalised to represent the homogenous group, in which the individual classes all people they consider dissimilar to their self. This grouping disregards any of the differences that may individualise these Others (Riggins 5). Using my Othered *body* to hide my *self* in this research contradicted the alliance I had with the body/self paradigm – something I was willing to temporarily overlook.

Given my need to self-disguise within my own performance practice, I was familiar with, and indeed attracted to the camouflage that the fantasyland cast of costume shop characters offered individual acts of self-presentation. However, as indicated by the opening quotation from my Research Journal, seeing my customers so naturally conjure the characters that enrobed them, gave rise to the thought that fictional disguises could possibly be conduits for pre-existent aspects of the self, and could thus still create a sense of self-focus. This potentiality sat uncomfortably with my assumption that by performing multiple Others in my practice, I was performing everyone but me, and thus avoiding narcissistic self-focus.

In the context of contemporary performance art practice, this research seeks to understand how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept. Does enacting Others conceal or reveal the self? This research direction unfolded over the course of this six-year practice-based PhD. It was informed by an autoethnographic study, contextualised within numerous relevant theoretical frameworks, which considered the relationship between my multiple-identity performance art practice and my self-concept. Initially I was motivated to act a multitude of fictional Others, as I thought this practice would allow me to perform everyone but myself and would thus counter the narcissistic self-focus I thought came with performing with my body/self. My multiple-identity performance practice was hosted within YouTube's video blogging (vlogging) community and also within a live art setting. Vlogging describes the practice of keeping a vlog, or blog (a webpage that acts as an individual's public journal), in

which video is used as the primary medium for posts (webopedia 2014). YouTube's vlogging community provided a place for my performance practice, because vlogging's culture of parodic roleplay lent itself to multiple-identity performance, as did the website's infrastructure that enabled one to perform different vlogging identities across multiple accounts. Hosting fictional vlogging identities (referred to as personae throughout this exegesis), each on their own YouTube 'channel', gave my performance practice a sense of online fragmentation that was separated from my real self. This motivated my early position that multiple-identity performance practice enabled the performer to avoid their self.

However, as this project progressed, it became evident that no matter how hard I tried to separate them from myself, being their sole creator, my personae inevitably came from no one else but me. At times autobiographic stories inadvertently penetrated my personae vlogs. In other instances, I relived my real emotional memories to authentically enact my personae – so that they would convincingly mask my 'real' self beneath. In these ways my 'real' self was elicited by my performance practice and this realisation led me to consider if, despite my best efforts of self-denial, my multiple-identity performance practice related to my self. This conflicted and precarious balance between self-avoidance and self-revelation led to an investigation into how one's multiple-identity performance practice relates to their self-concept.

To fully establish this thesis topic, in this introduction I will first define its key terms and the theoretical perspectives that underlie it. I will then give a more in-depth description of my multiple-identity performance art practice (referred to as *All MySelves on YouTube*) that guided this study. The different research methodologies that enabled a theoretical interpretation of this practice will then be discussed. Finally, the layout of this whole thesis will be explained in a chapter outline.

In the following section I outline the key terms used in this thesis to understand how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept.

Self-Concept:

As the lynchpin to this research, the term self-concept will be defined first. Articulated by psychologists Horrocks and Jackson, self-concept is:

[A] concept developed by cognitive organization and the dynamic process of development. It constitutes a series of beliefs and attitudes about the organism... Self-concept, because it is a concept, is cognitively structured; because it consists of attitudes and beliefs it is affective. Hence, self-concept may be defined as a value-based cognitive-affective symbolization of the organism growing over time through maturation and the accretion of experience (Horrocks and Jackson 1972, 52).

Being an individuated symbolisation that encapsulates the organism as a whole, self-concept can be considered synonymous with the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'self', which is defined as 'a person's essential being that distinguishes them from other people' (2005, 10th ed.). Thus the two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. While a diversity of philosophical scholarship underpins theories of the self, self-concept provides the most relevant framework for the context of this argument. Encompassing one's self-understanding, self-concept will allow for the analysis of how the performer's self and their performed multiple-identities interrelate.

Performance Art and the Aesthetic of Self-Focus:

I base my understanding of performance art within Anne Marsh's notion of it being a visual art practice that usually involves the artist presenting themselves in front of an audience (Marsh 2014). As a widely acknowledged movement, performance art emerged during the nineteen-sixties out of Allan Kaprow's 'Happenings' from the previous decade. Happenings involved audience members performing everyday activities in conjunction with artists. This interactivity anticipated and shaped the

subsequent approaches of performance artists from the late nineteen-sixties. These artists reacted against the perceived inaccessibility of high art by using their body as artistic medium, in order to bypass superfluous intermediate media and enable a direct communicative connection with their viewer. (Goldberg 1988)¹. Both Marsh (2014) and Goldberg (1988) acknowledge that performance art's idealistic foundations sought democratic accessibility and human connection. These traits seemingly contradict the exclusivity and social isolation that I self-consciously attributed to performance artists' body/self representations. However, paralleling with the body/self paradigm, both theorists nevertheless attribute self-absorption (Marsh 2014) and narcissism (Goldberg 1988) to the artist putting their body/self on display – especially in instances where autobiographic disclosure accompanies this action. Both Marsh and Goldberg hint at the moral tension inherent in displaying the self/body as artwork. This is a tension I, as a performance artist, could relate to all too well.

Both live and videoed performance art is discussed in this thesis. Given that the performance artwork produced for this project predominantly exists through video-documentation, videoed performance will mainly be examined. As it can literally zoom in and sustain focus on the performer's body/self, while creating a reflective record of it, video guarantees a sustained body/self-focus. The concurrent exhibitionism and reflection of videoed performance art has led it to being theorised as narcissistic (Krauss 1976). Videoed performance art (and sometimes photographic work) that unabashedly makes the artist's body/self the audio-visual/visual centre of attention, will be specifically focused on in this thesis. In such work, the enframed body/self monopolises the camera's view, in simple settings that do not distract from it. Furthermore, the performer often delivers self-focused actions or monologues. All of these presentation modes culminate to produce what I refer to as an 'aesthetic of self-focus'. As a young performance artist, compelled to scrutinise the narcissistic overtones of this aesthetic of self-focus, I was particularly

¹For a more detailed account about the lineage of performance art, refer to RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present*. Published by Harry N. Abrams, 1988.

drawn to Vito Acconci's videoed performance artworks from the nineteen-seventies. Greedily dominating the camera's view, while creepily disclosing personal details, his work epitomised this aesthetic. Not only does videoed performance art's aesthetic create a self-focus strong enough to examine how and if the performer's body/self relates to their embodied roles, but the narcissistic theories associated with it provides a framework within which to consider my narcissistic guilt complex and the way it subsequently shaped my art.

iCulture and the Aesthetic of Self-Focus:

I first became familiar with video logging (from now on referred to as vlogging) when initially navigating the online video sharing Social Networking Site (SNS) of YouTube² in 2007. I immediately related vlogging back to performance art, as it shared an uncannily similar aesthetic of self-focus. Like Acconci, and other artists who indulged in the aesthetic of self-focus, vloggers make their body/self the centre of attention in simple (usually domestic) settings, while delivering autobiographic monologues that often disclose personal details. Despite mainly being performed by unprofessional user-generators (theatrically untrained participants who make and upload content),³ within this thesis, vlogging is considered a legitimate performance genre. Performance theorist Richard Schechner's definition of performance substantiates this position. He describes performance as: 'marked, framed, or heightened behavior separated out from just "living life"...' (Schechner 2006, 35). Although vlogging is often couched within familiar daily activities, it is considered performance because users knowingly record and thus inevitably self-consciously shape their behaviour to be presentable for an audience.

In contrast to my guilt complex about performing with my body/self, the unabashed body/self-focus of vlogging intrigued me. Such shameless self-presentation was

² YouTube was founded in 2005.

³ To see a more thorough discussion the amateur/unprofessional performance style that characterises many vlogging practices, refer to Nick Salvato's article "Out of Hand: YouTube Amateurs and Professionals" (2009).

based within the dynamics of what I refer to as 'iCulture'. In this context the term culture refers to the general way of life that shapes a specific society as a whole (Williams 1963)⁴. The contemporary Internet is largely defined by social networking cultures that encourage, and in fact necessitate, self-exhibition. SNS such as Facebook and YouTube implore the participant to regularly post their personal thoughts and to document their body/self with videos and/or photos. Indeed the 'selfie' – a photo taken of oneself, by oneself and often posted online – epitomises the aesthetic of self-focus. 'iCulture' seems the most appropriate term to describe this culture of individual exhibitionism and self-reflection. I have appropriated the 'i' prefix here that Apple applies to their numerous personal Mac computers (e.g. iPad and iPhone – both devices that enable one to exhibit their body/selves online) because in this context 'i' is easily understood as a symbol for exhibiting the body/self. Being based within an iCulture that encourages and necessitates self-exhibition, vlogging shares an uncannily interchangeable aesthetic of self-focus with videoed performance art. Not characterising other performance genres to the same degree, this uniquely intense aesthetic of self-focus bonds vlogging and videoed performance art.

While the contemporary performance art examined in this thesis utilises the aesthetic of self-focus, videoed performance art from the nineteen-seventies shares more of a kinship with the type of aesthetic of self-focus found within vlogging. Within this thesis, the relationship between vlogging and seventies performance art is strengthened by my preceding knowledge of seventies performance art, which enabled me to recognise the aesthetic of self-focus when I saw it in YouTube vlogging. Furthermore, seventies cultural commentary on self-focus and narcissism influenced my cultural values and shaped my perception of vlogging's aesthetic of self-focus. For this reason, nineteen-seventies theories of self-focus, performance art and its critique are analysed in detail alongside vlogging's iCultural aesthetic of self-focus. This comparative analysis does not intend to conflate nineteen seventies

⁴ For a more in depth discussion of what constitutes 'culture', please refer to Raymond Williams' seminal book *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1963, Penguin in association with Chatto & Windus).

culture with iCulture. Rather, it honestly reflects on how the seventies *zeitgeist* of self-focus, in both art and cultural commentary, informed my early ideas of self-focus and narcissism and helped me identify it within YouTube vlogging.

While the aesthetic of self-focus is the most striking similarity between performance art and vlogging, the relationship between the two genres is further strengthened by other shared traits. Both performance artists and vloggers perform everyday activities – often considered ‘mundane’. For instance, performance artist Pipilotti Rist pays homage to musician Chris Isaak with her shrill voice-breaking rendition of “Wicked Games”⁵ in her videoed performance piece *I’m a Victim of this Song* (1995). Similarly, infamous vlogger itschrisrock (of *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* [2007] fame) sings and dances badly to numerous Britney Spears’ songs. As seen in these examples, vloggers and performance artists deliver their performances regardless of their technical skill levels (e.g. singing, despite a lack of musical ability), and this further binds both genres together, because neither is expected to comply with traditional theatrical standards of virtuosity. Additionally, both performance artists and vloggers interact with their audiences. Numerous performance artists continue to utilise interaction styles pioneered by Happenings, while vloggers communicate with their audience via text and video response.

As will be described in the methodologies section of this introduction, I am a performance artist who uses vlogging as a mode of expression for my performance art practice. The shared aesthetic of self-focus and other stylistic links between performance art and vlogging makes the latter a relevant conduit for the former. Using vlogging to express my performance art practice means that I methodologically conflate the two. While I acknowledge that both performance genres are defined by differing intentions and contexts, within this research project they feed into one another and by discussing them together it helps consolidate the examination into the relationship between the performer’s body/self projections

⁵ “Wicked Games” is a song that appears on Chris Isaak’s album *Heart Shaped World* (1989).

and their self-concept. The practices of other vloggers and performance artists outside of my practice are comparatively analysed to deepen this discussion.

Vlogging's aesthetic of self-focus is consolidated by its position within an i-focused iCultural environment. In this context, it epitomises contemporary styles of self-presentation, which can be considered an aspect of self-experience and more broadly contemporary selfhood (or self-concepts). While some of the contemporary performance art discussed in this thesis also utilises aspects of iCultural self-focus, it does so to a lesser degree than vlogging. With its consolidated self-focus and contemporary context, vlogging is viewed as a particularly pertinent performance style to highlight how contemporary notions of self-concept relate to one's multiple-identity performance practice. Within this thesis, examples of vlogging performance pieces are discussed in more depth than performance artworks because vlogging is the main performance method for my practice. As I practically and theoretically investigate vlogging, which epitomises an aesthetic of self-focus that is representative of contemporary selfhood, this thesis provides insights to other performance artists who are interested in interrogating contemporary notions of selfhood, particularly within an iCultural context.

Multiple-Identity Performance Practice and Identity:

Other than pertaining to the aesthetic of self-focus, vlogging also exhibits multiple-identity performance practice, by carrying on the social networking tradition of online roleplay. As this study seeks to address how a multiple-identity practice relates to the performer's self-concept, analysing vlogging's roleplay is particularly pertinent. Within this thesis, the term multiple-identity performance practice refers to the practice of one performer who enacts numerous identities within the one performance context.

To contextualise a multiple-identity performance practice, I will first define the term 'identity'. Horrocks and Jackson define identity as 'conceptualizations of the self that develop out of combinations or fragmentations of identifications' (1972, 54).

Furthermore, Horrocks and Jackson describe identification as contextually tailored self-conceptions (1972). For instance, each individual can be classed into broader social groups (e.g. class, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc). Certain social circumstances call for the individual to locate their self-understanding within the social grouping(s) most relevant to their given situation. Art theorist Lucy Lippard elucidates the sense of social negotiation that informs identities, saying that they are 'imposed or arrived at collectively, compressed between internal and external needs and demands' (Lippard 1999, 28). In fast-paced non-traditional social contexts individuals experience 'multi-fragmented social positionings' (Cooper and Rowan 1999, 1), which result in broad and dispersed personal identifications (Baumgardner, Boone Rappoport 1999). Being broadly multifarious, not all identifications will be congruent with one another, although some will. Within this thesis, I propose that congruent identifications group together to form discrete identities and discrete identities accrue to contribute to one's overall self-concept.

Because online roleplay lies at the foundation of vlogging's multiple-identity performance practice, its history will be briefly outlined. To elucidate 'roleplay', I will first define 'role'. Drawing from sociologist Erving Goffman's theories on public self-presentation (1959), I consider 'role' to be a public self-presentation that is contextually tailored. For instance, one may take on a professional and reserved role in front of work colleagues, but a flamboyant and fun role in front of friends. In the context of her seminal study into online text-based fantasy roleplaying Multi-User Domains (MUDs), in the mid nineteen-nineties when the Internet was becoming mainstream, sociologist Sherry Turkle posited roleplay as the imitation of roles that are incongruent with one's everyday sense of self (Turkle 1995). Communicated via text rather than visually, made MUDs anonymous and so they provided a safe place for the user to perform roles that were usually not available to them in their everyday life. For instance, a middle-aged man could play a young maiden, a frog, or an evil witch – roles which, while removed from daily life, may have been apt for the fantasy context of online roleplaying games. For the most part, Turkle refers to each role played by the MUDer as a 'persona', noting that the

term refers to an actor's mask, while also referring to 'person' and 'personality' (Turkle 1995, 182). This dual meaning of persona is relevant to Turkle's assertion that playing roles not usually available in everyday life allows one to express repressed parts of themselves. Furthermore, as computer monitors facilitated multiple websites being open at once, MUDers could concurrently play numerous roles in different games (allowing the middle-aged man to play all of these roles simultaneously if he wanted). Although not based on the roleplayer's everyday personal identities, roleplay nevertheless invokes supposed identifications of Others. For instance, in enacting his young medieval maiden role, the middle-aged man might draw on a maiden's assumed identification with social expectations of chaste purity and thus form an imagined identity for her. Because numerous imagined identities are manifested through roleplay, it is considered synonymous with multiple-identity performance.

The roleplay in MUDs provides an early example of what multiplayer gaming/virtual world researcher Celia Pearce would call an online 'play-frame' culture, where 'participants mutually agree to suspend everyday rules and social contracts and abide by an alternative set of rules or constraints' (Pearce 2009, 26). Within MUDs, participants suspend their everyday identities to roleplay different ones. Through her interviews with MUDers, Turkle concluded that it was the anonymity of MUDs that enabled this suspension of everyday social rules and the resultant roleplay. However, vloggers nevertheless practice roleplay today, despite revealing their face/body (a revelation common to numerous contemporary SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, etc). While no longer anonymous, the culture of the online play-frame has permeated contemporary online culture and has established SNS as socially acceptable places for roleplay.

The roleplaying play-frame established in SNS such as MUDs has no doubt informed vlogging's roleplay. Vlogging's roleplay manifests in a slightly different way though. Rather than completely immersing themselves in a fictional role, vloggers slip in and

out of caricatures⁶ of the various people involved in the stories that they recount. So, within one video, a vlogger may traverse a range of observed identities, while also acting themselves. These caricatures often take the form of exaggerating another's observable personal identifications to the point of stereotype. For instance, in Vietnamese-Chinese Australian vlogger yourchonny's *My Parent Teacher Interview* (2014) he caricatures his parents and teachers in recounting a story about a parent-teacher interview. To comically present his parents, he draws heavily on the stereotype that 'Asian parents' are unreasonably strict and obsessed with their children's school grades. Although these stereotypical enactments may not accurately portray the identities' of yourchonny's parents (and the other people he caricatures), they represent the identifications their son observes in/attributes to his parents, and in this sense, his performance of them re-presents their identities. By making them stereotypically superficial, yourchonny and vloggers like him, distance their sense of self (which is presented as being more nuanced and analytically deeper) from their roles. Roleplaying different caricatured identities within the one vlog represents a prevalent style of multiple-identity performance practice within vlogging. The vlogger's YouTube channel (the personal homepage where they upload their videos) consolidates this multiple-identity performance, as it progressively accumulates vlogs and the array of identities performed within them.

All MySelves on YouTube:

More than just allowing the observation and analysis of the aesthetic of self-focus and multiple-identity performance practices, the YouTube vlogging environment enables me to roleplay 'Othered' caricatures while simultaneously avoiding my own narcissistic *self*-presentation. So, as a result, my practice within this project is hosted within the YouTube vlogging environment. Unlike other vloggers, I do not sway back and forth between being myself and enacting Othered roles. Rather, while delivering each vlog, I avoid my self-presentation altogether by maintaining

⁶ Caricatures are comically exaggerated representations of an individual's personal traits (Pocket Oxford English Dictionary 2005, 10th ed.)

the roleplay of one non-autobiographic fictional identity of my creation. My “Persona Journals” – the reflective written journals that I used to construct fictional character profiles, roughly plan personae performances and reflect on their vlogs – will be described in more detail in the forthcoming section on methodologies. By maintaining the idiosyncrasies that characterise each role (e.g. clothing style, voice, mannerisms, etc) I present ‘a coherent and unified characterization’ (Miller 2013, 26) akin to what lies at the heart of conventional acting (Miller 2013). I deliberately employ conventional acting techniques as a performance method to convincingly feign the Other and hide myself. At the start of this project I naively aligned acting with faking and therefore felt reassured that it would hide my ‘real’ self.

While I do not transition between different roles within singular vlogs, participating within the YouTube vlogging community nevertheless inspired my own multiple-identity performance practice. Turkle’s conception of the multiple-identity MUDer, who simultaneously roleplayed multiple personae who were separated by different games (in different computer windows), inspired the template for my own vlogging practice. Like Turkle’s MUDer, I perform multiple non-autobiographic identities who are separated from one another – each being hosted on their own personally tailored YouTube channel. I participate in the conventional vlogging practice of periodically uploading new vlogs in the guise of each vlogging identity. The non-autobiographic content of each vlog is intuitively generated based on each persona character profile. The conceptual significance of this content is usually only recognised in retrospect. Performing ongoing vlogs in the guise of non-autobiographic online personae allows me to feel that my performance practice is fragmented and virtual and therefore separated from my ‘real’ essential (offline) self.

As Turkle had done with MUDing identities, I refer to my performed online identities as ‘personae’, in reference to her MUDing framework. Simultaneously rooted in the meanings of ‘mask’ and ‘personality’, this term is at once complimentary and contradictory to my purpose of hiding myself with the Other.

Given that I utilise acting techniques, which I initially interpreted as faking, I could also use the more common acting term 'character' to label each vlogging identity – although character too can be associated with the personal (e.g. one's idiosyncratic traits, or moral character) and the Other (e.g. a theatrical role). However, 'persona' will be the term used in my research, as it is a contextually appropriate term for online roleplay.

My vlogging practice is also taken offline and contextualised in the live art setting with performance/video installation pieces. Offline, in the live art setting, poignant portions of persona vlogs are edited together and exhibited via video projection and/or video screen. Editing each persona together demonstrates my multiple-identity performance practice. These conjoined, edited vlogs are often interspersed by live performances by me. In these gallery performances, the presence of my live body/self symbolises my actual, or 'real' self, which juxtaposes with the virtually 'Othered' online personae exhibited via video. I bring my live and online performances together to compare the relationship between my 'real' self and the multiple-identities I perform. Extending my online practice into a live art setting in this way enables consideration of how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept.

The vlogging and live art components of this project make up the practical element of the exegesis and will henceforth be referred to as *All MySelves on YouTube*.

Practice-Led Research and Autoethnography:

Although as a viewer of YouTube I had intuitively observed vlogging's multiple-identity performance practice, I was only able to articulate it once I started to practice my own vlogging-inspired multiple-identity performance practice. Upon first viewing YouTube vlogging at the beginning of this project, before setting up my online vlogging practice, I was inspired to represent a cross-section of some of the vloggers I'd observed. *HerTube* (2008) was a live art piece where I transitioned

between performing different personae, who were based on real vloggers. After delivering and reflecting on the performance, I realised that it did more than just represent a cross-section of vloggers. Rather, it demonstrated the way vloggers slip in and out of different roles during their performances. Upon conceptualising this, I sought relevant theory to help me articulate these findings further. Finding Turkle's theories on MUDing gave me a framework within which to both develop an understanding of vlogging's multiple roleplay and within which to develop my practice further.

The way in which my practice directed theoretical investigation – which then fed back into my practice – as described in the above example, indicates the methodology employed for this entire research project. This methodology is best described as practice-led research. Creative writer/arts researcher Hazel Smith and composer/arts researcher Roger T. Dean (2009) describe practice-led research as a process in which practice can provide research insights that emerge from the creative work itself, or from the documentation/theorisation of it. After making and critically reflecting on *HerTube*, I recognised it as a creative representation of vlogging's multiple-identity performance. Australian artist and art theorist Graeme Sullivan (2005) suggests that numerous artists intuitively make their artworks, but only understand their meaningful implications with retrospective critical analysis. Drawing on Dean and Smith's (2009) and Sullivan's (2005) methodological frameworks, I refer to the process of unpicking an artwork's meanings after it is made as retrospective analysis. Being practice-led, I utilise this technique to discover the theoretical implications of my artwork. The research themes uncovered by this retrospective analysis directed my theoretical investigations, which further informed my artwork. The creative development enabled by this reflection highlights it as a reflexive methodology. Dean and Smith (2009) acknowledge that within practice-led research, research can also lead practice. They refer to the way both practice and research feed into one another to generate research insights as an iterative cyclic web. Because my practice directs my

theoretical research, which feeds back into my practice, I utilise this iterative cyclic web methodology.

Hosting my performance practice within the YouTube vlogging environment means that this project also utilises the methodology of autoethnography. Being an extension of ethnography, where the researcher observes and culturally interprets people's behaviours in particular social settings (Watson Gegeo 1988), autoethnography involves the researcher immersing themselves directly within the social context that they are studying (Pace 2012). In doing this, 'Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding' (Pace 2012, 2). In studying their personal experiences to understand a wider social space, the autoethnographer becomes a subject of their own study. Being a member of the vlogging community gives me personal insight into how it works and how it can be used for my research, and in this sense I become a subject of my study. Although it seems ironic that I would end up making myself a study subject in a project that was instigated by the need to avoid my self-presentation, this autoethnographic approach elicits a deeper understanding of YouTube. My participation in YouTube vlogging is not only confined to posting videos. It also involves providing and receiving commentary, within the guise(s) of my personae, about posted vlogs (from myself and other vloggers), in the form of text comments and video responses. Joining in with the vlogging community in this way ensures an insiders' understanding about how it works as a social space and how this in turn influences self-focus and multiple-identity performance practice.

Other than being a consequence of my practice, an autoethnographic methodology becomes important to considering how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept. While I move between denying and considering the potential self-focus of my vlogging practice, I ultimately have to consider what my self-concept is and how/if it relates to my multiple-identity

performance practice. Because I study my personal self and personal responses to my personae, I am again implicated as an autoethnographic study subject.

Given that my personal experiences provide research insights to this project, it is integral that I have a way of analysing and reflecting on them. The Research Journal is a methodological tool that allows me to do this. A Research Journal is considered a written document, within which a researcher can document and reflect on their research experiences and findings (Borg 2001). For this project, I employ a Research Journal and Persona Journals (considered a type of Research Journal). The Research Journal is a place where I freely reflect on my experiences with YouTube vlogging, its community and how the theoretical research relates to these experiences. Each Persona Journal is not only used to formulate persona-profiles, but also to reflect on how and if each persona relates to my personal self-concept. These reflections are honest and take my emotional experiences and personal histories into account. As Borg (2001) notes, Research Journals go beyond general self-reflections to provide research data and discoveries. As my Research Journals provide a place to articulate, reflect on and analyse my personal vlogging experiences, they enable autoethnographic research into myself as a study subject and this research is iterated back into my theoretical and practical investigation.

Within this exegesis relevant Research Journal writings (particularly from the Personae Journals) are referenced in discussions of vlogging practice and the relationship between the performer's self and their performed multiple-identities. Considering how my vlogging identities relate to myself, the tone of these written reflections, and the subsequent discussions they inspire, are often autobiographic. Being about myself, this writing is honest, angst-ridden, colloquial and at times deeply personal. Within this writing I also acknowledge my personal biases, not with the intention of being complicit with them, but rather to contemplate my self-concept accurately so I can understand how, and if, it relates to my practice. Ebbing and flowing between self-denial and self-examination necessitates that the tone of my written language oscillates between 'objective' academic and 'subjective'

personalised tones. At times, both writing styles appear alongside each other in an effort to represent the complex layers of this paradoxical exploration.

The research discoveries in this thesis are discussed in chronological order, as this is the most logical way of representing the distinct rationales that informed the trajectory of the thesis. Retrospective analysis is a tool that enables and reinforces this chronological discussion, as the collation of progressive findings necessitates looking back on them as they occurred. This thesis is broken up into two parts that represent the progressive ideological positions that informed this study. The first section “Part One: Self-Denial” considers the separation between my self-concept and my vlogging personae and is inspired by my initial drive to avoid my own self-presentation within my artwork. “Part Two: Self-Revelation” explores the possible connections between my vlogging personae and self-concept. Seemingly a contradictory direction, this line of inquiry is informed by a developing inkling that, as the sole artist creator within this project, my attitudes and beliefs may shape my personae in such a way that possibly reflects my self-concept. The examination of how I personally relate to my vlogging personae, will provide broader insights into how selfhood is expressed and experienced in an iCultural environment, offering a framework for other performance artists wanting to engage with contemporary self-conceptual issues. In “Part One: Self-Denial”, my autobiographic stories are discretely italicised, to consider the separation between my multiple-identity performance practice and myself. However, in “Part Two: Self-Revelation” the stories are merged with the normal font of the exegetical writing to explore their possible conflation with my performance practice.

In Chapter One, “Narcissistic Self-Presentation and iCulture”, I explain the guilt I felt in relation to my self-focused performance practice using the framework of nineteen-seventies sociological theory that frames self-focus as narcissistic. With this framework, I do not intend to conflate seventies and contemporary culture, but rather to provide an honest context for my own cultural biases about self-focus and narcissism. Establishing this guilt complex illuminates my motivation for trying to

avoid myself by performing the Other. Drawing from Rosalind Krauss' (1976) article "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" and seventies videoed performance artworks from Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman, I elucidate the aesthetic of self-focus that defines my practice and parallels it with YouTube vlogging. This seventies *zeitgeist* provides a framework for me to exemplify YouTube vlogging as a contemporary site for the aesthetic of self-focus that is emblematic of iCulture. I thus establish the iCultural selfhood to be examined in relation to multiple-identity performance practice.

In Chapter Two, "Not Acting Myself – Performing Everyone But Me", I outline some methods with which to perform Other(s), which I suggest, in turn, avoids a relationship between the performer's self and their practice. I posit acting as a particularly useful technique of feigning the Other to avoid the self. I draw on the ideas articulated in Sherry Turkle's (1995) book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, to imagine a framework for my own online multiple-personae performance practice, namely her idea of early Internet roleplayers as multiple-identity performers. I examine whether this online fragmentation disables the relationship the individual has with their performed identities. By drawing comparisons between the roleplaying practices of artist Cindy Sherman (who also tries to perform everyone but herself) and myself, I contemplate if it is possible to perform with the body while simultaneously avoiding the self.

In Chapter Three, "Déjà vu – Acting and Self-Revelation", I explore how *acting* the Other can actually elicit one's inner resources. The term 'inner resources' is used to refer to the accrued life experiences individual actors have 'in' them. The actor draws from these life experiences to conjure embodiments appropriate to the role they're acting (McGaw 1975). Although I initially use acting ('faking' the Other) as a method to avoid my self-presentation, the possibility that I draw from my inner resources during performance suggests a relationship between myself and my vlogging personae. Drawing on acting theories from theatre director Constantin

Stanislavski and director/acting teacher Lee Strasberg, I inquire as to whether the provocation of these inner resources reveals the performer's self-concept.

In Chapter Four, "Personae and Personal Identities: Storying All MySelves Together on YouTube", I examine the relationship between vlogging personae and the real identities of constituent self-concepts. Within the framework of Drama Therapy and Narrative Therapy, I consider if each of my vlogging persona represents one of my own discrete personal identities. Drama Therapy is an expressive therapy that involves emotional expression through theatrical techniques such as roleplay, singing and dancing (Pearce 1996). This symbolic self-expression avoids direct emotional confrontation, so as to not overwhelm the participant, but to provide them personal catharsis (Landy 1996). As achieving personal catharsis contradicts the original intent of this project, Drama Therapy is not employed as a method, but rather used as a theoretical framework within which to retrospectively observe whether the theatrical techniques of roleplay and acting inadvertently elicit parts of my real self. Based within the view that the self is constructed from the stories an individual tells themselves about their self (Capps and Ochs 1996), Narrative Therapy is a type of psychotherapy where, in conversation with the therapist, the therapy participant rewrites problematic self-stories into more constructive and positive ones (Dunne 2006). Using Narrative Therapy I retrospectively analyse how the plotlines of my vlogging personae interrelate and consider if this reflects the relationships between my personal identities. Drawing from Robert J. Lifton's (1993) concept of the Protean Self – an individual whose multiple-identities are coherently anchored together by a reflexive 'I' – I use this analysis to nuance an iCultural selfhood that is simultaneously multiple, yet anchored to a core.

So, how does a multiple-identity performance practice relate to the performer's self-concept? Although I costume myself in the Other, as you get to know me throughout this exegesis, you might also come to know all my selves on YouTube.

PART 1: SELF-DENIAL

CHAPTER 1: NARCISSISTIC SELF-PRESENTATION AND iCULTURE

As a young artist I was conflicted about the inevitable self-focus that accompanies making art. On one hand, I was fascinated by the way creative decision-making inevitably reflects the artist's self, thus enabling an indirect form of self-presentation; on the other, I felt that this self-focus limited an artwork's outreach and condemned it to an immoral narcissistic isolation. My fear of appearing narcissistic repressed my interest in indirect self-presentation through art. In this chapter, I will draw from Christopher Lasch's seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979) to explain the common misconceptions that encouraged me to conflate self-focus with narcissism and narcissism with immorality.

As a young artist, anxiously denying my artistic self-focus, I used my body as an intentionally ironic vehicle to critique self-focused art. Rosalind Krauss' article "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (1976) and videoed performance artworks from Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman will be used to elucidate why I thought videoing my body would symbolise narcissistic self-focus.

Upon discovering YouTube vlogging, I was struck by how its (seeming) aesthetic of narcissism appeared remarkably similar to the videoed performance art of the seventies that had influenced my self-focused performance practice. Studying vlogging propelled me out of the narcissistic seventies *zeitgeist* into a new era of self-focus, largely defined by the Internet and its accompanying i-focused culture. Within this contemporary context, self-focus was largely accepted. In retrospect, I can see that I was gripped by the unapologetic self-focus of vlogging because it challenged the shame I associated with it. It also awakened my latent interest in how the artist's self is represented in their work and in particular how the performer's self relates to their practice. However, still mired in my narcissistic guilt, I resisted this investigation in favour of a comparative critique that would examine the commonly shared narcissistic aesthetics of videoed performance art

and vlogging. This comparative analysis does not intend to conflate seventies culture with iCulture. Rather, it honestly reflects on how the seventies *zeitgeist* of self-focus, in both art and cultural commentary, informed my early ideas of self-focus and narcissism, which provided me with a framework through which to understand YouTube vlogging's self-focus. If I could analyse it and be above it, I felt, I would not be participating in this narcissism (and could thus avoid feelings of guilt).

By establishing my artistic background and the personal biases that shaped it, this chapter sets up the foundation of this thesis.

The Immoral Narcissism of Self-Presentation:

For much of my life I regarded gratuitous instances of self-display as unseemly and egotistical. This seems an old fashioned attitude given that the very cornerstone of our contemporary Internet culture *is* self-display. However, my childhood was Internet free, and I did not incorporate it into my life until well after it became mainstream. Although a child of the eighties and nineties, I appeared to have internalized the seventies attitude which conflated self-focus with narcissism and denigrated it as a 'social vice' (Welchman 1996, 16).

To fully establish the seventies attitude critiqued narcissism as immoral, it is necessary to understand what narcissism is. Because psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's 1914 essay *On Narcissism*, influenced contemporary understandings of the condition and is close to the initial concept I had of the word, I will draw from it to define the term. Freud argues that we are all born with object love (the ability to love and focus on people/things outside of ourselves) and ego love (the ability to love ourselves). The narcissist's ego love outweighs their object love. Often, having been rejected by their love object, the narcissist defensively withdraws their love from others and projects their idealised self onto their ego, so they can direct their love internally, which results in the attitude of narcissism.

My initial naïve understanding of narcissism can be contextualised within cultural critic Christopher Lasch's (1979) seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. Lasch states that '[n]arcissism appears realistically to represent the best way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life, and the prevailing social conditions therefore tend to bring out narcissistic traits that are present, in varying degrees, in everyone' (50). Although Lasch mostly speaks of a 'culture of narcissism,' rather than pathological narcissism, he argues that traits of the pathological narcissist were manifest in a less extreme form in everyday seventies Americans (33). Although not necessarily pathological, I will nevertheless refer to Lasch's individual as a narcissist because they are shaped by a culture of narcissism.

Lasch (1979) suggests that various social, political and environmental threats to humanity created individuals who disregarded their teetering posterity and unreliable social conditions, in favour of living for themselves, in 'the now' (3-6). Living for themselves, in the now, the seventies American cultivated psychic self-improvement by pursuing various personal preoccupations like 'getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to "relate," overcoming the "fear of pleasure..."' (4). Also, to sever one's dependence on others, one aspired to love oneself (14). To use my terminology, Lasch's proposed individual was 'self-focused.' Seemingly, Lasch equates this self-focus with narcissistic social withdrawal, which results in shallow, unfulfilling relationships with others. Unable to deeply connect with others, the narcissistic individual feels empty and leads an impoverished personal life (39-40). This withdrawal has a detrimental affect on the greater good, so to speak. For instance, rather than giving thought to how apocalyptic disaster may be prevented, the narcissist is consumed by their individual survival (4). In his quote '[h]aving no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement' (4), Lasch perhaps implies that personal improvement doesn't matter because it comes at the cost of the greater good. As will be

discussed shortly, as a young artist, because my artwork only mattered to few, I felt as if it was self-focused, narcissistically isolated and inconsequential to the greater good.

To overcome the insecurities associated with a lack of interpersonal connections, Lasch's narcissist depends on an admiring audience to validate their self-esteem (1979, 10). Attracting an audience depends on attention-seeking behaviour. Lasch considers autobiographic writing as a form of narcissistic exhibitionism. He says that although, with focused editing, the genre can provide insight into the human condition, it can also denigrate into self-display (16). Lazy writers present undigested 'self-disclosure to keep the reader interested, appealing not to his [sic] understanding but to his [sic] salacious curiosity about the private lives of famous people' (17). Although such self-disclosure may seem 'deep', the writer uses self-parody to obscure the seriousness of their stories and prevent a penetrative gaze (18). With my original naïve understanding of narcissism, I would have inferred that by taking advantage of their personal insights to generate a superficial gaze, the writer cheapens them into shallow attractions. I mention narcissistic autobiographers here because their use of titillating revelations are akin to those of the video/performance artists who influenced my practice and the YouTube vloggers who shared their 'biggest' secrets, perhaps to accumulate views, with their audience. I will soon examine how, like Lasch, I associated this type of self-revelation with narcissistic exhibitionism.

Because a narcissist's projected images must stay captivating and impressive to maintain their audience, they need to constantly scrutinise those images (Lasch 1979, 92). Photographic images literally allow the narcissist to see themselves and 'provides the technical means of ceaseless self-scrutiny' (48) required to maintain one's public image. Moreover, because the narcissist is part of a culture that conflates real life with mediated imagery (because the culture is inundated with mediated imagery that reflects real life), to create a sense of selfhood, the narcissist must consume images of their self (47-48). He describes the photo album's role in

this:

By preserving images of the self at various stages of development, the camera helps to weaken the older idea of development as moral education and to promote a more passive idea according to which development consists of passing through the stages of life at the right time and in the right order (48).

Lasch implies that because these photographic images confirm various rites of passage, the individual need not identify with them on a deeper level. Whether self-scrutinising, or self-‘understanding,’ by eternally returning to their image, the narcissist goes through the motions of what is socially expected of them, rather than engaging with who they can morally become.

Lasch (1979) cites that social critics commonly view narcissism as vain, selfish and disagreeable, but he warns against such moral inflation, as it overlooks the vulnerability and self-loathing that necessitates the narcissist’s veneer of self-love (31-32). However, it seems he falls into the trap he warns against by applying value judgements to narcissistic ways of being. He devalues the narcissistic culture of psychic self-improvement by implying that any attempt to improve the self ‘doesn’t matter.’ Saying that some autobiographic writing of the time ‘*denigrated* [my emphasis] into self-display’ (16), he speaks about self-display in a derogatory manner. His contention that looking at one’s self-display deprives them of a moral education is perhaps his biggest judgement. Although Lasch may not condemn the narcissist’s self-love as vain and selfish, by de-moralising the narcissist, he inevitably judges them as immoral.

From the analysis above, it is clear that Lasch (1979) equates self-focus with narcissism, because he assumes that it necessitates social withdrawal. Seeing self-display as superficial attention seeking, he relegates it to narcissistic exhibitionism. Although critical of the cultural tendency to be judgemental of narcissism, Lasch unwittingly does the same and thus reflects the popular view. According to Lomas (2011), narcissism got ‘quite a lot of bad press’ in the seventies (141). It was further viewed as a social cul-de-sac for much of the twentieth century (Welchman 1996,

15). Welchman additionally notes that visual self-presentation was viewed as shameful in the early years of the twentieth century (1996, 15). As an international bestseller, Lasch's book provided a moral compass for the time, reflecting and reiterating cultural values. Although I was born a few years after the publication of *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* and, until recently, remained unaware of it, I was nevertheless surrounded by, and internalised, the values it espoused. Like many in my culture, I equated self-focus, exhibitionism and not-contributing-to-the-greater-good with narcissism, which I understood to be morally repugnant. Deeply embedded within me, these cultural value systems accounted for my narcissistic guilt complex that arose from my artistic self-presentation. However, straddling the border between this previous generation and the I-focused culture of the Internet that celebrates self-focus as empowering individualism, I formed a conflicted relationship with my artistic self-presentation. I felt driven to self-present, but was too ashamed to do so. Before exploring this internal conflict in more depth, I will lay the conceptual groundwork that informed the use of my body as artistic medium.

In her article, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (1976), art critic Rosalind Krauss echoes the seventies *zeitgeist* that conflates self-focus with narcissism. Writing at a time when most video art depicted the human body – often the artist's own – and used it as its main medium (52), she proposes that video art is a psychological medium thus equating the display of the artist's body with the display of their psyche.⁷ Therefore, while Krauss doesn't articulate it this way, she essentially conflates bodily-display with self-display. This conflation may have its origins in the seventies cultural *zeitgeist* that her work echoes. Like Lasch, she further equates such self-focus and display with narcissism, saying that the condition is endemic in video art (50). I will explore the ways in which this tendency to conflate the body with the psychological self is related to my performance practice shortly.

⁷The psyche, in sum, is the living self' (Gregory 1987,649). To legitimate this statement Gregory analyses the Greek origins of the term 'psyche.' He says that its common translation into 'soul' can be misleading, because to have psyche is to be *empsychos*, or animated. The psyche animates life and each living creature has a different psyche that individuates them. In this sense the psyche is the living individual, or self (Gregory 1987,648 – 649).

Krauss (1976) does not ground video's narcissism only in the exhibitionism associated with self-display. Additionally, for her it is the video artist's own regard of their self-display that encloses their artwork within a creatively stagnant and narcissistic isolation. This self-regard was facilitated by the practice of that time whereby live footage was transmitted to a TV monitor enabling video artists to see themselves as they were performing. Consequently, they fed off and responded to their reflection. This performance style was further consolidated by not using a script, a practice that generally grounds performance in a broader genre.

Although the video artist's reflection could be considered objective, Krauss (1976) contends that it is more accurately a 'displacement of the self' Krauss (55) and that 'the medium of video art is the psychological condition of the self split and doubled by the mirror-reflection of synchronous feedback' (55). Through '[b]racketing out the text and substituting for it the mirror-reflection' (55) video art withdraws from the objective to invest in the self – reflecting the very condition of narcissism (57). Because '[t]he I does not see itself any more than the eye sees itself' (Crossley 2006, 27)⁸, rather than being deeply insightful, doubled subjectivity stagnates with no objectivity to elucidate it:

[T]he artist locates his [sic] own expressiveness through a discovery of the objective conditions of his medium and their history... the very possibility of finding his [sic] subjectivity necessitate that the artist recognize the material and historical independence of an external object (or medium)' (Krauss 1976, 58).

Because the video artist's medium is their subjective self, there is no inherent *outlet* for their self-expression. This becomes repressed, with no objective medium to convey it (Krauss 1976, 59). In this way their creativity festers: unvoiced, undeveloped and unrelatable.

⁸This concept will be explained in more depth from the perspective of Lacan's 'mirror stage theory' and Cooley's 'looking glass self' theories in Chapter Four.

Krauss (1976) uses Vito Acconci's *Air Time* (1973) to exemplify video art's subjective implosion:

Acconci sits between the video camera and a large mirror which he faces. For thirty-five minutes he addresses his own reflection with a monologue in which the terms "I" and "you" – although they are presumed to be referring to himself and an absent lover – are markers of the autonomous intercourse between Acconci and his own image... *Air Time* construct[s] a situation of spatial closure, promoting a condition of self-reflection. The response of the performer is to a continually renewed image of himself. This image, supplanting the consciousness of anything prior to it, becomes the unchanging text of the performer. Skewered on his own reflection, he is committed to the text of perpetuating that image (Krauss 1976, 53-54).

Fig 1. Vito Acconci, *Air Time*, 1973, still from videoed performance, 35mins

The still image from Vito Acconci's videoed performance *Air Time*, 1973, 35mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The still image from *Air Time* can instead be accessed via
<http://artnews.org/news.php?i=208&t=news>

In this example, Acconci observes himself in a mirror rather than a TV monitor, feeding off his own reflection. Nevertheless, he participates in the same self-reflection that the videoing process facilitates. The self-perpetuation to which Krauss refers is also played out by YouTube vloggers, whose individual channels, as will be discussed shortly, provides them with even more mirrored surfaces of 'infinite regress.'

Krauss' (1976) video artist, whose creative life force languishes while captive to a reflective hall of mirrors, recalls the story of Narcissus, who literally succumbs to his own image:

Narcissus, wearied with hunting in the heat of the day, lay down here... While he sought to quench his thirst, another thirst grew in him, and as he drank, he was enchanted by the beautiful reflection that he saw... Spellbound by his own self, he remained there motionless with fixed gaze, like a statue carved from Parian marble. As he lay on the bank, he gazed at the twin stars that were his eyes, at his flowing locks, worthy of Bacchus or Apollo, his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, his lovely face where a rosy flush stained the snowy whiteness of his complexion... Unwittingly he desired himself, and was himself the object of his own approval... How often did he vainly kiss the treacherous pool, how often

plunge his arms deep in the waters, as he tried to clasp the neck he saw! But he could not lay hold upon himself... Poor foolish boy, why vainly grasp at the fleeting image that eludes you?...

No thought of food or sleep could draw him from the spot... As golden wax melts with gentle heat, as morning frosts are thawed by the warmth of the sun, so he was worn and wasted away with love, and slowly consumed by its hidden fire...' (Ovid AD 8, translated by Innes 1955).

While Krauss' conception of the video artist is grounded in the social milieu of the time, her analysis overlooks some of the key artistic ideologies that motivated sixties and seventies artists to video their performing body. In the same year Krauss wrote her article, artist Hermine Freed (1976) said about the artist's use of video:

The Portapak would seem to have been invented specifically for use by artists. Just when pure formalism had run its course; just when it became politically embarrassing to make objects, but ludicrous to make nothing; just when many artists were doing performance works but had nowhere to perform, or felt the need to keep a record of their performances; just when it began to seem silly to ask the same old Berkleean question, 'If you build a sculpture in the desert where no one can see it, does it exist?'; just when it became clear that TV communicates more information to more people than large walls do; just when we understood that in order to define space it is necessary to encompass time; just when many established ideas in other disciplines were being questioned and new models were proposed – just then the Portapak became available (Freed 1976, cited in Rush 2003, 13).

By documenting their performance, the video artist intended to make their artwork accessible to more viewers, taking it beyond the gallery setting – possibly even via TV. As Rush explains, factions of artists made alternative TV (often featuring their body/self) to encourage its viewers to co-produce, rather than just passively absorb, media communication (Rush 2003, 14-17). So, although Krauss viewed the videoed self-focus of the artist as isolating, the video artist encouraged communality to critique mainstream media – behaviour that directly contrasted the socially isolated narcissist.

Numerous artists videoed their art making, to share conceptually based processes with their audiences (Rush 2003, 72-76). On reflection, such a longing to show the

meaning under their work seems too substantial and communicative for an isolated artist stuck on their own surface reflection.

Like Krauss did, at the start of this project, I overlooked video art's intentions of connectivity, to indulge my ideas about narcissistic self-focus.

On beginning my Bachelor of Art, I came to Art School filled with ideals of 'reaching out' through my art and providing relevant social commentary to a broad and captivated audience. Growing up, motivational phrases espoused by motivational schoolteachers, such as 'be your very best' and 'contribute to society', impacted my value system. To quote the nineteenth century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1848, cited in Richardson 1986), I wanted to '[b]e not simply good, [but] be good for something' (188). These principles were reinforced at Art School, where lecturers implored us to consider the social commentary of our artwork and how our target viewership would relate to / be affected by it. Amid this drive for social consciousness, 'navel-gazing' (an artist making work about themselves) was discouraged.

I felt charged by the virtuous contribution I was making to the greater good with my artwork. That was until I realised that the non Art School people in my life 'didn't get' my work, and rather felt bemused and offended by it. Disenchanted, I concluded that my artwork was inaccessible to those beyond my Art School world and was therefore socially irrelevant. Fellow artists connected to my work, but sharing my vocation, they were too much like me, making me feel as if I wasn't contributing far beyond myself.

*The desire to increase the social relevance of my artwork necessitated a reflection on why it was irrelevant. Scrutinising my creative process, I realised that **my** experiences informed conceptual directions that were relevant to **me**. I developed the artwork with **my** internal dialogue, imbued it with **my** opinion and produced it the way **I** saw fit. This type of self-reflection is common to many creative processes, but at the time it was a revelation that I equated with selfishness. How could I expect others to relate to my work when it was totally self-focused? Like Narcissus, I had foolishly tried to make a connection with something outside of myself by bending over my own watery reflection. Not fulfilling my moral obligation to contribute to the greater good, I felt ashamed and labelled myself a narcissist.*

But it was not just my practice that I labelled as immorally narcissistic. Being surrounded by other artists who were similarly self-reflective in

their creative method, I labelled the whole contemporary art⁹ scene, which I was part of, as narcissistic.

When I shared my concerns about the inaccessibility and self-focus of 'contemporary art', I felt that my Art School teachers dismissed them. I was either told not to underestimate the intelligence of my audience, or to not worry about appealing to the 'lowest common denominator.' Generalising the non-art-educated people in my life (who did not relate to contemporary art) as the 'general public', I felt that these responses either denied contemporary art's limited viewership, or vainly relished its exclusivity. Either way, both attitudes reinforced my perception of contemporary art's narcissistic isolation, and limited potential to contribute to the greater good. Still eager to make a contribution, I thought that critiquing contemporary art's denied narcissism would help to highlight and change it from the inside.

Making it the main medium of my video art practice, I used my body as an intentionally ironic vehicle to critique self-focused art. In doing so, I intended to demonstrate the self-focused isolation of contemporary art to other artists. I was aware that by limiting my intended viewership to other contemporary artists, I paradoxically participated in the narcissistic isolation I was trying to negate. But I reassured myself with the thought that illuminating our self-focus from the inside would help change it.

Using my body to symbolise narcissistically isolated self-focus, contrasted with the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies performance artist, who used their body to foster greater connectivity with their audiences. Art theorist Anne Marsh (2014) argues that the anti-establishment culture of the sixties and seventies encouraged artists to experiment with new art forms, such as performance art, removing art from its exclusive position in the gallery and democratising it. By implicating their body, and sometimes the audience members', performance artists aimed to directly communicate with their audience to foster human collectivity and negate the alienation of their industrialised world. Concurrently though, the performance artist

⁹ Although an elusive and broad term, at this stage I understood contemporary art to be a movement that challenged established artistic techniques and social standards, having been told by teachers to 'push the boundaries'. For a more in depth view of the movement, please see Terry Smith's book *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009, University of Chicago Press).

often intensively analysed themselves and their position in the world (Marsh 2014, n.p), engendering a type of self-focus that, at this time, I viewed as narcissistic.

In using my body to represent myself, like Krauss (1976), I equated one with the other. Body art theorist Amelia Jones (2006) articulates this conflation well, with her body/self paradigm. With the term body/self, she refers to 'the inextricability of body and mind and the fact that we often access the self via its visible – corporeal – form' (xv). This latter claim is based on her synthesis of a number of theoretical perspectives. For instance, she states psychoanalysis as understanding the body as 'a locus of visible or verbalized symptoms through which the conscious and unconscious self is enacted' (xiv) and sociology as positing the body as the most direct social symbol of the self. Krauss and I particularly equate televisual depictions of the artist's body to the self. With the term 'televisual', body art theorist Amelia Jones refers to 'any works that exploits the intimate texture of the video, television, or computer monitor – its skin-like grain – to convey aspects of embodiment to viewers' (Jones 2006, 138). Krauss and I perhaps conflate televisual depictions of the artist's body to their self because, compared to exclusively visual media, video additionally shows movements and sounds, or 'visible... [and]... verbalized symptoms,' making the artist's embodiment (and therefore enselfment) seem more real. Notably, Krauss' critique of artistic self-representations does not include self-portraits from other media.

To create an aesthetic of self-focus in my work, I first looked to other artists who made their bodies the focus of their videos. Vito Acconci's and Bruce Nauman's works from the sixties and seventies particularly struck me.¹⁰ Considering that the *zeitgeist* of this period was exemplified by self-focus (those indulging in it and those critiquing it) it is hardly surprising that I observed it in video work from the period.

¹⁰While numerous other artists would also provide relevant examples of the aesthetic of self-focus, Acconci and Nauman are specifically relevant to my retrospective analysis. Being the first artists who I identified as using the aesthetic of self-focus, they strongly influenced my artistic use of it. Furthermore, the works of theirs that influenced my practice were made during the sixties and seventies and thus are relevant to the historical context of the cultural theory I draw from to discuss my understanding of narcissism that initially shaped this research.

Interestingly, I had not yet read Krauss' (1976) "*Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*", which also notes the narcissistic quality of these particular artists' video works. In Acconci's *Theme Song* (1973), *Open Book* (1974) and Nauman's *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1* (1968) and *Pinchneck* (1968), the body/self of the artist dominates the camera's view. In *Open Book* and *Pinchneck*, the artists' bodies/faces greedily encompass the purview of the camera, obscuring and (in the case of *Open Book*) entirely blocking out any discernable background. Where backgrounds are visible, they are understated, a mere appurtenance to the artist's body and, as Krauss would add, to psyche and self (Krauss 1976, 57). In much of his video work from this period, Acconci discloses himself further by delivering intimate and sometimes autobiographic soliloquys. For instance in *Air Time* he delivers a monologue about a five-year romantic relationship, disclosing personal details about it, eventually confiding to the audience that he is going to end it (National Library of Australia n.d).

My analysis of these artists' videoed actions and settings as enabling of self-focus did not take into account the artists' conceptual concerns. For instance, in speaking of Acconci's *Theme Song* (1973),-which implores the viewer to 'come closer, wrap their legs around him and believe that he's being honest', Rush says: 'His blatant manipulations exposed the covert enticements of advertisement-funded television (If you wear these jeans you, too, will be thin, blonde, and desirable)' (Rush 2003, 30). In this sense, Acconci was critiquing commercial TV and encouraging the viewer to see their place within it – in the process creating a dialogue that negated narcissistic enclosure. Rush also explains that Nauman considered his making processes to be equally important conceptually as his finished artwork, and so invited his viewers to see his videoed actions as sculptural extensions (Rush 2003, 72 & 76). Intending his body to be conceptually insightful, Nauman pushes it beyond superficial self-presentations.

Fig 2. Vito Acconci, *Open Book*, 1974, still from videoed performance, 10.9

The still image from Vito Acconci's videoed performance *Open Book*, 1974, 10.9 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The still image from *Open Book*, 1974, 10.9 mins, can instead be accessed via
<http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=901>

Fig 3. Bruce Nauman, *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1*, 1968, still from videoed performance, 60 mins

The still image from Bruce Nauman's videoed performance *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1*, 1968, 60mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The still image from *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1*, 1968, 60mins, can instead be accessed via
<http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=3037>

Regardless of the artists' conceptual intentions, in my practice, I focused on their aesthetic of self-focus and used it to inform my own. Because, like Nauman (1968) and Acconci (1973, 1974), I wanted to keep the video-focus on myself, I employed their techniques of self-focus. My body and face was centrally framed by the video camera with either backdrops of plain white walls, or simple domestic spaces foregrounding it. In various Acconci-inspired moments, I delivered autobiographic monologues that detailed my personal grievances about prospective boyfriends, Art School and 'arty try-hards.' This intentionally self-indulgent blithering culminated in a series called *Bitching* (Godley, 2002 – 2003). Making my work personal, as Acconci had, I stated on camera that it was all about me – a willing self-sacrifice, which was intended to illuminate the artist's narcissistic self-focus. In *Me Looking at Me, Looking at Me* (2003), a stationary camera videos me videoing myself with a hand-held camera. Gazing at my reflection in the viewfinder of the hand-held camera, I transition between different poses. The video shifts between the hand-held and stationary footage. Thus I successively feed off my posed reflections and participate in the same type of 'self-enclosure' Krauss accuses Acconci of in *Air Time*. Positioning myself as my own muse I did not develop any creative ideas beyond myself, thus critiquing the artist's social disengagement and self-love.

iCulture:

In the years between finishing my Art School degree and beginning this research project, I worked at a costume shop. Situated in Perth's Western suburbs, its mirrored walls were abuzz with private high school and university students – the girls surveying their sexiness in sexy costumes and the boys regarding themselves assuming roles and reciting catchphrases from their childhood heroes.

*One uncharacteristically quiet Saturday afternoon, one of my co-workers excitedly told us about a girl-blogger as she took the helm at the computer. She transported us to a website illuminated by bright little windows of video stills. Having only recently installed the Internet at home, this was my first glimpse of YouTube. Comfortably couched in my vertical mattress of bursting booking rack, I watched my co-worker play a video. With a shock of recognition, I sprang forth. I had never seen YouTube; but I **had** seen **this**.*

A girl vlogger sat centre frame in an unremarkable domestic space, droning on about her boyfriend issues. This was the very aesthetic of self-focus in the videoed performances of artists such as Acconci that I had reproduced in my own work.

Unlike me, the girl vlogger seemed unashamed about her self-focus. She unapologetically displayed her body/self without sheathing it in irony. Engrossed in her spiel, my co-workers embraced her self-focus. This new space, YouTube, seemed to respect, even revere, self-focus as accepted practice. It made me think that boldly launching one's body/self into the world was not just reserved for special occasions like costume parties anymore.

Given that the Internet is characterised by self-focus, my wide-eyed surprise seems strangely quaint. Self-focus is facilitated by the individual interests driving one's unique Internet navigation and by the exhibitionistic projections of the body/self that social networking sites (SNS) – such as vlogging on YouTube – necessitate. 'Selfies' – photos taken of oneself, by oneself – litter sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. They have become so commonplace that in 2013 a definition of the term was included in the Oxford English Dictionary, which subsequently announced it as the word of the year (Oxford English Dictionary, accessed September 20 2014, <http://www.oed.com/>). As the body is the most

direct social symbol of the self (Jones 2006), online bodily projections exemplify the Internet's culture of self-focus.

Exhibiting the body/self on sites that encourage self-disclosure, presents an especially revealing self-focus. Impersonating a concerned friend, Facebook's status updater asks 'What's on your mind?' (Facebook 2014), while YouTube's original slogan of 'YouTube – Broadcast Yourself', has been more recently supplemented with the request to 'Share your thoughts' (YouTube 2014). As a participant in both of these sites, I have observed others sharing 'secrets,' divorce struggles and mourning processes. Going further than only mediating their body, participants seemingly share all of themselves, exhibiting their most intimate details.

Being defined by exhibitionistic self-focus, 'iCulture' seems an appropriate term to describe these online social conditions. I have appropriated the 'i' prefix here that Apple applies to their numerous personal Mac computers (e.g. iPad, iPhone and iBook) because the 'i' is an easily understood symbol that epitomises the themes of this discussion. In addition to allowing idiosyncratic navigation and being intimately attached to one's person at all times, these devices enable, indeed tempt, one to capture and upload themselves whenever they feel the need to share, and in this way they epitomise the culture of online self-focus. Aboujaoude (2011) says about online 'i' centric terminology: 'The shift from e- to i- in prefixing Internet URLs and naming electronic "apps" parallels the rise of the self-absorbed online Narcissus' (69). I will consider self-focused iCulture in relation to narcissism.

Steve Dixon's (2007) notion of the digital double will be used to contextualise iCulture's virtually projected body/self. Dixon defines the digital double, as a technological reflection of one's body (250). In his unpublished article "Proliferating Identities in New Media Performance and Cyberculture", he says about it:

It is interesting to relate the digital double to the Narcissus myth, and its particular relevance to the digital age. In our technologised culture we are increasingly projecting ourselves and watching ourselves on screens and in

cyberspace, and creating doubled identities in arenas such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Second Life*. Like Narcissus, we are increasingly hypnotised by our own reflections. (personal communication August 11, 2011).¹¹

His subcategory of the reflection double, which identically mirrors the appearance and movement of the digital participant can be applied to the contemporary Internet participant. Although the Facebook selfie is still and YouTube vlogs mediate past movement, seeing their identical likeness, the online networking participant is exposed to their reflection double. Like Narcissus, who was captured by his own watery double, the participant perpetually returns to their reflection, regularly uploading new pictures and videos of themselves, while checking how others have responded to their doubles.

Dixon's (2007) observations about the narcissistic digital double are pertinent to our time. But why are contemporary Internet users compelled to longingly look at themselves online? On reflection the answer may be found in our need to self-construct. Indeed McCracken (2008) suggests that since the Modern era, individuals have been both free to and forced to construct themselves. In this exegesis I equate self to self-concept, which is understood to be:

[A] concept developed by cognitive organization and the dynamic process of development. It constitutes a series of beliefs and attitudes about the organism... Self-concept, because it is a concept, is cognitively structured; because it consists of attitudes and beliefs it is affective. Hence, self-concept may be defined as a value-based cognitive-affective symbolization of the organism growing over time through maturation and the accretion of experience (Horrocks and Jackson 1972).

In other words, being dynamically organised, one is inevitably driven to structure the self. Using Anthony Giddens' (1991) notion of the reflexive project of the self I would argue that now more than ever individuals take on more responsibility for self-construction. As Giddens explains, in traditional societies, individuals were prescribed identities, which were passed from generation to generation; they did

¹¹ Please see permission to use this copyrighted material in "Appendix 3: Copyrighted Material" from pages 159-160 of this thesis.

not have to build a self from the ground up. Conversely, in ‘highly modern’ cultures, couched in globalised mass media, traditional identities can no longer be relied upon to define the self because the media presents the individual with too many identity and lifestyle choices. When coupled with their Enlightenment-based thinking, which is based on scientific doubt that constantly revises said truths in the light of new information, this amount of identity choice results in constant identity-revision.

What infrastructure supports the development of our self-conception? Charles Cheung (2007) puts forward the personal Internet homepage as one possible context that facilitates Giddens’ reflexive project of the self. Within this discussion the YouTube channel, Facebook timeline and Twitter account are all considered to be personal homepages. Cheung contends that individuals who are unsure of their identity(ies) (and uncertainty is inevitable when one is overwhelmed by choices that they are culturally encouraged to doubt) can experiment with different ones with each revision of their homepage (278). In this context, posting a new vlog can constitute a revision of the YouTube channel. Although individuals can use their internal dialogue to revise their identities, on a number of levels seeing themselves play out these identities on their homepage is more effective. This is due to the homepage’s archival potential, which allows users to play out, save and literally reflect on a number of different identities – the vlogger can re-watch any number of their archived vlogs whenever they want. Furthermore, the user can gauge their Internet audience to affirm their identities. On YouTube text comments, video responses and personal messages allow one to assess how they’ve been socially perceived. I contend that the self-reflection facilitated by personal homepages enables one to participate in the reflexive project of the self.¹² In saying this, it is not my intention to conflate self-reflection and self-reflexivity. Self-reflection is

¹² Beyond the context of the self, I further posit that reflection is part of any reflexive process. For instance, the reflection on creative decisions, outcomes, processes and reference points enables the revision – or reflexive development – of a body of artwork. In *All MySelves on YouTube* retrospective analysis has been used to reflect on and therefore reflexively develop artistic processes and outcomes. This approach is demonstrated in discussions of my practical approaches in ensuing chapters.

understood as looking at a representation of one's self, while self-reflexivity is understood as being aware of and developing one's self, based on this awareness. For one to be able to revise and/or construct their self, they first need to reflect on their self to see what aspects they want to develop. Therefore, I propose self-reflection as a stage integral in the self-reflexive process. Seeing their different online identities, with their accompanying social responses, the personal homepage user can story together the ones most pertinent to their self-concept (Cheung 2007, 278-279). Within this argument, I do not assume that online self-construction is a given. However, I do contend that an individual's personal homepage is one possible location for the type of self-reflection that can potentially facilitate reflexive self-construction.

Lasch (1979), of course, considers self-mediations as fake and the personal sense of development that comes from storying them together as shallow. From this perspective then, the depth of self-construction implicit in the process of posting, revising and looking at one's reflection double on their homepage could be questioned. However, from a contemporary perspective, because our Internet self-manifestations are intricately intertwined with our everyday lives, penetrating our social, business and personal lives, they could be considered deeper than nostalgic photos assigned to a dusty family photo album. Crossing over to our 'actual' (offline) lives these self-mediations may fuel substantial self-constructions.

Dixon (2007) talks about the profound implications of the reflection double. In the context of art installations and multimedia theatrical performances, he notes that one's reflection conflates with one's actual body/self. His analysis of Blast Theory's multimedia theatre performance *10 Backwards* (1999) speaks to this. In this performance the main character videos herself eating breakfast. She then watches this footage back, while trying to exactly emulate her recorded actions (Dixon 2007, 246-248). By re-enacting this activity, she travels back in time to relive her past (247). Dixon concludes about this performance:

Niki uses digital video as an instrument for self-analysis, but for her the technological duplicate becomes the “real” that she must painstakingly copy and emulate. The sequence’s power and fascination lies in the fact that we see her gradually embodying and becoming one with her technological reflection... the digital reflection effectively effaces its live double to emerge as the dominant force (247-248).

Fig 4. Blast Theory, *10 Backwards*, 1999, still from videoed performance, 70 mins

The still image from Blast Theory’s videoed performance *10 Backwards*, 1999, 70 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The still image from *10 Backwards* can instead be accessed via
<http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/presentations/see-matt-talk-in-sheffield/>

Relating this back to Cheung’s (2007) personal homepage concept, if SNS participants look to their virtual reflection to inform their actual behaviour, it becomes a reference of real weight that can result in substantial self-development. Dixon (2007) concludes about the reflection double that it ‘announces the emergence of the self-reflexive, technologized self, conceived as becoming increasingly indistinguishable from its human counterpart’ (268). As our virtual and offline selves are entwined, viewing mediated images of the self as ‘superficial’ (as Lasch would), and inconsequential to self-development, seems a thing of the past. Indeed the reflexivity of self-construction on the Internet directly contradicts the narcissistic personal and artistic stasis that both Lasch (1979) and Krauss (1976) attribute to looking at self-mediations.

Although they are not debased by their ‘superficial’ mediations, are self-construction attempts by the online networking participant undermined by what could be seen as immodest, narcissistic self-revelations? Dixon (2007) says about self-revelation on the Internet:

Personas are honed like characters for the new theatrical confessional box, where, like postmodern performance artists, individuals explore their autobiographies and enact intimate dialogues with their inner selves. Seduced by the apparent intimacy and privacy of this most public of spaces, they confess all online and reveal secrets to strangers that they have never told their closest friends. The World Wide Web is a site of therapeutic catharsis-overload, and it

constitutes the largest theatre in the world, offering everyone fifteen megabytes of fame' (4).

By saying that sharing secrets offers Internet users 'fifteen megabytes of fame,' one could speculate that users share intimate details to *get* fifteen minutes of fame.¹³ From Lasch's perspective, using personal details to elicit the salacious curiosity of others narcissistically cheapens them (1979). If Internet participants share intimacies because they need to be looked at, this could narcissistically cancel out the meaningful reflexivity of reflecting on the self.

Psychiatrist Elias Aboujaoude (2011) suggests that the contemporary Internet encourages and maintains narcissism (69). In part, this is because it provides exhibitionists with a 'pulpit and an audience' (86), fulfilling their need to be worshipped and admired (69). He talks about the narcissist's grandiose visions of fifteen minutes of Internet fame, saying:

The grandiose objectives that mark many people's online lives tend to lie on the superficial side and are more preoccupied with reproducing short-lived attention than something substantive or lasting – a "flailing chicken step" will always generate more hits, which is the goal, than any intelligent contribution in an online forum of ideas. A Web site's utmost goal may be for users to bookmark it and add it to their list of "favorites." It will do anything in its means to catch our attention and earn that distraction. Many of us take the same approach, and do not mind if our contributions are not meaningful enough to last beyond those fifteen minutes (65).

Although here Aboujaoude talks about inconsequential acts of obscurity, self-disclosure can become just as frivolous if it is done merely to gain attention. On YouTube I have viewed many personal revelations which, when coupled with the vlogger's pleas to be watched, favoured, subscribed¹⁴ to and 'liked', can look like attention seeking behaviours.

¹³ In his quote, Dixon references the phrase 'fifteen minutes of fame,' made famous by Andy Warhol. The phrase is derived from an exhibition catalogue for Warhol's 1968 retrospective exhibition at Moderna Museet gallery, Stockholm. The catalogue reads: 'In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes' (Warhol 1968, in The Phrase Finder 2014).

¹⁴ On YouTube a function exists to 'favourite' videos. When a video is favoured, it is automatically featured on the channel of the YouTube user who favoured it – thus increasing its exposure. When

In contrast, Michael Strangelove (2010) argues that self-disclosure on vlogs enables expression of the authentic self, self-construction and community connections – all traits that directly contrast narcissistic exhibitionism. Containing autobiography and confession, he classes vlogs as video diaries.¹⁵ He contends that vlogging culture is defined by the pursuit of authenticity, which vloggers try to express through autobiography and confession of their real life stories. Vloggers’ drive to present their real self is an attempt to assert and stabilise their personal identity in the face of their hyperreal and uncertain postmodern context (67-68). Then by striving to share meaningful insights to consolidate their sense of self, Strangelove’s vlogger belies the superficiality that can be associated with mediated self-disclosure. Because the diary genre helps reveal repressed personal material, stories together disparate identities, processes emotions, and acts as a reflexive mirror within which to observe the self (80), it ultimately enables self-development – a profound activity that I would argue goes beyond the shallowness of attention-seeking self-disclosure.

Strangelove (2010) notes that vlogging’s high degree of social interactivity – in the form of text comments, video responses and private messages – separates it from other private diary formats to connect vloggers in meaningful discourses. This in turn heightens the reflexivity already attributed to diaries (72-75). Intensified reflexivity manifests when we watch ourselves being watched by others (82). This is reminiscent of Cooley’s (1902) looking glass self. Being immersed in their selves, individuals are only able to see an outer vision of their selves by assessing how others receive them in social situations. From the looking glass self, Symbolic Interactionism (SI) emerged in the 1930s. SI proposes that, not being able to perceive reality directly, people interact with each other to construct meanings. In this sense, how others perceive the individual in social situations will influence that

a YouTube member subscribes to a vlogger’s channel, they are sent updates when the vlogger uploads new videos (YouTube 2014).

¹⁵ For Strangelove’s take on the diary/video diary genre, please refer to the chapter ‘Video Diaries: The Real You in YouTube’ in his book *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (2010).

individual's self-concept (Blumer 1973). Laura Robinson (2007) has more recently applied SI to social networking sites (SNS), saying that Internet users constitute their 'cyberself' by assessing how the generalised 'cyberother' perceive them (104).¹⁶ From this perspective, interactive YouTube vlogging ensures social connection and resultant reflexive self-development, which contradicts the isolated narcissistic implosion that Lasch (1979) and Aboujaoude (2011) attribute to mediated self-disclosure.

In an iCulture where our reflection double enables self-construction and social connection, we may no longer devalue self-focus as a narcissistic vice. This is perhaps why I noticed my fellow costume-shop assistants direct a certain reverence to the girl-vlogger and why, in my subsequent foray into YouTube's vlogging community, self-focus was accepted and encouraged as the norm.

I, however, upon discovering YouTube vlogging, had only had the Internet at home for a year and was out of touch with iCulture's values. My attitude was still shaped by older ideologies that denigrated self-focus as a narcissistic vice. Although intrigued by vlogging's performance artist-like unapologetic self-focus, I was still too self-conscious to embrace; equating it with narcissism. To prove to my viewers and myself that I was not a narcissist, I instead chose to critique the narcissistic bond that seemingly united preceding videoed performance artworks and contemporary vlogs. Clinically objectifying this comparative analysis separated me, I felt, from narcissism.

The following discussion provides an analysis of how I comparatively couched YouTube vlogging in the same aesthetic of self-focus that I thought afflicted videoed performance art. This allowed me to avoid a deeper study that would consider one's self-conceptual relationship with their performance practice.

¹⁶ For a more comprehensive view of Robinson's ideas, please refer to her article: *The Cyberself: the Selfing Project Goes Online, Symbolic Interaction in the Digital Age*.

Vlogging and Narcissism:

My comparative analysis of narcissistic self-presentation in seventies videoed performance art and vlogging was sparked by the recognition of their shared aesthetic of self-focus. To investigate this commonality further, I became a YouTube vlogging lurker (one who observes the goings-ons of a networking site, but who does not actively participate). I found the girl vlogger's aesthetic of self-focus, which I'd first observed in the costume shop, to be common practice. Like the girl vlogger, all of the vloggers I will discuss are the centrepieces of their videos. All the videos were shot in non-intrusive simple surroundings. Although I condemned narcissism, my latent fascination with self-presentation created a push pull effect that enticed me to investigate vlogging's narcissism further. This investigation uncovered even more narcissistic attributes that bonded videoed performance art and vlogging together.

More so than Krauss' video artist, the YouTube vlogger returns to their image, lingering on it in a way that I viewed as narcissistically implosive (excessively inward-looking). Vloggers, like the video artists that preceded them, can view their body/self while videoing it and can additionally return to their image on their YouTube channel. Being able to see their reflection doubles both on camera and online, I surmised that the vlogger's narcissistic self-gaze was more intense than the preceding video/performance artist's whose aesthetic of self-focus had captivated me.

During my initial YouTube jaunts, I particularly encountered this lingering self-reflection in videos from Australian vlogger Bazza462006 – a cross-dressing male in his 60s. At regular intervals, for the last seven years, Bazza has exclusively posted vlogs that show him posing for the camera in various tailor-made female outfits. He typically transitions between 'feminine' poses, sensually rubbing his body through the fabric of his costumes and occasionally delivering commentary in his husky

voice about how nice he feels in the garments. Being positioned in his bedroom, between the camera and a built-in full-length wardrobe mirror, his vlogs show both his front-on and mirrored back-view. Often turning around to face the mirror, he takes time to regard his reflection. In *Crossdresser Michelle- New Pink Leotard*, where he wears a pink leotard, which he says ‘feels so nice to wear and... looks pretty nice too’ (Bazza462006 2008), he turns to face the mirror, placing each hand gently on its reflective double, as if encircling his own reflection. While here he pauses and looks lovingly at himself. Some time later, he turns to face the mirror again, surveying his reflected swaying hips. In *Crossdresser Michelle- What’s Underneath* (Bazza462006 2007), while wearing a green leotard, he similarly encircles his reflection with his reaching hands, regards his reflection and says ‘Mmmm, nice.’

Fig 5. Bazza462006, *Crossdresser Michelle- New Pink Leotard*, 2008, still from YouTube vlog, 1.58

The still image from Bazza462006’s videoed performance *Crossdresser Michelle- New Pink Leotard*, 2008, 1.58 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *Crossdresser Michelle- New Pink Leotard* can instead be accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/user/bazza462006>

Fig 6. Bazza462006, *Crossdresser Michelle- What’s Underneath*, 2007, still from YouTube vlog, 2.42

The still image from Bazza462006’s videoed performance *Crossdresser Michelle- What’s Underneath*, 2007, 2.42 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *Crossdresser Michelle- What’s Underneath* can instead be accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/user/bazza462006>

Making these vlogs to overtly gaze at his mirrored reflection, Bazza’s sensual self-ogling couples with his self-praise to exhibit a sense of narcissistic love. I am more interested though, in how his narcissism can be likened to Krauss’ video artist. For instance, contemporary video devices generally have a viewfinder that can be flexibly positioned to allow viewing during videoing; the framing of Bazza’s choreographed movements suggests he is doing this. According to Krauss’ (1976)

argument, simultaneously seeing and recording live visions of himself, Bazza's performance, like that of many vloggers, becomes self-referential.

However, unlike Krauss' video artist, Bazza has multiple reflective surfaces. He also gazes at himself in his bedroom mirror and can most likely see his mirrored back in the camera's viewfinder. More than creating a self-focus, this setup creates a hall of mirrors that intensifies it. Like Acconci does in *Air Time* (1973), Bazza creates 'a situation of spatial closure' (Krauss 1976, 54). However, because Bazza embraces his reflections from all sides, seemingly titillated by their enclosure, his hall of mirrors stretches beyond Acconci's, whose fixed gaze at one looking glass limits his reflective regress.

Seemingly making these videos in order to watch and display himself, Bazza's speech is sparing. Perhaps he feels words would distract from his mirrored beauty – like a splashing stone rippling the pond's surface. When he does speak, he seldom refers to objects outside of himself, preferring to stay focused on complimenting himself. Being his main referential material, it is hardly surprising that his self drives his monologue. Conversely, Acconci's spoken content usually refer to others, whether he be talking about personal relationships, as in *Air Time* (1973), or trying to have a relationship with his audience, as in *Theme Song* (1973). Perhaps it is Bazza's extreme spatial enclosure that consolidates his self-focus. Speaking almost exclusively about himself, creates another mirror for content generation.

Although most vloggers do not use an additional background mirror, and many refer to situations outside themselves, Bazza's regressing hall of mirrors could be seen to symbolise the many self-reflections made available to the vlogger through their YouTube channel (homepage). Upon signing into their channel, the vlogger sees numerous self-reflections in the form of thumbnail video stills. They can click on any or many to re-view themselves. Although earlier performance/video artists presumably archived their videos, accessing their archives wouldn't have been as immediate or as socially necessary. For the vlogger, all uploaded reflections are just

a click away within the one locus of their channel. Being a social networking site, the vlogger is also compelled to check their account regularly to maintain their online social life. For these reasons they may be lured to their videoed reflections more often than the video artist was.

Such refer-ability is perhaps why vloggers like Bazza perpetuate more or less the same vlog. Mostly taking place in his bedroom and all centred on him dressing in female attire, Bazza really does feed off his reflections for more material. While not all vloggers self-perpetuate, they are more likely to reuse the same setting and performance style than video artists like Acconci and Nauman. Existing at an extremity of self-perpetuating vloggers, Bazza exemplifies how much more implosively reflective vlogging is than preceding videoed performance art.

Eternally returning to their mediated image allows the vlogger to narcissistically scrutinise their public presentation and, perhaps more importantly, monitor and maintain their impressive image in view of how they are seen by others. This narcissistic self-scrutiny is particularly evident in vlogger Ficquettegirl's vlogs that deal with the aftermath of Michael Jackson's death. In *Michael Jackson Haters... GROW THE HELL UP!!!* (Ficquettegirl 2009), she delivers an enraged spiel, raising her voice and swearing at Michael Jackson haters who have been defaming the pop star online after his (then) recent death. In the user comments left about the vlog, it is evident that a number of viewers have received Ficquettegirl's comments as offensive, over-reactive and unreasonably biased. In (narcissistically) referring to her previous video to generate *Video Response to Michael Jackson Haters... GROW THE HELL UP!!!* Ficquettegirl says:

I am actually doing this as a response to my last video and ah, pretty much what I wanted to say was I'm sorry for being kind of rude about it... I was a little upset so I don't know if I really worded everything right or not, I probably did word a few things wrong. But all I was saying is there are people mourning him [*Michael Jackson*] and pretty much try and respect that people are still upset about it... I'm sorry if I came off wrong and etcetera... This is going to be on here as a response to the last video and sorry for using such horrible language on the last one. And ah, everyone have a good day. Peace (2009).

By apologetically acknowledging her 'rude' behaviour in *Michael Jackson Haters... GROW THE HELL UP!!!*, it is evident that Ficquettegirl uses the self-reflection elicited by the comments from the 'generalised other' to gauge how she was received. Rather than being a genuine critical self-examination, her anxious self-scrutiny seems more of an attempt to please a larger audience. As Lasch says, the narcissist's anxious self-scrutiny cannot be confused for critical self-examination (Lasch 1979, 94). Addressing Michael Jackson haters, she says: 'Try not to be mmmnn, talking really bad about him in front of them [*Michael Jackson fans*] or etcetera' (Ficquettegirl 2009). Pausing her speech with 'mmmnn,' her face distorts in to a distasteful expression while she searches for the language to describe Michael Jackson hating behaviour. Judging from her expression of disgust, it seems that 'talking really bad about him' is a polite façade that covers the ruder language she would prefer to be using.

Recalling Cooley's (1902) looking glass self and SI's notion of the socially constructed self (1973), Ficquettegirl's video response could be understood as an attempt to see her self and reflexively develop it. My bias towards seeing vlogging as narcissistic at that point in time, and what appeared as a 'fake' attempt to 'pander to the audience' led me to view this, and other similar vlogs, as narcissistic self-scrutiny.

In addition to being watched by themselves, narcissists also crave attention from others. The vlogger's disclosure of intimate personal details is another narcissistic commonality between performance/video art and vlogging. Being steeped in seventies values which judged public self-disclosure as immodest, and being uninitiated in the more contemporary values of iCulture, it did not occur to me that social networking participants perhaps shared such personal insights to share and develop an authentic sense of their self (as Strangelove [2010] would argue). Rather, I attributed such secret sharing to narcissistic attention seeking and thought that the worldwide stage of the Internet intensified this exhibitionism.

I assessed Columbian vlogger KKortez3's personally penetrating vlogs as particularly exemplifying this trait. In the opening dialogues of his vlogs *ADDICTED TO MASTURBATION? The Consequences & the Way Out?* (2010) and *HAVE YOU BEEN MOLESTED? You're not alone... the key to heal* (2010) he promises self-revelation by trustfully imparting his biggest secrets:

What I'm about to tell you I've never told anyone before. Not my parents, not my sister, not a pastor, *anyone*. I haven't told anyone. The only one that knows is me and God and well now, it's gonna be you. [Kortez then goes onto discuss his experiences of being addicted to masturbation and offers advice to others on how to overcome it] (KKortez3 2010).

[And]:

Well I've already told you one of my biggest secrets, but I wanna be an open book, so I'm about to tell you my biggest, biggest secret. It happens to a lot of people. Most people take themselves to psychologists, or, you know, somebody who they can trust but I feel like I can trust you. You know I also feel like once I don't have any secrets I wouldn't have anything to be afraid of, I won't have to be afraid to be judged by anybody, because everybody knows everything about me. [He then talks about being repeatedly molested by a family member as a child, describing the trust issues this left him with and how his recovery involved forgiving the perpetrator] (KKortez3 2010).

Fig 7. KKortez3, *HAVE YOU BEEN MOLESTED? You're not alone... the key to heal*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 8.32

The still image from KKortez3's videoed performance *HAVE YOU BEEN MOLESTED? You're not alone... the key to heal*, 2010, 8.32 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *HAVE YOU BEEN MOLESTED? You're not alone... the key to heal* can instead be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/user/KKortez3>

Considered from Strangelove's (2010) perspective, Kortez's desire to not keep any secrets from his audience could arise from a motivation to be authentically transparent. By claiming that he trusts his audience, he could also be seen as trying to cultivate a connection with them. Because these aspirations reveal the intimate self and foster communal connects, they oppose narcissistic exhibitionism.

From my perspective at the time, however, KorteZ's promises to reveal everything about himself seemed a ploy to tantalise viewers and tempt them to watch on. His profoundly penetrating public confessions seemed an audio visual parallel to Lasch's 'exhibitionist author' (1979): inappropriately intimate. This made me wonder if the confessions came from a genuine place of sharing, or if they were used as irresistible bait for a gossip hungry audience. In both vlogs KorteZ says that he is sharing these personal insights to help others. However, a written subtitle early on in his vlog about masturbation reads 'Even if this subject doesn't affect you, watch it 'till the end for awareness' (KKorteZ3 2010). Saying that he shares personal information to help others, yet urging those who are not affected by the issue to watch on, contradicts his former claim and throws into question his motivation for sharing. While connecting to others may be the explicit motivation for vloggers like KorteZ to share such personal information, I was suspicious that their underlying motivation was to be watched, and in the process gain fifteen minutes of fame.

In the above analysis, a comparison has been drawn between the aesthetic of self-focus in seventies videoed performance art and YouTube vlogging. This is not to say that contemporary videoed, or non-videoed performance art does not also share a similar aesthetic of self-focus with vlogging. For instance, such an aesthetic is exemplified in Australian artist Anastasia Klose's performance piece *The Re-Living Room* (2012). In this piece she badly danced for six hours everyday in a living-room setting, for the duration of the exhibition.¹⁷ In part this performance was inspired by the artist's own captivated viewing of a band dancer (Klose 2012). Klose says about the work:

I wanted to give people that experience of watching someone dance in earnest...
I also wanted to re-live a period of my past where I sat on the couch for a couple

¹⁷ This piece was shown as part of the Primavera exhibition (2012), at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney. It ran for two months (Klose 2012). I viewed Klose's work live.

of months avoiding life and dancing to video clips... I was living life on the stage (2012).

Similar to Aboujaoude's (2011) subject who attention-seeks with their 'flailing chicken step' (65), Klose dances badly – as she had previously done in the privacy of her own home – to voyeuristically captivate her audience. Knowing that this bad dancing recalls intimate memories of the artist's personal (although not physical) inertia, the viewer feels as if they are intruding on a private moment. This feeling is consolidated by the artist's facial expression of self-conscious unease. Although it would have been polite to look away, I found the vulnerability of expressing such an intimate moment in public too riveting to – as it had been in Kortez's vlogs.

Fig 8. Anastasia Klose, *The Re-Living Room*, 2012, photograph of live performance

The photograph of Anastasia Klose's live performance *The Re-Living Room*, 2012, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

**The photograph of *The Re-Living Room* can instead be accessed via
<https://anastasiaklose.wordpress.com/>**

Hennessy Youngman is an American performance artist, who, in his series of YouTube vlogs entitled *ART THOUGHTZ*, comically critiques contemporary art issues (Hennessy Youngman 2014). Like other vloggers he situates himself in front of plain domestic spaces, such as walls, doors and other everyday settings, which act as mere appurtenances to the vlogger's (and in this case artist's) body. While this established performance art setting of self-focus seamlessly translates onto YouTube, Hennessy's irreverent gangster-rapper assessments of high-art issues deflect the earnest quality that is often associated with intimate confessional videos from vloggers and seventies performance artists, such as Acconci. For instance, in *ART THOUGHTZ: Performance Art* (2012), he says:

Performance art is a pre-Internet method of annoying groups of people using your body and voice, working in conjunction, in order to create a compelling spectacle that heightens said annoyance. Though, if you read anything about performance art's origins, you'll probably read, um, some quotes, talking about how European performance artists of yesteryear were mounting an attack on

our bourgeois sensibilities through these aesthetic provocations. Um, but that's just hogwash, you know what I'm saying? Because sometimes, Internet, it's just fun to annoy motherfucker's. This kind of nuisance amusement is the genesis of performance art (Hennessy Youngman 2012).

Fig 9. Hennessy Youngman, *ART THOUGHTZ: Performance Art*, 2012, still from YouTube vlog, 10.53

The still image from Hennessy Youngman's videoed performance *ART THOUGHTZ: Performance Art*, 2012, 10.53 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *ART THOUGHTZ: Performance Art* can instead be accessed via http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjaKtx_dN78&list=UU1kdURWGVjuksaqGK3oGoxA

Referring to his audience as 'Internet', rather than addressing them as individuals (as KorteZ does) further depersonalises this vlog.

While the analysed works from Klose and Hennessy display some aesthetics of self-focus, neither example conflates intimate self-expression with video¹⁸ – a device that, as has been discussed throughout this chapter, televisually frames and reflects the artist's body/self to consolidate the aesthetic of self-focus. This is not to say that contemporary performance art doesn't convey intimate self-expression with video. However, the videoed depiction of penetrating autobiography seems more evident in seventies performance art and vlogging than in contemporary performance art. Because seventies videoed performance art is more stylistically akin with YouTube vlogging, it was used in this chapter to elucidate vlogging's aesthetic of self-focus. As vlogging particularly consolidates and takes the videoed aesthetic of self-focus to a new level (as has been discussed in this chapter), throughout this thesis it will be drawn on more than contemporary performance art to discuss how the performer's self relates to their performance practice.

Within this chapter, which reflects some of my early impressions of YouTube vlogging, it is evident that I was intrigued by what I saw as the site's narcissistic self-focus. So much so that I decided to host my own performance practice there. Given

¹⁸ Klose's performance appears to have only been documented with photos.

I was still using my body/self as principle artistic medium, and given my project is about self-presentation, it would have seemed fitting to examine *my* own involvement in narcissistic self-presentation. However, still viewing self-focus as shamefully narcissistic, I was not ready to acknowledge it in my practice.

Instead, I chose to perform non-autobiographical vlogging personae that would allow me to avoid myself while critiquing narcissistic online self-presentation – this practice, hosted on YouTube and recontextualised within a live art setting, is called *All MySelves on YouTube*. Ironically, however, even if it were possible to consciously avoid self-focus while using my body/self as artistic medium, analysing my firsthand vlogging experience to gain research insights unwittingly resulted in an autoethnographic self-focus. According to Pace (2012) ‘Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding’ (2). I thus became, in the words of Louis, an autoethnographic researcher who is ‘an instrument of my inquiry: and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am’ (cited in Frost et al. 2001, 365). The original intent of my inquiry revealed my personal biases about self-focus being narcissistic, which inevitably led to self-focus.

Being so engaged in YouTube’s narcissism threw my apparent aversion to narcissism into question. My comparative analysis of videoed performance art and YouTube vlogging allowed me to see how widely intensified and thus accepted self-focus was in this new iCulture. Perhaps I hosted my practice on YouTube because I intuited it to be a safe platform for my own self-presentation – one that would not condemn it as narcissistic. However, my desire to explore the self-focus in my practice remained latent because I was still mired in feelings of narcissistic guilt. In some senses, while my practice was inevitably ‘all about me’, with my artistic methods and theoretical justifications, I went to great lengths to try and evade myself, as I will explain in detail in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER 2: NOT ACTING MYSELF – PERFORMING EVERYONE BUT ME

Not realising the futility of trying to avoid self-focus in an unwitting autoethnographic project, from the outset I wanted to make it clear that although using my body/self, I was performing the Other. Within this discussion, from a sociological viewpoint, the Other is understood as anyone an individual perceives as different from their self (Riggins 1997, 3). Throughout this thesis the term ‘Other’ has been capitalised to highlight it as a conceptual framework and to represent the homogenous group the self assigns Others to (Riggins 5). The concept of the Other will be explored in more depth as the chapter progresses. Seeing my personae as Other meant that I did not relate them to my self-concept and thus believed I could keep my self-focus at bay. This, however, contradicted my assumption that bodily representations equal self-representations. Sinking deep into self-denial I somehow overlooked this paradox.

This chapter will explore the artistic methodology I put in place to try to deny my self-focus. Firstly, unlike the vlogger, who made an exhibition of *their* private life to narcissistically garner attention, I would nobly avoid self-projection by performing non-autobiographic personae. I used Sherry Turkle’s concept of the early online multiple-identity roleplaying MUDer (which will be explained shortly) as a template for my YouTube practice of performing multiple vlogging identities. By performing multiple-identities, unlike Turkle’s vloggers, I did not think I was expressing different facets of myself, but rather that I was performing everyone but myself. While Turkle’s MUDers enacted their psychologies by roleplaying, I thought I avoided mine by acting – a method I naively thought was akin to pretending. Within acting, I relied on simulacrum and parody to consolidate the barriers between my personae and I. The Cartesian denial that I exhibited at the start of my project, that *embodying the Other* somehow guaranteed self-avoidance, will be analysed in relation to photographic artist Cindy Sherman’s claims that the characters she poses as have no relation to her personal self.

HerTube and Vicarious Self-Representation:

To investigate its narcissism, I became an avid viewer of YouTube vlogging. Caught up in my viewing moments, I momentarily forgot the intended investigation and became seduced by the behavioural and performative details of numerous vloggers. I was enchanted by delicious details, such as: the way teenage boy taylor9073 (2007) flicked back his overgrown side fringe; how Bazza462006, a cross-dressing middle-aged man, delicately and lovingly smoothed out the fabric of his dress; how itschriscrocker (2007) – of *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* fame – manically gyrated to a Britney Spears song; how ellijayne (2007), a teenage girl, styled very much like Avril Lavigne¹⁹ pleaded for a loving audience, whilst condemning emo²⁰ try-hards.

From this fascinated viewing I created the performance *HerTube* (2008).²¹ During this performance I was contained in a semi-translucent tube (that was approximately 1.5m high and 2.5m wide) while real-time vision and audio of me addressing the camera was mediated to a computer screen on the other side of the room. Within this piece I concocted and consecutively performed four vlogging personae inspired by the YouTube vloggers who had most captivated me during my avid YouTube viewership.

¹⁹Avril Lavigne is a pop star whose visual style is informed by punk and emo subcultures (Avril Lavigne 2014).

²⁰'emo' refers to a fashion and musical style of the 2000s that emerged from emotionally expressive punk culture (What the heck is emo, anyway? n.d).

²¹*HerTube* was exhibited as part of 'Floorwork: Live Art', held at The Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery, Fremantle in 2008.



Fig 10. Meredith Godley, *HerTube*, 2008, still from video documentation, 14 mins

'Richard' appropriated aspects of the real YouTube vlogger Bazza462006, posing in, as Richard says: 'the first dress my wife ever made for me' (*HerTube* 2008). As Richard, like Bazza462006, I rubbed the fabric of my 'dress' (in the performance I had to quickly transition between numerous characters, so the 'dress' was just a chiffon wrap) up and down with an almost sexual fervour.

As 'Paul' I did a singing and dancing rendition (as much as I could in my confined sitting position) of Britney Spears' *...Baby One More Time*. This was a direct allusion to itschriscrocker's (2007) *Chris Crocker - Britney This Is For You*, where he sings and dances to Britney Spears' *Gimme More*. Through Paul, by trying to do the most over-the-top performance that I could, I paid homage to Crocker's frenzied unprofessional choreographed dance moves and bad singing voice.

Fig 11. itschriscrocker, *Chris Crocker - Britney This Is For You*, 2007, still from YouTube vlog, 2.49

The still image from itschriscrocker's videoed performance *Chris Crocker - Britney This Is For You*, 2007, 2.49 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *Chris Crocker - Britney This Is For You* can instead be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/user/itschriscrocker>



Fig 12. Meredith Godley, *HerTube*, 2008, still from video documentation, 14 mins. Paying homage to Crocker's: *Chris Crocker - Britney This Is For You*

HerTube (2008) symbolised public mediation of 'private' behaviour; bad singing and dancing and hidden lifestyles that would usually be confined to one's home. This is reminiscent of Dixon's (2007) comments about Internet self-expressions already cited in Chapter One:

...individuals explore their autobiographies and enact intimate dialogues with their inner selves. Seduced by the apparent intimacy and privacy of this most public of spaces, they confess all online and reveal secrets to strangers that they have never told their closest friends (4).

The confining tube obscured my body and thus alluded to an intimate non-transparent space, while the computer screen revealed my televisual body as it divulged personal details to my audience. On a conscious level, I aimed to critique vloggers as shameless exhibitionists who inappropriately reveal personal details to get attention.²²

However, applying the technique of retrospective analysis,²³ I realise that the real, intuitive, motivation for this work was to re-present the delicious idiosyncrasies of the YouTube vloggers who had most captivated me. Thus, my intended critique was contradicted because it indulged in self-representation for its own sake. By

²²For a closer analysis of this idea refer to Chapter One.

²³Please see the Introduction for a description of retrospective analysis.

representing the self-representation of Others', I vicariously indulged in it and in this sense *HerTube* indicated a latent interest in self-representational performance.

Multiple Identities – Performing the Other and Hiding the *Real* Self:

Beyond representing a cross-section of vloggers who had interested me, I had not initially attributed any thematic relevance to performing multiple vlogging personae. However, retrospective analysis revealed the significance of embodying multiple-identities. Reading Sherry Turkle's (1995) book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* – in which she examines early Internet roleplaying networks as sites for multiple selfhood – alerted me to the Internet's role in facilitating multiple-identity expression. It also allowed me to contemplate YouTube's contextual relevance to *HerTube*'s multiple-identity performance.²⁴ Turkle's discussion of the online multiple self gave a historical backdrop for the type of subjectivity that would eventually be fostered by iCulture. Furthermore, my interpretation of her theorised MUDing subject provided me with a template that offered clues on how to perform the Other online and avoid performing myself. Although in the context of the Internet's history, Turkle's text is old, its key ideas will be explored in depth because it irrevocably shaped this project.

In *Life on the Screen*, Turkle (1995) examines Multi-User Domains (MUDs), which are online text-based multi-user roleplaying games based in virtual fantasy worlds, where users can explore, build and socialise (11). Her major premise throughout the book is that MUDs give participants the opportunity to roleplay multiple-identities that they would not be able to in real life (RL). Turkle equates roleplay with imitating roles Other to the ones part of the MUDer's everyday self. This leads me to ask: how is this different from everyday life, where social demands force individuals to enact roles, not necessarily associated with their self-concept? I will draw on seminal theory about everyday roleplay from sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) to contextualise this discussion.

²⁴At this point my project was both practice-led and research-led – with *HerTube* informing theoretical research directions, which provided further insights.

Goffman (1959) discusses the individual in terms of dramatic metaphors. He describes the publicly presented self as the 'front stage' self, who 'performs' different 'roles' for different 'audiences'. That is, one self-consciously alters their behaviour depending on the social situation they are in (Goffman 1959, 18-27). By using dramatic metaphors to discuss the individual's public presentation, Goffman implies that they act, or feign their public behaviour. This implication is consolidated by Goffman's use of the term 'back stage' self to describe one's uninhibited, 'real' self that only has the chance to manifest away from the public's gaze (Goffman 1959, 114-115). Essentially, it can be inferred that the social obligation of roleplaying suppresses one's real self.

Turkle clearly delineates online roleplaying from roleplaying in everyday life. In 1995, when she conducted her study, MUDs, being text-based, were anonymous. With iCultural hindsight, the noticeable lack of the MUDer's face, body and 'real' identity, may provide an explanation as to why, at the time, their online manifestations could have been perceived as separate from real life. Throughout the text Turkle refers to offline life as real life, or 'RL' (Turkle 1995) and says that in MUDs 'one can play a role as close to or as far away from one's "real self" as one chooses' (12). Turkle suggests that virtual communities such as MUDs offer their participants 'time out' (assumedly from their RL's) to experiment beyond their everyday roles (203 – 204).

Celia Pearce's (2009) notion of the online play frame articulates Turkle's 'time out' idea well. She describes online gaming environments as places where social norms are overlooked and individuals are allowed to "take liberty with their roles and identities" (59 – 60). For example, in MUDs married men could roleplay women and have romantic relationships with other male personae (Turkle 1995, 213), secure in the knowledge that the MUD was a safe haven that would conceal behaviour usually forbidden in real life. Thus, a greater sense of freedom is attributed to online roleplay because it is separated out from everyday life.

Looking to Turkle's theories, I thought that performing Others in a virtual environment would allow me to avoid my real life self. By the time I started this project in 2008, contemporary Internet communication conflated offline and online life. On networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook, one's real life identity was revealed by the televisual projection of their face, body and identity. This consolidated their real offline relationships. I, however, had only had a home Internet connection for little more than a year and felt personally disassociated from the online environment. At this point in time I only engaged with email and no other networking sites. As a result, rather than experiencing this sense of conflation, when online I felt as if I was taking 'time out' from my real life. I used this online time out, like Turkle's MUDer, to perform roles as removed from my 'real self' as I wanted. I concocted and hosted five vlogging personae, each on their own personally tailored YouTube channel, who were purposely created to be different from me. Unlike those in *HerTube*, these personae were original creations who sometimes appropriated vloggers and people I'd observed in my real life. They formed the basis of this thesis' multiple-identity performance practice *All MySelves on YouTube*.

ShelleyFeeltheMelody was totally obsessed with the then recently deceased Michael Jackson, and would deliver anxiously manic rants about topical Michael Jackson fan issues. DevineDhammapada was a new age spiritualist, who exuded deep breathing calm, while preaching an amalgam of spiritual values. TheRobbo93 was a teenage boy cashed-up-bogan (CUB)²⁵ interested in talking about his drinking and Guitar Hero exploits and his girlfriend Rochelle. Rochellebell17, Robbo's ex-

²⁵ 'Bogan' is an Australian social construct, which is a label often applied to individuals who exhibit what are commonly viewed as stereotypical 'uncultured' traits of people from 'lower socio-economical' groups. An American equivalent would be 'white trash.' Bogans are a part of Australian identity and are parodied within Australian popular culture. Cashed-up-bogans (CUBs) refer to individuals who exhibit stereotypical 'bogan' social traits, while belonging to wealthy economic classes. For further discourse about bogans, refer to Campbell's thesis, *Bogan: exploring images of Australian cultural marginalisation* (2004).

girlfriend, was an outgoing, loud, popular-girl-type, who harnessed her sexual prowess to feel publicly confident. She joined YouTube to bitterly defame Robbo and set the record straight about their breakup. And finally, FootFixHero was a male foot fetishist who liked to video his feet doing naughty things with cream, slippers and socks. This persona was Robbo's vlogging alter-ego.

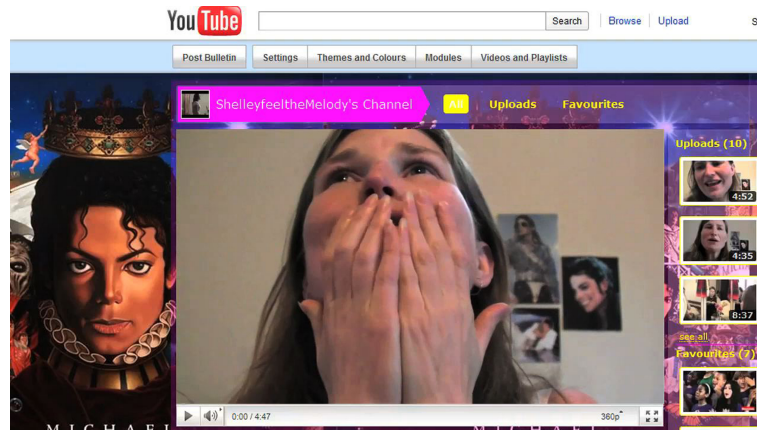


Fig 13. Meredith Godley, *ShelleyFeeltheMelody*, 2010, screenshot of YouTube Channel

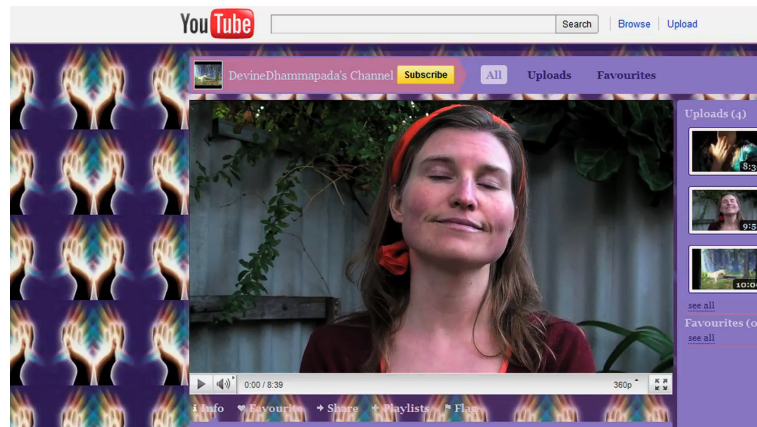


Fig 14. Meredith Godley, *DevineDhammapada*, 2010, screenshot of YouTube Channel

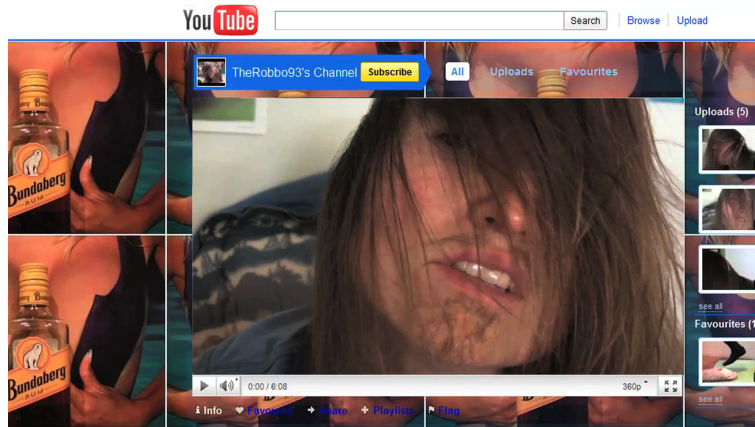


Fig 15. Meredith Godley, *TheRobbo93*, 2010, screenshot of YouTube Channel

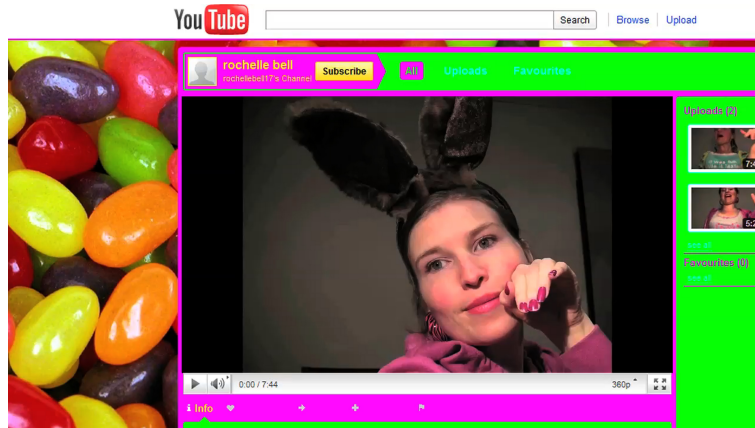


Fig 16. Meredith Godley, *rochellebell17*, 2010, screenshot of YouTube Channel

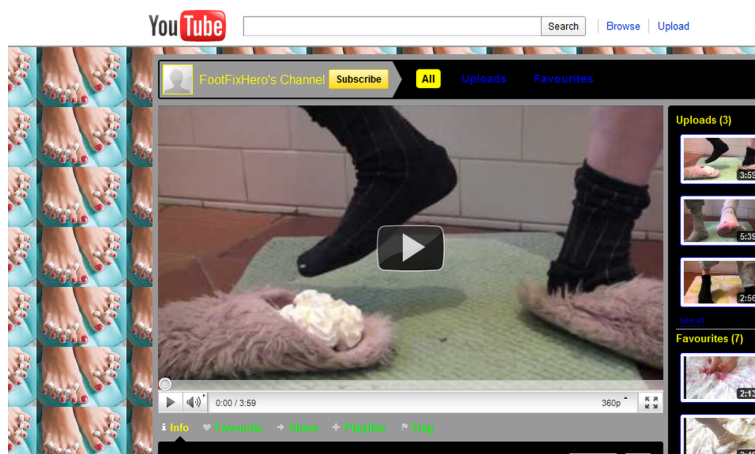


Fig 17. Meredith Godley, *FootFixHero*, 2010, screenshot of YouTube Channel

In no way did I feel like any of these personae were part of me. I was disinterested in Michael Jackson's music and dubious of his innocent pleas against the pedophile charges laid against him. Unlike Shelley, I would never publicly defend him. With my negative biases about what I saw as irrational beliefs, I also 'looked down' on various new age beliefs and was irritated by anyone who preached spirituality at me. In no way could I relate to Robbo because I had never been a teenage boy. Although I had been a teenage girl, I had been a quiet, unpopular one, unconfident in my sexual appeal and in this way Rochelle was my antithesis. Not being obsessively driven by any sexual fetish of my own, I looked at FootFixHero as an exotic curiosity. With a litany of differences, I rested, assured that the Othered personae of my multiple-identity performance practice did not provide reflections of the real life Meredith.

Another device I used to consolidate my denial of self-focus, was to align Turkle's articulation of the postmodern MUDer to my practice thus detaching my 'real' self from it. Turkle contends that the computer interface extends the multifarious self, giving it a purer form of postmodern expression. To fully understand this requires a brief consideration of the concept of 'postmodern subjectivity'.

According to Baumgardner, Boone & Rappoport (1999) postmodern individuals live in a world of flux, multiplicity and transformation (95). They maintain a 'dynamic portfolio of alternative self-concepts' (99) to correspond with the swiftly shifting socio-economic circumstances in which they find themselves (97)²⁶. It is often assumed that because of its concurrent maintenance of multiple identities, the postmodern self lacks a 'core' and is thus decentered. Grodin and Lindlof say: 'Self

²⁶ For an in depth discussion about the socio-economic conditions that produced the postmodern self, pursue Baumgardner, Boone & Rappoport's *Postmodern Culture and the Plural Self in The Plural Self: Multiplicity in Everyday Life* (Rowan, John and Cooper, Mick, eds. 1999. London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd).

becomes multivocal as we carry a number of voices with us. Individuals, then, may find that they no longer have a central core with which to elevate and act, but instead find themselves “decentred” (1996, 4).

David Bell (2007) discusses a similar idea in the context of the Internet, also suggesting that playing with different identities destabilises one’s essential, or core self (267). Furthermore, he conflates the core self with the real self, saying ‘the certainty of the ‘real me’ is replaced by Sherry Turkle’s uncertain question, ‘Who am we?’’ (Bell 2007, 267). Bell’s conflation is perhaps grounded in earlier conceptions of the modern self, where the subject autonomously ‘finds’ their authentic self ‘within’ (Flaskas 1999, 21 & 22 and McCracken 2008, 86-89 & 305). In this context, because it is multiple, the postmodern subject is considered detached from a core, or a real self.

Baumgardner, Boone & Rappoport’s (1999) views the postmodern self as one that has a ‘dynamic portfolio’ (1999, 99). Similarly, Turkle (1995) describes the postmodern individual as ‘a set of roles that can be mixed and matched, whose diverse demands need to be negotiated’ (180). In demonstrating how this manifests in everyday life Turkle describes a hypothetical postmodern subject who ‘wakes up as a lover, makes breakfast as a mother, and drives to work as a lawyer’ (14). Although this hypothetical individual is postmodern, in that they have a bank of roles to draw from, by ‘simply playing different roles in different settings at different times’ (14) they are limited to a modern experience of these roles. This is because modern individualism is defined by serial pluralism, where the individual progressively transitions between clearly different self-concepts (Baumgardner, Boone & Rappoport 1999, 99). In contrast, postmodern subjectivity is defined by simultaneous pluralism (Baumgardner, Boone & Rappoport 1999, 99). Unlike in ‘real life,’ Turkle’s MUDing subject is able to experience their online roles simultaneously because they can have numerous computer windows open at once, each dedicated to a MUDing persona (14). In contrast to the offline subject, who enacts one role at a time and is thus unified by their authentic core at any given moment, the online

subject is defined by the postmodern disunity of disjointed parallel roles and so, as Bell would say, lacks any sense of a core... any sense of a real self.

Given that I performed parallel personae separated by discrete YouTube channels and that I participated in different vlogging subcultures, I told myself that my online projections were fragmented and lacking a core real self, like the postmodern subject and Turkle's MUDer. Because I still delineated a difference between real life and virtuality, there was a sense that my core self was offline, on the other side of the computer making directorial decisions. Uncontained by the unity of my *live* body, these ephemeral online manifestations were free to split. This perception was undoubtedly encouraged by Larua Robinson's notion of the online 'ephemeral self' that is not committed to a 'masterself' or subject to 'the unity imposed by the body' (Robinson 2007, 98). I reassured myself that this postmodern fragmentation ensured the disappearance of me.

Although this idea of Internet selflessness is dated (with Strangelove's newer theory of authentic pluralism, in Chapter One and Four contradicting it), buying into it at the start of my project reassured me that by performing multiple Others online, I detracted attention away from MY 'real' self that lay beneath.

Internet Roleplay the *Real* Self:

In perceiving Turkle's (1995) ideas of online multiple-identity performance practice as enabling my desired disconnection from self-focus, I was taking them somewhat out of context. Effectively, I appropriated her claims of the virtual, fragmented vlogger for my own agenda of self-avoidance. It is evident in my previous arguments that the online postmodern self can be associated with a type of selflessness. Turkle, however, argues that the vlogger's virtual subjectivity is also related to their offline self-concept, a point I overlooked. In so doing, she implies that the MUDer's online manifestations is imbued with their real life self.

She suggests that by exploring in roles that are usually off-limits to them in everyday life, the MUDer connects to genuine aspects of themselves, which are merely repressed by social expectations. One of Turkle's (1995) study participants says: 'I'm not one thing, I'm many things. Each part gets to be expressed more fully in MUDs than in the real world. So even though I play more than one self on MUDs, I feel more like 'myself' when I'm MUDding' (Turkle 1995, 185). In analysing this quote Turkle says:

In real life, this woman sees her world as too narrow to allow her to manifest certain aspects of the person she feels herself to be. Creating screen personae is thus an opportunity for self-expression, leading to her feeling more like her true self when decked out in an array of virtual masks (Turkle 1995, 185).

Contradicting my idea that performing multiple selves results in a fragmented selflessness, this study participant's multiple personae appear to culminate in a discovery of a self-concept interwoven by various threads. By laying a path to the inner self, each persona contributes to an experience of self-discovery emblematic of self-focus.

In addition to providing a pathway for discovering what is already inherent in the self, Turkle (1995) argues that MUDing facilitates self-reflexive development of repressed elements of the offline self. Turkle's suggestion that MUDers call on their online personae in real life situations, will be discussed within the paradigm of therapeutic roleplay. One of her study participants, who describes himself as 'diplomatic' and 'nonconfrontational' in 'real' life, roleplayed ruthlessly forceful personae online and called on them when his offline business required him to be assertive (220). It is evident that this MUDer used his online roleplay to reflect on his real life (offline) behaviour and effectively alter it.

This MUDer's self-facilitated therapeutic process can be seen as akin to the self-reflexivity evoked in roleplay therapy. Within the context of psychotherapy the technique of roleplay involves the patient acting out an imaginary situation as if it were real (Corsini 1966, 6). In this arena roleplay facilitates self-reflection and

analysis that is aimed at improving the patient's social skills (xi). Because, like MUDs, the therapy session is removed from real life threats, it is considered a 'safe' place to practice social roles. Then, where deemed appropriate, one can apply these practice roles in real life situations. Because behaviour affects self-concept, applying these roles in real life can positively influence self-concept (14-22). In the context of MUDs, then, enacting online personae in real life, allows the MUDer to incorporate them into their self-concept. Thus, by permeating the personal self, MUDing personae emphasise a socio-psycho self-development. Keeping this process in mind, although roleplay involves performance of the 'Other', it is none-the-less self-focused; online roleplay reflexively implicates the offline, or 'real' self.

More recently, Turkle (2011) has said of the contemporary Internet: '[w]hen people create avatars, they are not themselves but express important truths about themselves' (230). Speaking of Facebook (an example of a networking site that reveals the face/body), she suggests that while a user may present an illusion of who they want to be, this illusion is nevertheless revealing of their personal fantasy of who they wish to be (153).

Like Turkle's Internet networkers, YouTube vloggers often imitate the role of the Other, in a fashion that reflexively reveals their selves, sometimes slipping in and out of numerous caricatures. This technique is particularly evident in vlogger yourchonny's videos.

yourchonny is a Vietnamese-Chinese Australian teenager who caricatures a range of people from his life. In *My Parent Teacher Interview* (2014), for example, he slips in and out of caricatures of his parents, teachers and his 'real' self. In doing so, he comically enacts misunderstandings that resulted from the language barrier between his Asian parents, who speak English as a second language, and teachers. As 'himself,' he provides commentary on the unreasonable expectations 'Asian parents' can sometimes place on their children (2014). Although he roleplays Others, these Others can be seen as representative of his own cross-cultural roles

as a first generation Australian. Thus they provide the reflexive perspective needed to integrate them within his self-concept.

Fig 18. yourchonny, *My Parent Teacher Interview*, 2014, still from YouTube vlog, 3.00

The still image from yourchonny's videoed performance *My Parent Teacher Interview*, 2014, 3mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *My Parent Teacher Interview* can instead be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvf31jpvAnc>

Acting, Simulacrum and Parody:

The 'Others' I performed online were consciously created to be different from, and to not reflexively illuminate, my 'self'. My method of *acting* them, I believed, consolidated their Otherness and further side-stepped the self-revelation that came with vlogging's typical style of roleplay. This set of beliefs was congruent with the naïve definition of acting I held at the inception of this research: '...to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate' (Kirby 1995, 43).

Like acting, vlogging's roleplay relies on representative impersonation. Although, by virtue of being interspersed with real self-presentations and not displaying character traits simultaneously (e.g. appropriate costume, physical movements, etc), the vlogger breaks their role and unconvincingly feigns the Other. This separates vlogging roleplay from conventional thinking about acting, which, as Ken Miller (2013) suggests, should provide 'a coherent and unified characterization' to appear real (26). My notions of acting at the time were very conventional and led me to differentiate vlogging's self-revelatory roleplay from acting. This viewpoint demonstrates that, at the time, I was unaware of lesser-known acting techniques that actually align with vlogging's roleplay. For instance, Epic Theatre, which was largely championed by theatre director Bertolt Brecht, in part requires actors to frequently break out of character to address the audience as themselves (Brecht 1964). With my entrenched ideas of traditional acting, committing to my personae by staying in character for the duration of their vlogs and simultaneously representing their character traits, made me feel as though I convincingly feigned

them and that no cracks appeared in their artificial masks to reveal my real self beneath.

As an artist who *acted* my personae, I separated myself out from other performance artists who performed themselves. Anne Marsh (2014) differentiates performance art from theatre, suggesting that artists don't act out invented roles that contribute to a narrative. Christopher Allen (2013) crystalises this theatrical comparison, saying:

[P]erformance artists have always been particularly anxious to distinguish their activity from that which takes place on stage. The main difference, they insist, is that they are not acting; performance artists don't pretend to be someone else or to be carrying out an imaginary action, but present themselves in their own person and enact whatever they do literally.

Given that by performing themselves artists can be perceived as self-obsessed (Marsh 2014, n.p), I was anxious to align my practice more with *acting* so I could clearly pretend to be someone else. Although not a trained actor, by acting my vlogging personae in a manner that seemingly convinced other YouTubers, I challenged the perception that performance artists act themselves, and I also stylistically extended performance art into a theatrical realm that it usually avoids. Although, some contemporary performance artists also utilise acting techniques, their acting is often overstatedly unrealistic, announcing the artist's deconstructive presence and implicating their critical self. For instance, in Kalup Linzy's mock TV soapie series *Melody Set Me Free* (2010 - 2014), hosted on YouTube, he and his cast purposely over-act their characters, mime to pre-recorded caricatured voice-overs and wear unconvincing costumes. With this pronounced over-acting, Linzy is able to deliver his parody on soap operas. Similarly, in Ryan Trecartin's videoed performance *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), the artist and his family and friends act out a 'camp extravaganza of epic proportions' to reference bad TV and reflect on a youth culture that is both 'damaged and affirmed' by their media consumption (Saatchi Gallery 2014). Although both of these artists implicate their critical selves to create a sense of self-focus, their performed falsity negates the

earnest intimacy that heightens the aesthetic of self-focus within videoed seventies performance art and YouTube vlogging.

Fig 19. Kalup Linzy, *Melody Set Me Free 4.0 "We KiKi"*, 2014, still from YouTube vlog, 4.29

The still image from Kalup Linzy's videoed performance *Melody Set Me Free 4.0 "We KiKi"*, 2014, 4.29mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *Melody Set Me Free 4.0 "We KiKi"* can instead be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qhX8POOFFM>

Acting was just one stage that allowed me to perceive my personae as completely non-referential to the self I was trying to avoid displaying. As my personae were created in anything but my image, and were interpreted as actual people by their YouTube followers (as will be described shortly), they became realities unto themselves that had no relationship with the originating projection point of my body/self. Perceiving them as independent realities separated from my body/self, I viewed my personae as simulacrum. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) philosopher Jean Baudrillard contends that reality itself does not exist. Rather, our experience of reality is limited to the models and signs that we use to represent it. He suggests that this is perhaps because representations build on representations to obscure an original reference point. Or, as in the case of Western religious faith, the concept of God draws on its original *representation* to exist in the first place. Simulation 'is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal' (Baudrillard 1981, 1). Simulacrum refers to the reality of this representation. Baudrillard describes the different stages of the reference image's simulacra: the image reflects reality; it then denatures reality; thirdly it obscures the absence of reality; and finally it detaches from reality altogether to become its own entity, or a pure simulacrum (1981). These stages of simulacra parallel with the artistic processes I used to remove myself from my vlogging personae. In *All MySelves on YouTube* my personae referenced vloggers and people from my offline life thus reflecting reality. Then, by realistically feigning my personae, I denatured their authentic roots. Thirdly, because each vlog was unscripted and largely improvised, my personae emulated vlogging's naturalistic dialogic style and this hid

their inauthenticity, or the absence of reality – paradoxically this allowed them to be perceived as authentic and to become their own vlogging realities. And finally, a detachment from my sense of reality can be seen in the way I separated my real life from my online life. In this final stage, I had a sense that my core self was offline, on the other side of the computer making directorial decisions, while my original body/self became lost in a haze of televisual reproductions that became real unto themselves – transferring from camera, to computer, to editing program, to compressed file, to YouTube channel. Unanchored to the actual reference of my *live* body, the fragmentation of these simulacral personae reinforced their postmodern separation from my essential self. This perception was undoubtedly inspired by Laura Robinson's (2007) notion of the online 'ephemeral self' that is not committed to a 'masterself' or subject to 'the unity imposed by the body' (98).

Another artist who, like me, is considered a multiple-identity performer is Cindy Sherman. Using makeup, costume and even prosthetics, Sherman has dressed up and photographed herself as hundreds of different characters for almost forty years. It is integral to discuss Sherman's practice (although she is not a vlogger, or performance artist) because, like me, she uses her body/self as her main artistic medium, yet vehemently denies the presence of herself within her practice. Sherman proposes that her performance of multiple-identities enables her to perform everyone but herself. Additionally, I will argue that she utilises simulacral artistic methods that progressively removes the original reference point of herself during her creative process. In the following discussion, rather than analysing the specific themes of Sherman's photographic series' and oeuvre, I focus on her attitude of self-denial. This helps me to elucidate the simulacral artistic methods that I, despite the presentation of my body/self, similarly used to remove myself from my practice. By using her body as a canvas, Sherman's practice relates to the performance art genre, which is defined by the artist's artistic presentation of their body (Marsh 2014). Similar to vlogging, Sherman's multiple-identity performance practice utilises parodic 'Othering'. Thus, Sherman's practice shares similarities with

these genres and coupled with her attitude of self-denial it is relevant to include her work in this discussion.

Sherman's performance of multiple-identities evokes rich conceptual potentials and speaks to various movements such as feminism, postmodernism and post-structuralism. However, she does not conceptually articulate these evocations. She aims to avoid dogmatically imposing meanings on her work, so as to encourage viewers to generate their own readings (Hattenstone 2011). She does, however, comfortably discuss her work in more casual terms within newspaper interviews. The following of Sherman's quotes and ideas are therefore sourced from newspaper interviews.

According to Krauss (1993), theorists have commonly assumed that Sherman's consistent photographing of her body indicates that she is conceptually driven to reveal her 'deeper self' (104). It is unsurprising, in a culture that views the body as a social locus for the self,²⁷ and that uses photographed self-portraits to understand subjectivity,²⁸ that Sherman's work is often classed as self-portraiture. In her book *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject*, Amelia Jones (2006) says that to understand ourselves we need to 'continually make and grasp and view imagery as if to complete our pictures of ourselves. We don't know how to exist any more without imagining ourselves as a picture' (xvi).²⁹ Sherman's prolific self-photographing could be perceived as an attempt to render and understand herself – as, by extension, could the continuous profile picture updates of Facebook users³⁰. Psychologist Danielle Knafo's (1996) ideas about Sherman's roleplay elucidate this point nicely. Knafo argues that Sherman plays different roles to discover and define herself (140-142) – much in the same way MUDers and vloggers do. She says: '[O]ne can understand her [Sherman] trying on these

²⁷ See the discussion on Jones' (2006) body/self paradigm in Chapter One.

²⁸ See the discussion on Lasch's (1979) photographically mediated narcissism in Chapter One.

²⁹ Jones' study is contextualised in American and European cultures that embrace self-imaging technology. In my discussion, I include Australia in this group too, and also think mine and Jones' ideas could potentially be applied to other iCultural countries.

³⁰ See Cheung's (2007) conception of how the reflexive project of the self is played out via homepage revision in Chapter One.

identities as an attempt consciously to bear them all, granting her greater freedom to become that whom she ultimately wishes to be' (161).

While Sherman does not explain what her work *is* about, Hattenston (2011) quotes her as passionately asserting that it is not about herself. She says: 'I'm not about revealing myself' (n.p). As Vogel tells us, Sherman insists that the use of her body/self is merely practical and not thematic. Vogel quotes Sherman saying '[w]henever I tried to hire people or use friends or family, even if I paid them, I felt like I had to entertain them... When I'm working alone, I can push myself. And I don't complain' (2012). Various sources often cite her irritably restating that her artwork is not about herself. For instance, while interviewing fellow artist Ryan Trecartin Sherman (2011) asks: 'Do people assume that your videos are some weird form of self-portraiture? (This is a comment I get all the time and can't stand)' (143).

I do not know why Sherman fiercely denies the common perception that her work is about herself. However, as she emerged as an artist during the late nineteen-seventies, I suggest her self-consciousness about her 'self-focused' work may have been the result of the *zeitgeist* of the time that relegated self-focus to a narcissistic vice.

Ironically though, it is Krauss (1993) – an originator of the anti-narcissistic seventies *zeitgeist*, who condemned mediated visions of the artist's body as self-focused (see Chapter One) – who supports Sherman's claims that her artwork is not about herself. Krauss critiques the common assumption that Sherman's photographs are self-revelatory by suggesting that they, and the characters within them, are non-referential simulacrum. Referring to *Untitled Film Stills* (1977 – 1980), Krauss (1993) suggests that Sherman's characters draw on stereotypical female film characters (98) and 'a generalized matrix of filmic portrayals and projections' (104). While they don't reference specific films or characters, emulating a stereotypical aesthetic, Sherman's photos seem recognisable and become copies without

originals, or simulacrum (Krauss 1993, 98). Given they are simulacrum, it is possible to infer that Sherman's photos have no originating reference point, not even Sherman herself. Krauss encourages this inference when she relegates readings that understand Sherman's characters as facets of herself, as buying into the myth that equates signified (character) with factual instance (real self).

Krauss' assertion that Sherman's mediated body is non-self-referential contrasts with her earlier position that the use of the artist's body as main artistic medium elicits a self-focus that is narcissistically implosive, a stance I discussed in detail in Chapter One. This more recent contention, that Sherman's work evades herself, is particularly surprising given that Sherman's creative process, as described by Criqui (2006), is very similar to the video art process that Krauss said elicited implosive narcissism. Cycling through numerous poses while the camera periodically takes snapshots of her, Criqui tells us, Sherman refers to her reflection in a mirror that is placed alongside her camera until, she says: 'Suddenly the reflection I'm looking at is not at all me. Suddenly it's like a phantom that's just popped out of the mirror, and that's when I know the character is right on' (Sherman quoted in Sischy 2012). Like the video artist, Sherman brackets out external objects to perpetuate her own reflection by relying on her own mirrored vision to generate content.

Ironically, it is this very process that Sherman uses to justify her contention that there is no self-reference in her work. She says that rather than becoming her characters, 'The image in the mirror becomes her – the image the camera gets on the film' (Sherman quoted in Criqui 2006, 276). Viewing her mirrored character as an autonomous phantasmagoric entity, Sherman shoos her ethereal projection away from her body/self and imbues it with a simulacral quality. Much as I did at the beginning of this project, Sherman conceptualises her self-projections as virtually separated from herself. Being thus detached from her self, her photographed characters – tied together by her often-recognisable face/body in coherently displayed series' – emulate a coreless, postmodern self, again much like my early online personae.

Identifying Sherman's characters as stereotypical perhaps facilitates Krauss' overlooking of Sherman's potentially subjectively implosive process. According to the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (2005, 10th ed.), a stereotype is 'an oversimplified idea of the typical characteristics of a person or thing.' Stereotypes are often viewed as superficial because they disregard the subtle nuances that make up a *real* individual. Discussing Sherman's *Bus Riders* series (1976-2000), Durand (2006) contends that 'As both actor and producer in this parade of simulacra, the subject's own identity... has been dissolved in favor of a gallery of social stereotypes' (236). In other words, Sherman covers her real identity with stereotypical masks, thus marking her reflective image as objective rather than a subjective point of implosion. Once more, like me, Sherman challenges the perceived self-presentation that usually accompanies a performance artist's work by not performing herself.

Fig 20. Cindy Sherman, *Bus Riders*, 1976-2000, photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. Each image 18.9 x 12.7 cm

Cindy Sherman's *Bus Riders*, 1976-2000, photograph gelatin silver print on paper – each image 18.9 x 12.7cm – is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

Bus Riders can instead be accessed via <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/353f36ee-5ff5-11e2-8d8d-00144feab49a.html#axzz3JQCuqpzO>

But, by photographing stereotyped characters, does Sherman really produce simulacrum that avoid any outside reference? Stereotypes can be imbued with personal reference, which I will argue debunks their function as simulacrum and makes them parodic.

To say stereotypes are limiting is not to say that they are altogether separated from one's real self. Although generalised, they can also provide valuable identity cues, as the following personal reflection illustrates:

As a seventeen-year-old art student, I was conscious of the 'arty' stereotype many attributed to my eccentric clothes. I felt sure that others thought my arty dress-sense was intended to look creatively dynamic, but was actually clichéd and try-hard. Yet, I had a disdain for jeans, zip-up hooded jumpers ('hoodies') and joggers because of their commonness and so opted to wear more unusual clothes. Looking at those in my Art School surroundings and to the 'arty' celebrities I idolised, I inwardly chastised the predictability of our stereotyped dress senses, but ultimately chose to align myself with them, to feel a little less common and more like an artist. At this age I used stereotyped costumes as props with which to articulate and understand my identity as a young artist.

The above reflection is an illustration of my contention that stereotypes are not complete simulacrums, because *real* people embody them. Furthermore, they are applied to *real* individuals by outside observers. The question then arises: Does Sherman create her characters from a generalised palette of stereotypes, or does she reference real individuals who she thinks are particularly stereotypical?

Sherman (quoted in Lippard 1999) says of her *Film Stills* characters that: 'I was really looking for the most artificial looking kinds of women. Women that had cinched-in waists and pointed bras, lots of make-up, stiff hair, high heels' (30). About embodying a character, she says:

I'm good at using my face as a canvas... I'll see a photograph of a character and try to copy them on to my face. I think I'm really observant, and thinking how a person is put together, seeing them on the street and noticing subtle things about them that make them who they are (Sherman, quoted in Hattenstone 2011).

The above reflections suggest that Sherman, at least sometimes, does look to real reference points such as characters and people, to inform her characters. This impression is reinforced by the fact that she also covers her studio walls with magazine cuttings and printouts of people in what she refers to as 'preposterous' positions (The Economist 2012). This is not to say that each of Sherman's characters clearly references one individual. Rather, as in my practice, Sherman's characters may be a compilation of different reference points, and meshing them together

may have the effect of decentering a clearly delineated reference point (or self). And without a clear reference point, her multifaceted characters can create the illusion of self-avoiding simulacrum.

If she does indeed sometimes 'copy' traits from Others, then her practice has less of a simulacral edge and more of a parodic one. Linda Hutcheon (1995) draws on the *Oxford English Dictionary* to explain the commonly perceived notion of parody as: 'an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect' (32).³¹ While Hutcheon discusses parody only in relation to creative works, the same principles could be applied to the parodying of an individual, or a character, as suggested in the definition: 'mimicry of someone's individual manner in a humorous or satirical way' (The Free Dictionary by Farlex 2014, accessed January 20, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/parody>).

By making characters look 'preposterous', Sherman parodically ridicules their original reference points. In her *Hollywood/Hampton Types* (2000-2002) series, for example, she depicts failed actresses posing for casting pictures. These characters, who seem too old, desperate, unfashionable and subcultured to fulfill their Hollywood aspirations, elicit feelings of derision in me. The tough-biker type looking 'actress' in *Untitled #352* (2000), particularly catches my eye, as she lurches forward to reveal obviously unattached prosthetic breasts almost falling out of her singlet top. Perhaps this is a comment on Hollywood's plastic surgery trend, where female actors are sometimes expected to have breasts as big as, if not bigger than, their acting abilities. I chortle inwardly thinking that this out-of-place ageing gothic biker-chick has wasted her investment on her breasts, because she will never 'make it' in Hollywood with her undesirable image. I initially berate myself for being tempted into Sherman's superficial game of stereotyping; a game (I feel) she implements to uncover the viewer's bigotry. However, the characters in her *The Socialites* series (2008) – ageing socialite women finding their place in a culture obsessed by youth

³¹Although she acknowledges that this definition doesn't encompass the homage that parody can pay to its original text (Hutcheon 1995, 32), it is the most relevant to my discussion.

and status – are ‘tragic’ (Moma 2012). I assume she is ridiculing the ‘types’ of rich old women whose image-conscious attempts to maintain their status flounder in a culture that spotlights fashionable youth. According to Krauss (1993) feminists have suggested that Sherman displays stereotypes to critique them. However, when stereotypical images are repetitiously restaged, they can become bogged down in the very stereotypes they aim to question – as Bhabha (1995) argues in relation to the exhibition ‘Black Male’ (held at Whitney Museum of American Art in 1995), which aimed to deconstruct stereotypes attributed to African American males. Indulging in her own game of stereotyping, Sherman’s parodic ridicule is evident.

Fig 21. Cindy Sherman, *Hollywood/Hampton Types*, 2000-2002: *Untitled #352*, 2000, photograph
Cindy Sherman’s *Hollywood/Hampton Types*, 2000-2002: *Untitled #352*, 2000, photograph, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

Untitled #352 can instead be accessed via <http://www.artbook.com/9783775734875.html>

Fig 22. Cindy Sherman, *The Socialites*, 2008: *Untitled #476*, 2008, photograph
Cindy Sherman’s *The Socialites*, 2008: *Untitled #476*, 2008, photograph, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

Untitled #476 can instead be accessed via
<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/gallery/10/#/2/untitled-476-2008/>

Stereotypes facilitate Sherman’s parody, while reinforcing the separation between her characters and herself. Riggins (1997) argues that because stereotyping categorises individuals, it delineates the difference between ‘types’ of people and enables Othering. He says: ‘They (stereotypes) are one of the major discursive strategies that ensure that differences between people are recognised’ (9). He further explains that because Othering belittles and dehumanises groups, it allows victimisers to take advantage of Others, whilst quashing the guilt associated with it (9). Thus, according to this line of argument, stereotyping both separates Sherman’s performed Others from her real self, and justifies her parodic derision of them.

The irony of parody is another device that separates Sherman from her characters. Hutcheon (1995) contends that irony implies a critical distance between the text being parodied and the new work (32). Applying Hutcheon's view to Sherman, her performed characters can be seen as 'new works', and the individuals, or stereotypes, they reference as the parodied texts. If we accept Jones' (2006) assertion that the body is the locus of the self then what we embody stands for the self. It is ironic that Sherman portrays 'tragic', 'preposterous' and 'artificial' characters, who she sees as Other from herself, with her body – a sign of herself. Her characters' aesthetic of often absurd falsity, however, points to their ironic embodiment and separates them from Sherman's real self.

Even though I had long suspected that stereotypes can be substantial identity markers, I suppressed this feeling and indulged in an idea similar to the one I imagine Sherman holds: if I made my personae extremely stereotypical, they would act as simulacral facades that would hide the 'real' me. My vlogging persona DevineDhammapada – a spiritualist who follows and preaches New Age doctrines – is a good example of how I tried to do this.

At the time I created Dhammapada I held a stereotype of New Age individuals as superficial, hypocritically entitled in their 'preachiness', and fickle in their belief systems. Research into anthropologist Grant McCracken's (2008) notion of the 'radiant self' spurred the creation of Dhammapada. This construct provided a sense of academic credence, which I felt I needed to justify my stereotype of the shallow New Age spiritualist. McCracken says that the radiant self – positioned within the Western New Age subculture – rejects the beliefs they were raised with in favour of a multitude of doctrines from various 'exotic' cultures, which they perceive as more 'authentic' than their own. However, being promiscuous with their beliefs, they don't develop a deep understanding of any worldview, which ironically debases their attempts at being authentic.

Because the web-based 'Urban Dictionary' allows Internet users to create and democratically elect definitions, the meanings generated reflect popular opinion, making them relevant to stereotypes. The following descriptions from Urban Dictionary say about 'New Age' individuals: 'they mix the worst parts of all Eastern and Pagan Religions and say "I'm spiritual, not religious."...' (whatever works 2005, quoted in Urban Dictionary 2014) and '[they are] holier-than-thou twats' (Jessica Murder-Your-Soul 2009, quoted in Urban Dictionary 2014).

Dhammapada's 'About' section on her YouTube channel lists Taoism, Buddhism, and Wicca, as her spiritual beliefs; consistent with the Urban Dictionary definition, she mixes Eastern and Pagan religions. Promiscuously indulging in these 'exotic' beliefs while simultaneously criticising Western doctrines Dhammapada embodies McCracken's superficial radiant self.

Despite her shallow spiritual promiscuity, in her first vlog, *Path to True Happiness* (2010), Dhammapada delivers a 'holier-than-thou' sermon, preaching about how to live:

Many people ask me: how do you achieve true inner happiness? The key is simplicity. To peel back all of these layers. All of these layers of ego, possessions. All of these layers of working late, of forgetting to take walks through Mother Nature. The problem with our Western world is that we're often driven by desire. As Buddha says: "If you sleep, desire grows in you. Like a vine in the forest, like a monkey in the forest, you jump from tree to tree, never finding fruit, never finding peace, from life to life." This speaks of us wanting too much in the Western world...

[Dhammapada then talks about our misguided search for happiness in material possessions and says that this will only lead to short term happiness. She then says that we need to stop thinking about what we want and think about what we have]...

What we all have is a connection to our higher spiritual self and to the whole cosmos and to our own mother earth. This is what we truly need to survive and to be happy (DevineDhammapada 2010).



Fig 23. Meredith Godley, *Path to True Happiness*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 5.49

Being improvised, Dhammapada's dialogue was unplanned. I purposely didn't research any New Age doctrines to which I thought she might refer. Rather, I spouted a cacophony of phrases and ideas I'd heard from New Age spiritualists on TV, YouTube and in everyday life. Furthermore, the Buddhist passage that I read was spontaneously and randomly sourced during the performance itself from a Buddhist text I'd borrowed from the local library that morning. Having given no forethought to Dhammapada's dialogue, her ramblings were meaningless clichés. Because the random Buddhist passage serendipitously echoed her vlog's clichés; it also seemed empty.

With her empty stereotypical words, I had wanted to present Dhammapada as a false simulacral mask that obscured any reference point to the real me underneath. However, with their praise for her, such as fatsammycat's (2012) text comment: 'Your words are truly wonderful. Thank you!', I interpreted Dhammapada's audience as believing her. Having purposely made Dhammapada's words meaningless, I perceived her assumedly New Age 'followers' as gullibly buying into her words and so my own personal biases that relegate New Age spiritualists to stereotypes of superficial consumers did not waver. Thus, rather than reflexively developing Dhammapada's persona, I used my perception of her gullible audience as an excuse to keep her shallow and therefore distanced from my 'real' self.

It is possible, however, that Dhammapada was taken seriously because I had inadvertently based her on a very real person from my life, which could explain why Dhammapada's words so effortlessly flowed from me. During Dhammapada's vlogging career I regularly attended a guided visualisation/meditation workshop which, given my apparent disdain for New Age spirituality, was ironic. However, I rationalised at the time that meditation was a psychological tool of well-being rather than spirituality. Upon retrospective analysis, I realised Dhammapada was a parody of my meditation teacher. Coing Dhammapada's regular phrase 'It *doesn't* matter' I was unwittingly repeating words that my meditation teacher used to reassure us that there was no right or wrong visualisation choice. Her calm, reassuring voice and patterns of stress and elongation in the pronunciation echoed in Dhammapada, as did the doctrines she taught. However, I exaggerated these traits so as to create a ridiculous effect. As Dhammapada my ecstatically drooping eyelids nodded along with my rhythmically floating head. I took slow, deep breaths, while luxuriating in my dragged-out airy tones. Makeup and hair-dye free, I dressed in spiritually significant colours and sat cross-legged in 'mother-nature' (my garden). Although Dhammapada subscribed to my teacher's spiritual beliefs and embodied aspects of her voice and physical movements, she differed to my teacher in being an absurdly 'zoned-out' 'Zen-ified' hippy, exemplifying a superficial stereotype that many people hold about New Age spiritualists.

Although, as in Sherman's practice, my referential parody debased the intended simulacrum of my personae, it still enabled a sense of personal detachment from them. Despite having personally liked my meditation teacher, in exaggerating her traits I stereotyped and thus Othered her away from me. I had thought that my derisive stereotypical exaggeration of Dhammapada would make her look fake and my embodiment of her would be an ironic statement that would detach her from the real me beneath.

With our multiple-identity performance practices, Sherman and I emulated postmodern coreless identities detached from a real self, in an attempt to perform

everyone but ourselves. While other visual artists have similarly embodied multiple non-autobiographic roles, they have often done so with an understanding that their embodied Others relate to themselves. As Cherise Smith (2011) and Brown, Dalton, Goicolea and Lee (2000) describe, in Nikki S Lee's series *Projects* (1997 – 2001), the artist took on the visual appearance appropriate to particular social groups she was not part of and had herself photographed with them. Her intentions were to symbolise how social contexts alter identity-expression (Antin 2011). Antin quotes Lee as saying the following about her practice:

I always feel like I have a lot of different characters inside and I was curious to understand these things. I wanted to see some sort of evidence that I could be all of those different things... Other people make me a certain kind of person. It's about inner relationships and how they really address the idea of identity (Antin 2011, 221-223).

Fig 24. Nikki S. Lee, *Projects: The Hip-hop Project (1)* 2001, photograph, Fujiflex print
Nikki S. Lee's *Projects: The Hip-hop Project (1)*, 2001, photograph, Fujiflex print, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

***Projects: The Hip-hop Project (1)* can instead be accessed via
http://www.tonkonow.com/lee_projects_3.html**

Although Lee performs the Other in *Projects*, she does so to bring out parts of her self-concept.³² Therefore, like other performance artists, she performs herself. By using our body/selves to perform everyone but ourselves, Sherman and I differentiate ourselves from other artists, who implement embodiment to perform their selves.

In this chapter I have explored the mechanisms I put into place to ensure that my performing body did not convey myself. I used virtual multiplicity to destabilise my core, or 'real' self; acting to avoid psychologically illuminating roleplay; simulacrum and stereotype to distance my personae from my *real* reference point; and parody

³²The understanding Lee exhibits of her self-concept is similar to Strangelove's notion of 'authentic pluralism', which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

to critically distance myself from my personae. All of these concepts were used to theoretically remove myself from my practice, and reassure myself that my art was not narcissistically self-focused.

According to Riggins (1997), however, 'discourses of Othering are myth-making enterprises more revealing of the observer than the observed' (10). If we accept Riggins' assertion, although Sherman and I tried to perform everyone but ourselves, by parodying those we observed, our performance of the Other was inevitably imbued with personal biases that were ultimately self-revealing. I will explore this idea in Chapter Three.

PART 2: SELF-REVELATION

CHAPTER 3: DÉJÀ VU – ACTING AND SELF-REVELATION

Although I had tried to avoid narcissistic self-focus by performing everyone but myself via virtual simulacrum and parodic Othering, the moments of déjà vu that I experienced during the process revealed to me that my personae were closer to myself than I'd originally thought. Eventually I realised that, as I was the only one performing my personae into existence; they came from no one else. They would therefore, in some way, be imprinted with my self-concept.

I also realised that because acting evoked real emotions, it implicated my inner self. Although I had thought that I would be able to hide my inner self via the physical enactment of Othered idiosyncrasies, in actuality I found that these physical actions provoked my inner feelings and thus provided inroads to myself.

Birthing Personae – Coming from No One Else But Myself:

One day, while preparing for ShelleyFeeltheMelody's vlog *Michael Jackson Meditation* (2010), I experienced a sense of déjà vu that revealed how this persona related to my self-concept. In this vlog Shelley – a manically obsessed Michael Jackson fan who started vlogging as a tribute to him after his death in 2009 – talks about the anxiety she has suffered since Michael Jackson's death. She explains that she is trying to combat her anxiety by practicing meditation and breathing techniques. The vlog is set in her meditation space, which she has built on her bed from 'things that are comforting' (ShelleyFeeltheMelody 2010). She also says: 'In this meditation space I also have, you know, my favourite pictures of MJ from the different parts of his career, from the different albums [*she turns and gestures to the background wall, which the bedhead butts up against, where small printed images of Michael Jackson can be seen*] (*Michael Jackson Meditation* 2010). While printing and blu-tacking these pictures of 'MJ' in preparation for this performance, I had a vivid flashback to being a teenager, printing out and blu-tacking Internet sourced images of the late singer-songwriter Jeff Buckley to my bedroom wall. I

would assemble these images on the wall parallel to my bed, so I could keep a watchful eye over the object of my obsession. I was like Shelley! I had also been morbidly obsessed with a dead famous musician, who I enshrined on my bedroom wall. I came to realise that perhaps rather than being ‘like Shelley’, it would be more accurate to say that she was like me. After all, my personal experience of enshrining a dead singer came first and this, coupled with the uncanny likeness of her meditation space to my shrine, suggested to me that a part of my teenage self-history informed her.

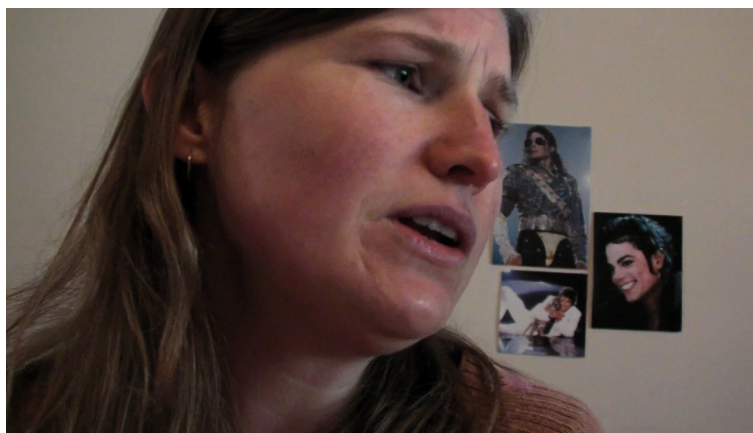


Fig 25. Meredith Godley, *Michael Jackson Meditation*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 4.35

The *déjà vu* that I experienced in the preparation of *Michael Jackson Meditation*, made it evident that I was drawing from my ‘inner resources’ (McGaw 1975) to generate performances. In this context, inner resources are:

What the actor has “in him” [sic]... the accumulation of his own experience. His *inner resources* are everything that he has done, seen, thought, or imagined... His life experience is not derived solely from what he has personally gone through; it comes also from reading, observation, seeing plays – from many other ways (9).

Consisting of cognitively accumulated experiences, inner resources are essentially part of one’s self-concept because, in part, self-concept is cognitively structured by one’s accrued experiences, as I explained in more detail in Chapter One. By inadvertently drawing from my inner resources, I was implicating self-concept.

McGaw (1975) further says about inner resources that:

His [sic] [the actor's] actions onstage are limited to these resources – to what he understands about life. As he is dependent upon his voice and body to carry out his actions, he is dependent upon his inner resources to tell him *what* actions to carry out' (9).

This above quote is particularly poignant to *All MySelves on YouTube*. More than just singly acting my personae, I created, costumed, situated, videoed and edited them. Other than feedback from supervisors, fellow-artists and friends, which I could take or leave, few 'outer resources' informed my personae. Having a solo practice meant that, to a large extent, that my creative output was inevitably limited to my inner resources. So, my practice was inevitably self-focused because it unavoidably came from myself. Although my practice came from me, I had reassured myself that the resultant Othered personae didn't recognisably resemble myself.

On the contrary, however, the way I parodied my personae actually revealed my personal biases. As Riggins (1997) says: 'discourses of Othering are myth-making enterprises more revealing of the observer than the observed' (10). Realising the self-generated nature of my work illuminated my personal agendas for parodying certain 'types' of people. Although I in part parodied my meditation teacher with Dhammapada, for example, I did not intend to defame her. Rather, I gravitated towards parodying her because, being a spiritual healer who taught guided meditations in the back of a New Age shop, I viewed her as the epitome of the New Age individual.

Retrospectively though, I can see that my parodic ridicule was aimed at another. In my early twenties, I became fast friends with an individual who aligned herself with New Age spirituality. Having emerged from awkward teenage years where I'd had trouble forming friendships, I appreciated having a 'best' friend to hang out with every weekend and to have regular phone-gossip sessions with. I finally felt accepted and because of this I found it easy to deny the cynicism I felt towards some of her spiritual beliefs. After we had been friends for about a year, I found out

that this individual had been venting about my un-spirituality with other people behind my back. Although I didn't particularly think of myself as spiritual, having my best friend bitch that I lacked spirituality hurt my feelings because she attributed such meaning to it. This tension culminated one day when I was discussing how well I was handling a recent breakup with a boyfriend. My friend enthusiastically replied that she had taught me well. I felt deeply patronised that she had cast herself as my teacher, and me as a clueless student, especially as we were the same age. Not long after, convincing myself that our close friendship could handle a frank discussion, I confronted her about the 'unspiritual' label she had given me, and about her condescending tone. The friendship couldn't handle it: I was unceremoniously 'dumped.' Feeling duped by this 'best' friend, I consoled myself that she just couldn't handle a *substantial* friendship.

To deal with this rejection, I sought revenge by Othering this friend out of my life. My no-longer-repressed bias grew to new proportions. In my bitterness my friend became a superficial born-again-hippy-New-Age-spiritualist unable to withstand a deep friendship. I inwardly mocked at the thought of the healing-energy infused water she purchased off the Internet. Literally *buying* into these props of spirituality without question displayed, after all, a consumerist gullibility that was uncritical and shallow. Who was she to revel in the enlightenment she had so 'generously' shared with me? Holding a grudge towards my ex-friend, I generalised my bitter perception of her as a New Age spiritualist and directed it towards 'her' whole group.

Although Dhammapada was in part a parody of my meditation teacher, she really embodied my stereotypes of the New Age to continue the Othering process of my ex-friend. While I relegated Dhammapada as being Other to me, her creation and performance was the result of my personal biases. Because my personal biases resulted from the accretion of my experiences and were cognitively shaped, displaying these inner resources with Dhammapada inevitably revealed parts of my self-concept.

The improvisational vlogging style I used in *All MySelves on YouTube* particularly enabled expression of my inner resources. The seminal Russian theatre director and theorist Constantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938) says that improvisation allows actors to put their inner emotions, derived from their personal context, into action (Stanislavski 1961, 96). He further promotes improvisation as an important technique during initial script readings, saying, ‘Our own words are the direct expressions of our feelings, whereas the words of another are alien until we have made them our own’ (Stanislavski 1961, 100). As previously stated, my vlogs were unscripted and only roughly planned. All of my vlogged words were my own. Further, not being confined by a script allowed me to naturally and directly express my feelings as they arose, thus shedding light on my inner resources.

More than just a technique that generally expressed my inner resources, improvisation retrieved even deeper inner resources to reveal parts of my subconscious, or deeper self. My improvisational performance technique can be paralleled to Surrealism’s³³ Automatism. In his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Surrealist founder André Breton defines the movement as ‘psychic automatism in its pure state’ (1924). To reclaim the imagination’s rights in a culture that repressed it with its restrictive rationality, Surrealists used techniques of Automatism to achieve direct expression of their subconscious mind (Aspley 2010 and Breton 1924). Breton first described Automatism in the context of Automatic Writing. Giving direction on how to achieve the technique, he says:

Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can ... Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you're writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard (Breton 1924).

³³ Surrealism was a cultural movement established in the early nineteen-twenties in Europe (Aspley 2010).

Visual artists also participated in Automatism using Automatic Drawing (Aspley 2010). With this method the artist allows their hand to move randomly across the drawing surface, applying chance and accident to their technique. Being freed from rational control, the resultant drawing is said to represent the subconscious, revealing repressed parts of the psyche (Encyclopedia of Art Education n.d). Unconfined by the rational control induced when working from a script, and instead performing randomly throughout my personae vlogs, I was never far from my subconscious. As with the unfolding sentences of Breton's automatic writing, one of my spontaneous enactments allowed others to cascade from hidden depths.

Dhammapada's vlog *Meditation- DevineDhammapada* (2010) particularly exemplifies improvisation as revealing of my subconsciously stored inner resources. Before performing this totally unscripted vlog, I had the general objective of delivering a ten-minute guided meditative visualisation in Dhammapada's guise. The finished piece was overlaid with still images, which were relevant to the meditative journey Dhammapada's cooing voice induced for the meditator. The visualisation commences on a beach, where a viewer finds a white canoe:

Whilst you are walking along this beach, feeling the warm sand beneath your feet, you notice a white canoe. You are compelled towards this canoe. You gently but lithely and lightly jump into this canoe with the feeling of a youthful spirit. Launch off into the ocean... Feel yourself bobbing along the ocean safely. Rock back and forth as if a baby, an infant, safe in their cradle. Feel the ocean breeze gently caress your skin. You can be naked you can be clothed. It *doesn't* matter. Whatever feels right for you (DevineDhammapada 2010).



Fig 26. Meredith Godley, *Meditation - DevineDhammapada*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 10 mins

While videoing this meditation, I felt as if Dhammapada's Othered words were naturally channelling through me from another place. Ironically, feeling like her improvised words weren't coming from me, I did not consider the significance of the canoe and other symbols evoked during the meditation. A few months after videoing this vlog though, I was struck by the memory of visualising the white canoe in my own meditations from years before.

Two years prior to commencing the facilitated group meditations discussed in Chapter Two, I was listening to guided visualisation/meditation downloads at home as a way of managing my anxiety. Sometimes I would follow the guided visualisations and at other times I would drift off into my own imaginary world. My self-initiated visualisations were infiltrated with images, from the movie *Dead Man* (1995), which I had viewed around this time. *Dead Man*, was a movie I discovered late one night while channel surfing. Set in the Wild West American frontier, the film focuses on William Blake (played by Johnny Depp), who is an injured fugitive slowly dying of a gunshot wound. An American Indian character called Nobody meets him and is convinced he is the late poet William Blake and that he must be returned back to the spirit world. So, Nobody escorts William Blake to the ocean, pushing him off into the water in a white Indian burial canoe saying: 'It's time for you to leave now William Blake. Time for you to go back from where you came from... Back to the place where all the spirits came from and where all the spirits

return. This world will no longer concern you... Go home William Blake' (*Dead Man* 1995). Avoiding his imminent capture, there is a sense of relief as Blake floats off into the ocean peacefully cocooned in his white canoe to die of his gunshot wound. I found this white canoe sequence profoundly relaxing. In my own visualisations would often picture myself floating off on the ocean gently bobbing along in a white canoe, a breeze gently caressing my skin, to a place where this world would no longer concern me.

Fig 27. *Dead Man*, 1995, film still, 115 mins

The film still from *Dead Man*, 1995, 115 mins, In Picture Start: An Ode to Cinema, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The film still from *Dead Man* can instead be accessed via <https://picturestarts.wordpress.com/tag/johnny-depp/>

When I started attending the meditation workshops mentioned in Chapter Two, the canoe drifted away from my personal meditations into the abyss of lost memories, and was replaced by my meditation teacher's visions. Evidently though, the canoe remained sunken within my subconscious until it emerged with my improvisational performance. At this point, although I had tried to deny my real affinity with New Age meditation and anxiously obsessive fandom by Othering Dhammapada and Shelley, there was no denying that these personae drew from my deep inner resources and thus represented parts of my self-concept. Given this, my days of denying myself within my practice were numbered.

Acting and Feeling – Performing the body / Performing the Self:

Because initially I didn't want any parts of my real self to be visible beneath my personae masks, I aimed to realistically act their Otherness. This seemingly contradicts my need at the time to perform exaggerated parodies, and perhaps also explains why other YouTubers viewed my personae as real. In order to realistically embody my personae, my performances had to be imbued with *real feeling*. Because my real feelings are based on my thoughts and experiences, they form an important part of my inner resources, thus implicating myself. I eventually realised that my embodied personae, or veneers did not hide my real self, because by

evoking my real feelings through action I created a physical embodiment that was part of my real self.

Being an untrained actor, I relied on pop-cultural clichés to inform my ideas about how to produce a realistic, or ‘good’, performance. I’d been influenced by movies and television series’ depicting the familiar fictional story of the young aspiring actor who is told by a mentor that they need *feel* their performance for it to be convincing. Inevitably the storyline goes, once the young performer frees their inhibited emotions, and genuinely feels during performance, they succeed in producing the sought after performances. In thinking this way, I reflected very conventional ideas about acting. Ken Miller (2013) says:

Psychologically-inflected realism is at the core of conventional thinking and judgements about screen acting. From this realist perspective, a performance is considered to be exemplary when it conveys a sense of truthfulness... and deals deeply and honestly with emotion. While the realist actor is expected to be ‘true to the text’, there is often an additional expectation of going beyond the text of the script or play by calling upon personal resources of imagination and emotion in order to locate an even deeper truth (27).

While performing my personae, as will be discussed in more detail shortly, I did try to feel them by drawing on my ‘personal resources’. It was only after I had been vlogging for some time that I read about acting theory. Upon doing so I became aware that my pop cultural clichéd realist acting methods had trickled down from seminal acting theories of directors Constantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938) and Lee Strasberg (1901 – 1982).

Stanislavski (1961) contended that to go beyond mechanical acting, actors had to *really feel* that they were their character. To achieve this state, the state Stanislavski called ‘I am’, the actor utilised various methods to empathise with and feel their character. The actor drew on their ‘emotional memories’ to find circumstances and experiences similar to those of their character. If the actor could sensually re-experience memories relevant to their character, then it would help them feel their character. Furthermore, using their Active Imagination, the actor could visualise

themselves in their character's context and even interact with them. Habitually using Active Imagination to familiarise themselves with their character's circumstances, enabled the actor to relate to their character and perform them convincingly, with feeling (24-28).

American theatre and film director Lee Strasberg (often accredited for creating 'The Method' acting technique) built on Stanislavski's ideas. He too thought that to produce a 'lively' performance, the actor had to bring real emotion to their part. However, while Strasbergian actors, using a method referred to as 'Affective Memory,' recall real memories to *feel* their performance, their memories did not have to relate to their character's or the production's circumstances at all. Strasberg (1987) argued that 'substitute situations' from the actors real life were often more effective at producing the desired emotion. He did not see a problem with using substitute situations, as he believed it was more important for the actor to show real emotion than to empathise with the character. After all, the audience would be unaware of the actor's recollections (83-87).

Although actors may be able to locate an emotional memory that they want to evoke, habits of socially learned repressed expression may limit their conveyance of the real emotion (Strasberg 1987, 95). Strasberg applied various procedures during training to teach actors the concentration necessary to organically express their repressed emotions on demand (during a live performance). If the actor had particular difficulty developing this concentration, they were asked to imagine a personal object, given to them by a person who they'd lost (131-136). '[B]ecause the object does have a built-in personal experience, it will invariably trigger a response' (Strasberg 1987, 136).

Stanislavski's and Strasberg's ideas trickled down into what I thought was my realist acting method. With *ShelleyFeeltheMelody*, for example, I tried to depict a manically anxious, obsessive grief-stricken fan who felt compelled to pay public

homage to the late Michael Jackson, despite her extreme introversion. Suffering from mild anxiety, obsessions and social phobia myself, I stated in Shelley's persona journal: 'I experience all of this, so I feel I can use it, exaggerate it and channel it into Shelley' (Godley 2009, 3). Like the Stanislavskian actor, in the early stages of Shelley's vlogging practice, I tried to bring relevant personal experience to imbue my portrayal of her with a sense of reality.

Being a manically anxious mourning fan, Shelley was frequently on the verge of crying, so I often played her with tears in her eyes. Because crying is associated with profoundly real feeling, I used it to create a sense of verisimilitude. Ironically during *Michael Jackson Meditation* she was at the pinnacle of her anxiety and on the verge of crying for the whole vlog. In the following excerpt, Shelley describes her meditation space:

What I've done is surrounded myself with things that relax me. You know I come home and I put on my fluffy slippers and I've also you know got my favourite pillow that my Grandma patchworked me when I was a little kid. And I also have Dogga, which is my favourite toy that she also gave me when I was a little kid. And you know my Grandma is also a person along with MJ who I really, really loved and admired and meant so much to me (ShelleyFeeltheMelody 2010).

While acting the vlog, I purposely remembered my Grandmother's passing knowing that it would elicit an appropriately teary response. Throughout my childhood I had not known this Grandmother very well. This was partly because we lived a distance from her and partly because her Alzheimer's disease affected her expression of her personality. At her deathbed, and later at her funeral, I was very sad. I was also conflicted about my sadness because I hadn't known her well. I felt guilty that I, and not my cousins who were close to her, was at her deathbed. During both of these occasions I felt like I was intruding on their emotional territory and that I didn't have a right to cry or express my sadness.

Like the Stanislavskian actor, by recalling my Grandmother's passing, funeral and my conflicted feelings about it, I utilised emotional memories that were relevant to

Shelley's circumstances, because they were infused with grief. However, seeing Shelley as a bit of a joke (she was after all making a vlog about meditation while hyperventilating), I didn't adequately empathise with her to enter Stanislavski's state of 'I am' (1961). Because, as will be discussed shortly, my recalled memories arose from different circumstances to Shelley's, and were hidden from the audience, I felt that my inner self was separated from Shelley's outer veneer. Whilst I didn't feel I was Shelley, *real feelings* produced my *real tears*.

Grasping and holding 'Dogga' up to the camera during this performance – a toy dog in actuality given to me by my Grandma – intensified my almost-crying state, my eyes were moistening and my voice crackling and waning anew. Having felt unable to express my sadness about my Grandmother's death at the time, this was the first time I'd publicly demonstrated my real feelings. Dogga thus fulfilled the role of Strasberg's evocative personal object by helping consolidate my sense of loss and sadness and allowing me to achieve organic expression for a previously repressed emotion.

By having 'real feelings' during the *Michael Jackson Meditation* performance, I was able to project real emotions and convincingly perform my self-obscurer personae. Simultaneously, by facilitating the recovery of previously repressed emotions, my personae were slowly drilling into my subconscious and mining ever-deeper areas of my self-concept.

Although I had evoked real memories to convincingly portray the emotions of my personae, I felt at the time that their 'inner' origins were protected by my 'outer' physical behaviour, which was composed of Othered idiosyncrasies. Feeling that my outer physical behaviour concealed my real inner self, I mentally separated body from self. I eventually realised, however, that because my acted physical behaviour affected my inner emotions rather than covering them up, they provided an inroads to them.

By repeatedly acting idiosyncrasies which were foreign to my embodiment of myself – Shelley’s nervous hand-flapping, Dhammapada’s ecstatic eye-rolling, Robbo’s slouched sitting-position, Rochelle’s neck-swiveling – I believed myself to have built up an impenetrable physical façade of Otherness that was unrelated to the underlying motivations. The sense that my outer physical shell hid my inner ‘real self’ was rooted in French philosopher René Descartes’ theories that distinguish the human subject’s soul from their body. Descartes proposed that the heat and movement of inanimate physical objects, which do not depend on consciousness to function, are akin to the heat and movement that drives the workings of the human body. Both can function without thought. Additionally he says: ‘because we have no conception of the body as thinking in any way at all, we have reason to believe that every kind of thought present in us belongs to the soul’ (Descartes 1649, translated by Cottingham, Murdoch and Stoothoff 1988, 219). Furthermore, he suggested that when the heat and movement of the body desists (when the body dies), the soul leaves the body (Descartes 1649, translated by Cottingham, Murdoch and Stoothoff 1988).³⁴ Radner (1971) elucidates Descartes’ soul/body separation – often referred to as ‘Cartesian Dualism.’ She explains that the body is a mere shell that houses the mind, or the real essence of one’s being. While Radner uses the term ‘mind’, rather than ‘soul’ to discuss this Cartesian Dualism, in this instance ‘mind’ is viewed as akin to ‘soul’. This is because Descartes attributes imagination, thoughts and free will to the soul (Descartes 1649, translated by Cottingham, Murdoch and Stoothoff 1988) and these are all functions that we still commonly ascribe to the mind. In this analysis then, mind and soul are used interchangeably. Although the body dies, the mind, with its superior ‘thinking’ nature, continues after death.³⁵ Although, within my practice-based research I

³⁴ Although these ideas emerged from the 1600s, I employ Descartes’ soul/body theories in my work here because it continues to pervade contemporary thought, with many spiritual beliefs still believing in a soul’s disembodied after-life and contemporary exercise fads promoting ‘mind over body’ attitudes.

³⁵ For a more in-depth explanation of this idea, please pursue Daisie Radner’s article ‘Descartes’ Notion of the Union of Mind and Body’ in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Volume 9, Number 2, April 1971, pp. 159-170).

analyse the separation of my *self* from my body, setting up this Cartesian Dualism, which separates the mind/soul from the body, is nevertheless relevant. This is because the self can be seen as synonymous with the mind, or soul. As explained in Chapter One, the term 'psyche' (meaning mind) is commonly translated into soul. It can also be understood as the personification of the life principle, making 'self' a near synonym (Gregory 1987).³⁶ Viewing my body as a mere shell that operated to hide my real self within my performance practice demonstrates how I brought into the Cartesian mind/body split. In another parallel with my work, by Sherman displaying her body while asserting that her artwork is not about her, she also buys into the dualism theory. I find myself wondering if she embodies the most artificial looking women, a practice I explained in Chapter Two, to declare her body as a mere façade that swaddles her real self.

Initially my Cartesian dualistic bias caused me to perceive acting in largely clichéd terms: I appreciated that real feelings could be provoked through emotional memory, but was unaware that physical actions were also used as tools for evoking and showing real emotions. While Stanislavski's (Benedetti 1982) theories on emotional memory are commonly known, his later ideas on 'physical action' are less so. In his later years, however, Stanislavski was concerned that emotional memory was too confronting for actors, who often became exhausted, hysterical, tense – or conversely inhibited – by the demands of the technique. In order to avoid this, Stanislavski now suggested that actors use physical actions to access their subconscious emotion. Theatre director Katie Mitchell (2009) delves into the ideas behind Stanislavski's physical actions to elucidate how they work. Drawing on nineteenth-century philosophies from William James, which influenced Stanislavski's physical action methods, she contends that physical experiences precede and stimulate conscious emotion. While it had long been thought that emotional feelings informed physical reactions, James contended that physical actions preceded and informed emotional feelings. For example, he suggested that if we see a bear in a forest, we have already turned and ran away from it before

³⁶ See Chapter One for a more in depth consideration of this idea.

realising that we are frightened. So, within acting, because physical actions are 'the bait which the feeling will rise to' (Stanislavski, quoted in Benedetti 1982, 67), actors can reproduce ones associated with certain feelings to really evoke them from within. Stanislavski says:

An actor on the stage need only sense the smallest modicum of organic physical truth in his action or general state and instantly his emotions will respond to his inner faith in the genuineness of what his body is doing. In our case it is incomparably easier to call forth real truth and faith within the region of our physical than of our spiritual nature (66 – 67).

Throughout my vlogging practice, it became evident that, rather than covering up my real feelings, physically enacted idiosyncrasies elicited them. Shelley's idiosyncrasies, for example, of hyperventilating and of rocking back and forth while compulsively tucking her hair behind her left ear-produced physiological feelings of panic in me. These included quickened heartbeat, breathlessness, blushing, light-headedness and sweating; symptoms that were reminiscent of the mild panic attacks that I had previously experienced. Alongside these physical symptoms I re-experienced real feelings of dread associated with them, as illustrated in the following Shelley persona journal extracts:

When performing Shelley my heartbeat quickens because to some extent I start to hyperventilate and talk faster than I normally would. This makes me somewhat breathless, but also super focused. My compulsive fidgeting (which consists of repeatedly tucking my hair behind my ears and shaking my hands back and forth) also makes my heart work faster. The hyperventilating and fidgeting are constant features of Shelley's character and I enact them during all of her persona performances. Shelley is enacted in this way to imply that she is very nervous. Between the fidgeting and hyperventilating I do start to feel warmer and flushed – which often results in a facial blush. These actions sometimes also make me a little sweaty. As Shelley's voice is higher pitched than my own I have to tighten my vocal chords which can lead to a sore, strained throat – particularly if the performance takes some time to get right.

Whilst enacting her, my emotions also alter. I don't feel particularly embarrassed or ashamed when playing Shelley, but rather I do feel a great sense of urgency, probably based on the physiological changes I embody to play Shelley (Godley 2010, 20-21).

(and):

Interesting in terms of ShelleyFeeltheMelody; perhaps I 'feel' her more [*than the other personae*] because I do in fact alter my breath to play her. I start to shallow breath and hyperventilate on purpose, in order to create a stressed appearance, but perhaps enacting this breath does make me feel the stressed emotional states of Shelley more easily; after all breath is slowed down therapeutically in order to facilitate relaxed feelings (Godley 2010, 28).

Because these embodied actions affected my emotional states, I could no longer see them as outer facades, detached from my real inner self. In fact, the interactive cycle they initiated – of evoking emotional responses, which in turn directed further embodied actions – debunked the Cartesian dualism I had applied to acting. Because acting channels the self through physical actions, the actor's body, like the performance artist's, inevitably reveals the self. Once again, I had aligned my practice with Amelia Jones' body/self paradigm, which I explored in detail in Chapter One.

Even though I became aware of how the physical acts involved in acting elicited myself, I still envisaged my personae on YouTube as virtually projected simulacrum, separated from my body/self. However, as I viewed and reviewed my videoed personae on YouTube, I became increasingly aware that in watching I was re-embodying the feelings I'd had while performing. This can be explained through Amelia Jones' (2006) idea of the punctum. In the context of mediated portraits, Jones describes the punctum as a visual detail that resonates with the viewer to evoke within them an embodied memory. Applying the same principals to televisual portraiture, Jones elucidates the punctum:

Because it gives us a body with which to engage, the photographic portrait (perhaps especially if it is *our own* portrait) encourages us to attach to it via our own psychic past; it calls out for us to bring embodied experiences from our own past (whether repressed and "forgotten" or easily called to mind) into dialogue with it in order to give this "new" subject meaning within our own world view (54-55).

Upon seeing my body in my personae vlogs, I inevitably remembered the physical and emotional sensations of performing them. The following excerpt from my Research Journal comparatively analyses what it felt like to perform Shelley and Dhammapada:

When I watch Shelley back on YouTube, I find myself holding my breath... she is so nervous, and in a way this gives me a sense of anxious anticipation. When her eyes fill with tears as she refers to the late Michael Jackson, I notice myself either blush (a bodily reaction of mine signifying emotional response – only sometimes embarrassment), or I get tears in my eyes... I am re-embodying these experiences viscerally and empathising with Shelley...

Start to fidget slightly when watching [*Shelley*]. Find it hard to continually focus on screen (direct contrast to DevineDhammapada). Notice that I recall a sense of throat pain / tightness in the throat by remembering what it is like to do her unnaturally high pitched voice in unnaturally fast pace... In contrast to DevineDhammapada, noticed myself slump in chair straight away and sit relatively still. Also, it was easier for me to stay watching the screen. I also found myself feeling relaxed and breathing deeper than I would for Shelley... (Godley 2010, 76).

Perhaps because my body/self was recognisable in these personae, it was relatively easy to attach them to my psychic past. Whatever the reason, I bridged the gap between their virtuality and my reality by re-embodying them as I watched. I could no longer separate them from myself.

In this chapter I discussed how my attempts to separate my personae from myself via acting were futile, because this method inevitably evokes one's inner resources and embodied emotions, which are synonymous with the self. Although I had become aware that acting drew from myself, I thought the Otherness of my personae would secretly conceal these self-origins. This meant that I did not yet fully appreciate the way acting, in conjunction with my multiple-identity vlogging practice, mapped out the psychology of my self-concept. As Strasberg (1987) acknowledges, although his acting methods are not intended to be therapeutic, they can have a therapeutic effect because they elicit the actor's feelings, emotions. In Chapter Four I will discuss the inadvertent therapeutic effect I experienced

through drawing on real parts of myself had and how this revealed the deep psychology of my self-concept.

CHAPTER 4: PERSONAE AND REAL IDENTITIES: STORYING ALL MYSELVES TOGETHER ON YOUTUBE

In the previous chapter I described how my chosen methods of acting elicited my inner resources and embodied memories, a process, which ultimately implicated myself in my practice. In this chapter I will deepen the discussion to suggest that beyond simply revealing snippets of my self-history, my personae actually expressed identities constituent of my self-concept, sometimes individually and sometimes in relationship with one another. Ironically it was because I'd thought my personae were distanced from my real self that I was able to express repressed and confronting parts of myself with them. As the practice Drama Therapy presupposes, symbolic expression is a less threatening, yet deeply cathartic means of attaining self-expression (Landy 1996).

Although I had initially performed multiple personae to obscure my 'real', assumedly singular self, as discussed in Chapter Two, the dialogues and narratives that developed between the personae echoed stories from my real life. In subsequent vlogs, I subconsciously developed these personal stories beyond my self-history to assert new and empowering identities within myself. In so doing, my multi-channeled vlogging personae facilitated an unknowing engagement in Narrative Therapy – a therapy that encourages participants to choose the personal stories with which they want to define their self (Dunne 2006). Viewed from this perspective, by being at the helm of these personae developments my artist self assumed the role of 'core decision maker' who was anchoring these multiple-identities together. This helped form my conception of the contemporary individual, as composed of multifarious identities that are held together by a decision-making core. By expressing multiple personae on YouTube, I was not losing my core (real) self, but was rather enacting contemporary iCultural individuality, which is defined by coherent and centred multiplicity.

The therapeutic framework of this chapter enables personal catharsis and thus allows me to delve deeply and honestly into my self-concept. Although personally cathartic, this framework also has broader implications because it helps me to define what contemporary selfhood is, albeit from an autoethnographic foundation. In this sense, it facilitates my conclusion that a performer's multiple-identity practice allows them to reflexively participate in contemporary individuality.

Personae and Therapeutic Self-Expression:

On reflection, it is hardly surprising that by embodying the Other myself was elucidated. Various theoretical perspectives, of which I will present two, propose that for one to be able to 'see' their self, they need to objectively project it and see it reflected back. Here, objectivity is equated to Otherness because, with its external, impersonal connotations, the objective is the antonymous *Other* to the subjective. Firstly, in his 'mirror stage' theory, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1949, quoted in Lacan 2002) contends that the infant first recognises their self in the mirror when they equate their actual movements to the ones echoed in the mirrored reflection. Seeing this objectified image of their self gives the infant a way of picturing their self for the first time and thus initiates their self-understanding. Secondly sociologist Charles Cooley's (1902) 'looking glass self' (previously referred to in Chapter One) proposes that one envisages themselves in relation to how they're socially received. Cooley makes it clear that without this gauge point, an individual's self-perception would be impossible. As previously discussed in Chapter One, Nick Crossley (2006) summarises Cooley's position well: 'The self is in many respects its own blind spot. The I does not see itself any more than the eye sees itself and we are therefore reliant upon others to reflect back information about ourselves' (27). Without considering our objective appearance, we wouldn't be able to know our selves.

Although I could literally see my movements mirrored on YouTube's reflective interface and, through the device of the punctum, could feel them again (as discussed in Chapter Three), I could still use the fictionality of my personae to justify

them as Other. Ironically though, it was their fictional Otherness that made my personae deeply revealing conduits of myself. This claim will be explained through the framework of Drama Therapy.

In Drama Therapy, the participant's body is engaged creatively with numerous theatrical techniques, like improvisational roleplay, singing and dancing (Pearson 1996). This allows for spontaneous emotional expression 'within the freedom and protection of role and metaphor' (Dekker 1996, 40). Personal experiences and emotions are not recounted factually and rather find their expression symbolically (Dekker 1996).

Landy's (1996) concept of 'distancing' perhaps best describes how and why Drama Therapy utilises indirect self-expression. Achieving self-expression with theatrical symbols, the participant distances themselves from their reality (13), which ensures that they can relive and acknowledge their feelings, without becoming overwhelmed by them (Landy 2009, 72).

Distancing occurs when, to varying degrees, an individual separates themselves from their feelings, thoughts, or physical self-image (Landy 1996, 13). Landy notes that:

Techniques of distancing in drama therapy include: the use of narrative or storytelling; projective techniques such as dolls, puppets, masks, makeup and videotape; psychodramatic techniques such as role-reversal and doubling; sociodramatic techniques such as caricature and social group rather than individual role-playing (Landy 1996, 19).

Landy (1996) further notes that by implementing stereotypes and caricature within their performance, the participant creates a generalised role. Performing a generalised role consolidates the participant's sense of distance from it (24).

Landy (1996 and 2009) proposes an ideal 'midpoint' of distancing, which cathartically allows one to relive, acknowledge and deal with their emotions whilst not being overwhelmed by them. Once a cathartic midpoint has been achieved, the participant can observe their self amid an emotional outburst (1996). Pearson (1996) adds that by not performing their self the participant is able to find expression free from the self-consciousness induced by fear of social judgement, and to express parts of themselves that would usually be repressed. The participant, she says 'become[s] reunited with aspects of themselves that they didn't know were there. They discover themselves' (13).

Given my fear of narcissistically focusing on myself, I obviously didn't consciously apply therapeutic techniques in my practice. However, in trying to separate myself from my personae, I inadvertently employed distancing techniques similar to those found in Drama Therapy.

Firstly, as discussed in previous chapters, because my personae were purposely constructed with character traits and 'personal' interests unrelated to my self-concept, I immediately created a distance between them and me. By concocting what I thought were non-autobiographic storylines for personae vlogs and for their general vlogging trajectories, I was creating stories that did not overtly relate to my own life. In this sense I was engaging with what Landy (1996) would call an 'overdistanced form of storytelling' (19).

Secondly, not only did I play the role of the Other when vlogging these personae, I caricatured generalised Others. As, discussed in Chapter Two, generalising and de-personalising my personae with stereotyped caricatures enabled me to parody and critically distance myself from them. Thus, by the very act of vlogging itself I created a video record of my objectively projected body/self; something that Landy recommends with patients to enable them to objectively observe their own behaviour.

Ironically though, because these ‘concealing’ masks made *me* feel protected and relaxed, I inadvertently let my guard down to reveal more of myself. Achieving a midpoint of distance from them, as is the aim in Drama Therapy, ultimately allowed cathartic self-expression of identities that I had long repressed. In this way I was like Turkle’s MUDers, who, in the play space of the Internet enacted roles that were generally off-limits to them, and thus connected to socially repressed parts of themselves. Although I had been trying to avoid myself, my inadvertent therapeutic practice encouraged me to deal with various personal issues, which in turn gave me deeper insight into contemporary notions of self-expression within online networking sites.

My realisation that *All MySelves on YouTube* enabled therapeutic self-expression came in 2012 while preparing for a live performance, and caused a significant shift in my thinking about my research. Until this point I had considered my research focus, amongst other things, to be about examining how *theories* of self-multiplicity (not *my* self-multiplicity) related to a multiple-identity performance practice. Now, with my denial of the links between my personae and myself finally gone, I felt I had exhausted the artistic possibilities of that early focus and decided instead to more deeply explore the self-origins of my personae. Although I felt a tinge of narcissistic guilt at the prospect, I was reassured by the acceptability of *self*-presentation within the YouTube vlogging community, and the accompanying perception that self-presentation actually *assists* social connections; perhaps self-examination was not so narcissistic after all.

I decided to start my new investigation with Shelley because her experience of anxiety made me feel closest to her; through her visibly and audibly overt public hysteria, she seemed to therapeutically express an insidious part of me that I none-the-less usually succeeded in publically concealing, even when experiencing mild panic attacks.

While performing Shelley I re-experienced all the physical and emotional symptoms I personally attribute to anxiety. However, the experience differed in that Shelley, as the very essence of anxiety, allowed me a public face not usually afforded to my feelings. Her fast, high-pitched, loud, and sometimes incoherent, ramblings emulated and indulged the panicked inner chatter that I often experience during heightened moments of actual anxiety.

Additionally, Shelley's obsession with Michael Jackson combined with her compulsive nervous fidgeting, to give me a public outlet for my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).³⁷ In real life when I've shared my obsessive thoughts or when people have seen my nervous compulsive behaviour, I have often been laughed at and told that I'm silly and irrational. While the intention of this response may sometimes have been reassurance, I have often felt judged. Hence, over time I've learnt to keep these thoughts and behaviours to myself. Shelley was thus inadvertently cathartic for me because she enabled the release of pent-up emotions.

The ways in which Shelley enabled catharsis for me has further parallels in drama therapy. According to Landy (1996): 'Through catharsis, the client releases tension in tears, laughter, shaking, blushing, etc' (19). It has been noted that for many of Shelley's performances, she has tears in her eyes. Although at times I had to elicit these tears with real emotional memories, according to my Shelley persona journal (Godley 2010), at other times: "I don't even tell myself to well up with tears; as soon as I slip into this role I just do" (27). While performing Shelley, I also often experienced shaking and blushing too. I am now left wondering if Shelley's physical signposts of anxiety, which seemed to just flow out of me, had less to do with acting and more to do with catharsis.

³⁷ Individuals who suffer from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder are afflicted by obsessive undesirable thoughts that compel them to repeatedly carry out irrational behaviour (Rachman and de Silva 2009, 1-2). For more information see *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, by Rachman and de Silva, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

As previously stated, catharsis is achieved when a participant can re-live emotions without being overwhelmed by them. This relies on a balance between underdistance, or expressing things close to the self and overdistance, or expressing things separated from the self (Landy 1996, 17). In some respects, with her uncontrollable manic behaviour and her extreme obsession with a celebrity to whom I didn't relate, Shelley was overdistanced from me. However, we were also underdistanced through literally sharing a pulsating anxiety. Although I knew that in performing Shelley I was experiencing real feelings, I felt that the reality of them was hidden behind the mask of her. This allowed me to unashamedly express emotions that I usually repressed to save public face.

While some of my other personae similarly allowed me to release repressed aspects of myself, this was not true of all of them. DevineDhammapada allowed me to indulge my inner hippy-spiritualist without fear of judgement from hippy-haters. Rochelle let me overtly and unabashedly express disowned parts of my sexuality. I struggled, however, to locate the remaining personae, TheRobbo93 and FootFixHero on my psychological map of catharsis. This is consistent with Landy's (1996) observation that '...individuals identify closely with certain roles they play and separate themselves from other roles' (13).

Perhaps I was overly distanced from these latter personae as they were males and I felt I could not relate to the experience of being male at all. Despite my difficulty identifying, I ultimately realised that these personae also played a cathartic role for me; a role they played in conjunction with the other personae. I discuss this in more detail in the upcoming section about self-narrative.

For a moment I want to pause to discuss my use of the term 'personae' in relation to the above ideas. Cathartic potential is indicated by this term because it strikes a balance between overdistance and underdistance. Turkle (1995) notes that the term 'persona' simultaneously refers to an actor's mask and the root of 'person' and 'personality' (182) – so it is at once both personal and impersonal. Indeed, as

discussed in Chapter Two, the personae of Turkle's MUDer, allow them to therapeutically roleplay identities, which they may not have the chance to enact in their everyday lives, and to incorporate them into their self-concept. This is similar to the Drama Therapy participant who implements theatrical distancing to cathartically express their identities that may be repressed in everyday life. Considering the therapeutically personal connotations I attributed to 'persona', it is strange that I used it to describe my vlogging identities who I had intended to be impersonal.

So why didn't I use the term 'character' instead of 'persona' to class my vlogging identities? Like 'persona', the term 'character' can simultaneously refer to one's personality and a role played by an actor. However, 'persona' is less often associated with acting. In 'total acting', performance studies theorist Richard Schechner (2006) tells us, "the "other" is so powerful that it takes over or possesses the performer" (174) and "the actor "disappears into the role"" (179). So, the acted character seemingly conceals the performer's self. However, as seen in Turkle's use of 'persona,' it is more often associated with one's self-implicating publicly projected identities. Performance artist Rachel Rosenthal (1984 quoted in Lampe 1995) similarly differentiates between persona and character saying:

In acting, or playing a character, you want to impersonate the personality of a person that is not yourself. A persona, however, is an artefact, a fabrication, that corresponds to what you want to project from yourself, from within. It is like taking a facet, a fragment, and using that as a seed to elaborate on. It is you and yet not you – a part of you but not the whole' (297).

Because it is often assumed that performance artists publicly project themselves, 'persona', rather than 'character,' may be a more appropriate term for their projections. In calling my vlogging identities 'personae,' was I subconsciously trying to present myself, like other performance artists?

Storying All MySelves Together on YouTube:

As mentioned, not all of my personae overtly corresponded to different parts of my self-concept. I could not personally identify with TheRobbo93 and FootFixHero. However, I had clearly interwoven these personae into larger plotlines involving the other personae that did cathartically represent my repressed identities. Therefore, although Robbo and FootFix did not directly represent any of my personal identities, the way I storied them with the other personae helped articulate my autobiographic narrative and resultant real self-concept. To some extent, then, they filled in for real people who featured in my autobiographic story.

This interaction between personae gave voice to my personal stories and identities in a way that I had not been able to do on my own. Incorporating my personal narrative and adding to it, my personae showed me the empowering possibilities of storying myself. Narrative Theory provides a useful model for understanding this.

According to the paradigm of the Narrative Self, our experiences give us a sense of meaning. To make our experiences meaningful, we first need to consciously process them. According to Ochs and Capps (1996) telling ourselves stories about them is how we do this. Because '[s]elf is... broadly understood to be an unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world... [and] [w]e come to know ourselves as we use narrative to apprehend experiences' (20-21) – our self is compiled of stories we tell ourselves. Because the Narrative Self is based on the cognitive processing of accumulated experiences, I will use it here as a parallel to the term 'self-concept' as I described it in Chapter One. In the name of coherency, not all lived experiences can be translated into stories, so we tend to select experiences that fit in with the primary story that others and we have about ourselves (Dunne 2006, 111). If our dominant self-stories are 'problem saturated,' then problem stories will perpetually feed into and constrain our self-concept (Dunne 2006, 110-111).

The paradigm of the Narrative Self provides an ideological foundation for Narrative Therapy, as the latter aims to put into practice self-storying techniques that

empower the therapy participant. Narrative Therapy is a type of psychotherapy in which the therapist and participant converse to identify and externalise problematic self-narratives, in an effort to deconstruct and reconstruct new self-stories that will be of psychological benefit to the participant (Boivin and Meier 2011). Dunne (2006) tells us that Narrative Therapy allows participants to see that they choose their personal stories. As such, she argues, participants with problem-saturated ones can 'rewrite their history with the stories that speak of their identity and values in a way that they prefer' (112). Drama Therapy thus provides complementary therapeutic means to assist in deconstructing problematic stories and reconstruct preferable ones. For instance, a Narrative Therapy participant may first dramatically enact a constraining past experience and follow this up with a reenactment of the experience, as it should have been (122-123).

Reforming past scenes often dramatically impacts re-descriptions in the present. The healing power experienced in these scenes alters feelings and continues the process of restorying one's life. The transformation of that past scene creates reverberations that move into the present and future (Dunne 2006, 124).

In retrospect, it is clear that the narrative dialogue between the personae rochellebell17 and TheRobbo93 was a dramatic restorying of some of my problematic teenage life experiences. Before I get into this, I will first explain the narrative that unfolded between Robbo and Rochelle.

Robbo had been established on YouTube for a good few months before I created Rochelle. During this time, in addition to vlogging about guitar hero and the schoolboy antics that he and his friends got up to, Robbo vented about his girlfriend Rochelle; he put down her video game skills, her music taste, and her 'chick-sensitivity'. Robbo's bitching about Rochelle culminates when he vlogs about their breakup in *Robbos facial hair* (2010):

One thing that has fuckin' changed, Charlie O'Neil has been reinstated to her rightful fuckin' place on my bedroom wall [*Robbo moves the camera to focus on the wall behind him, where a poster of a voluptuous model, dressed in a bathing suit is on display. In his previous vlog, entitled Sorry Rochelle, he had removed*

this poster from his wall as a sign of respect to his then-girlfriend Rochelle] and fuckin' that's cause Rochelle and I fuckin' went our separate ways [Abruptly gestures joined hands separating]. I was fuckin' like: 'Rochelle, you fuckin' keepin' me on a chain whippin' me.' And she was all like: 'Nah – you're fuckin' bein' insensitive and shit like that' And I was fuckin' like: 'Look Rochelle, fuckin' one party ends, another one fuckin' begins.' Fuckin', anyhoo, she was fuckin' cut-up [hurt] aye, she was like, I've never seen her that fuckin' cut, aye [shakes head, sighes]. Anyhoo, it's all good, it's all good. Fuckin', fuckin', what you see is what you get with Robbo and fuckin' no hard feelin's or shit like that. Fuckin', already fuckin' got some freedom from it. Rochelle used to hate fuckin' facial hair, so first thing I did was grow, grow a moustache and fuckin' little goatee there [Leans up closer to the camera lens and lifts head-hair, swept across his face, to reveal goatee and moustache]. Fuckin' paid dividends already aye. [Robbo then goes on to talk about a new love interest who likes his facial hair] (TheRobbo93 2010).



Fig 28. Meredith Godley, *Robbos facial hair*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 4.09

I had not originally planned to make a persona out of Rochelle, but after some of the 'trash-talk' Robbo had directed her way, I could not *not* offer her a right of reply. Creating Rochelle with the objective of fighting Robbo, I made her confident, loud, and outspoken – someone who was not afraid to defend herself in a public fight. During all of her vlogs, the camera is positioned below Rochelle's torso and face, forcing Robbo to 'look up to' her, as she 'talks down' to him. With this angle, her breasts jut out prominently, accentuated by tight t-shirts, with defiant catchy slogans, such as 'it was fun while it lasted' and 'shout it out loud' printed across the chest. She sits on a chair, with her left foot also planted on it, in a way that erects

her bended knee, which pendulates expressively back and forth, serving as a surface on which to flex her painted, pointy-nailed fingers. Her neck also swivels back and forth, jangling her long earrings when she makes a point. Emboldening her bodily gestures as instances of defiance, Rochelle's knee becomes a swinging sword and an army of tanks seems to burst from her chest³⁸.

In her first vlog *Rochelle's Response to Robbo's 'facial hair'*, Rochelle says:

Alright, so this in in response to some of the videos from 'theRobbo93' [*gestures inverted commas with fingers*] and in particular his 'facial hair blog' [*gestures inverted commas with fingers*]. Its like whatev's, you dumped me? Oh, so what didn't happen Robbo is that I dumped you and you cried about it for half an hour in the boys' tawlets and then had to get sent home with a 'migraine' [*gestures inverted commas with fingers*]. Oh, that's not what happened. Oh, well thanks for filling me in alright Robbo. It's like you probably never thought I'd actually come across this blog. What because five or six people have seen it so far Robbo? It's a bit embarrassing. It's like, Makayla rang me up the other day and she was like: OMG Rochelle you have to go and see this facial hair blog Robbo made. And I was like Oh my God. Obviously you're still bitter about me about the breakup (rochellebell17 2010).

More than just defending herself, Rochelle totally defames Robbo, claiming that when she was with him she was bored out of her brains because he hadn't developed beyond the age of thirteen. She also ridicules what she sees as his lack of intelligence, by querying whether or not he knows how to spell 'TER'³⁹ (rochellebell17 2010). In this introductory vlog, Rochelle also belittles Robbo's manhood:

³⁸This imagery of Rochelle is encouraged by lyrics from Nick Cave and the Bad Seed's song "Supernaturally", from the album *Abattoir Blues / The Lyre of Orpheus* (2004). The lyrics are as follows:

You're my north, my south, my east, my west
You are the girl that I love best
With an army of tanks bursting from your chest
I wave my little white flag at thee

³⁹Up until 2010, the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) was a score used to determine the eligibility of secondary students for West Australian university degrees.

And You Know, I do like facial hair *ON MEN* [*exclaims 'on men'*]. Not Robbo on like little boys with that little bum fluff shit that looks like it's come off a dead chicken, you know like that that fluffy stuff that comes out of pillows. Alright, I don't like that kind of stuff. So, you know, I like real facial hair on real men, and so in a way Robbo you are right, that does kind of exclude you, doesn't it?



Fig 29. Meredith Godley, *Rochelle's Response to Robbo's 'facial hair'*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 5.23

In his next vlog, *Robbos reply to rochelles whack vid*, Robbo responds to Rochelle's scornful comments. He is evidently rattled, at times being lost for words, shaking his head in bewilderment, only able to mutter 'fuckin'' in a tic-like manner. He does, however, manage to accuse Rochelle of offering his best mate Timmo a head job only two weeks after they broke up. He further says 'you're not all fuckin that [*attractive*] Rochelle. You might think that you are but you're not' (TheRobbo93 2010). He finishes by claiming that Rochelle is jealous of his Charlie O'Neil poster because the pinup model has larger breasts than Rochelle – as does his new girlfriend.

Rochelle responds to these accusations in *Rochelle's Response to Robbo's Response*, sarcastically saying that Timmo 'didn't get with' her. Rebutting Robbo's claims that she is unattractive, she says: 'I do have that [*waggles pointed forefinger defiantly*], and then some. Ting, ting [*Leans back and taps each breast with fore and middle fingers*]' (rochellebell17 2010). She then suggests that both Robbo and Timmo

sound out the slogan printed on her t-shirt, reading 'it was fun while it lasted'. Rochelle then proceeds to do a sexually provocative dance to The Black Eyed Peas song "My Humps" (The Black Eyed Peas 2005), unapologetically gyrating, thrusting and sensually rubbing her hands over her breasts. At the end of the dance, the subtitle '... sweet dreams robbo' appears (rochellebell17 2010).

Originally, Rochelle was a persona to whom I thought I couldn't relate to because she was so different from me. According to my Rochelle persona journal (Godley 2010):

Rochelle is not close at all to who I was as a teenager. She is loud, confident and outspoken. She seems somewhat of a popular girl, into popular music, who is confident she is attractive and not afraid to start a public fight. In opposition to this, I myself was a shy, quite, unpopular girl who was afraid to speak up and not confident at all in my attractiveness (1).

Yet, I relished performing her and talking down to Robbo – who I *really* felt disconnected from. In retrospect, it seems that other than providing Rochelle with a right of reply to Robbo, she also enabled me to have a right of reply to the teenage boys who denigrated me in my real life, which allowed me to restory myself in the process.

As a child and early teenager my weight ranged between plump to obese. I was at my largest weight at twelve-years-old when we moved to a new town. I began high school at a small district school⁴⁰ with fewer than one hundred students, who had all attended primary school together. It quickly became apparent that I was a social outcast, the year eight girl-group ignoring my social efforts. However, as the weeks went by this became the least of my problems. It was one thing to be left alone, but the boys, from across numerous year groups, began to publicly ridicule me. Names such as 'Michelin Man,', 'the man,', (being big was apparently equated to being masculine) 'so chunky you can carve her,' and 'powder puff' were hurled across the schoolyard and classroom at me, cuing hysterical group laughter. With such a small

⁴⁰ District high schools generally accommodate students in years eight to ten.

population, it was easy for all of the kids in the school to join in. As joking dares, boys would also ask me out, expecting me to fall for it. During all of these attacks I blushed silently, humiliated that I was attracted to some of these boys; I never defended myself.

The following year I had lost all of my weight and we were living in the city. Although I was still an 'unpopular' kid, at my new school, I had friends, and most of the loud kids left me alone for most of the time. When I met my future boyfriend I intuited that he was gay, but I went into denial about this when we were a couple and I was in love. The first three months of our relationship were very sweet, but then he began to do strange things to me. Randomly, he would pin me to the ground and repetitively blow in my mouth, drag me around the house by the ankles, spit on me and call me disgusting, berate me when I felt physical desire for him and tell me about dreams he'd had of murdering me. Regularly he told me how unattractive I was. At the time, I accepted this treatment and none of these incidents made me angry. They did, however, leave me feeling silly and undignified. Following my year of public humiliation I had become so desensitised to abuse about my appearance that I felt lucky anyone was going out with me at all.

It was only years later, after I had detached myself from my high school boyfriend, that I realised his behaviour was emotionally abusive and got angry. Although I attributed his abusive behaviour in part to a homophobic culture that forced him to repress his sexuality, I felt an injustice that he'd tried to punish me for mine. The experiences I'd had with teenage boys made me feel unworthy of being desired, and unentitled to be attracted to males or have any sexuality at all. As a younger child I'd been able to indulge in carefree flirtations with males, but now my interactions with them were coloured with guilt and shame.

Embodying Rochelle was extremely liberating, because it allowed me to restory my teenage self as it should have been. In this new story I was Rochelle, and Robbo and his best mate Timmo were the generic teenage boys from my past. Rochelle's

superiority complex and her self-defense finally enabled me to internally stand up to the teenage boys who had denigrated me. Moreover, because she totally belittled Robbo and his mate Timmo, through her I gained revenge by doing to them what those teenage boys had done to me: publicly humiliated them. Further, I rendered Robbo unable to sufficiently defend himself by performing him as bumbling and inept. In this way I took power back from the teenage boys who had rendered me speechless. Finally, by using her vlogs to flaunt her sexuality – referring to her sexual exploits with Timmo and lovingly caressing her body during her sexy dance – Rochelle embraced her libidinous sensuality in a way I was not able to as a teenager.

It is worth mentioning here that there is a sense that Rochelle ‘taunts’ these boys with her sexiness. For example, she dedicates her sexy dance to Robbo and signs off with the message ‘... sweet dreams robbo.’ Although I understand that a female’s self-value lies in more than just being considered attractive by those she is attracted to, as a teenager I had always wanted the approval and connection that I thought came with being attractive; Rochelle allowed me to indulge this fantasy. Embodying Rochelle allowed me to rewrite my history with a preferable story that I felt represented who I’d wanted to be all along. In this way, I used the dialogue of my multiple-identity performance practice to retell my story and empower my present self-concept with re-lived experiences.



Fig 30. Meredith Godley, *Rochelle’s Response to Robbo’s Response*, 2010, still from YouTube vlog, 7.43

In the live performance/video installation piece *All MySelves on YouTube and I* (2012), I examined the links between my vlogging personae and my 'real' self-concept by intermingling projected virtual personae vlogs with live autobiographic stories told by my live body/self, which symbolised my 'real' self. Although Jones uses the term televisual within the context of video, television and computer monitors, I contend that it can also be applied to video projections, as these too exhibit a 'grain-like' skin that emulates an uneven, organic (or embodied) texture. In this sense, the projection of my body is considered to be televisual. My live body/self was positioned beneath and in front of the video projection. The projection emulated a computer interface on which sometimes Rochelle's and Robbo's YouTube channels and vlogs, and sometimes Shelley's and Dhammapada's overlapped and played together in a manner that created an exchange between the two personae of each pairing. While both vlogs in each pairing were always visibly playing, sound from one persona was privileged at any given moment, creating the sense that the two personae were 'taking turns' to talk. Creating dialogues by intersecting personae vlogs allowed me to recreate the way I'd storied the relationships between different identities from my life. The dialogues between each pair represented separate self-stories from different parts of my life (although these self-stories nevertheless compiled to make up my whole self-narrative). During my live autobiographic story-telling I lowered the volumes on both projected vlogs simultaneously to privilege my 'real voice'. To varying degrees the content of my autobiographic stories related to personae projections that continued behind me, in order to suggest a relationship between my real self and my online personae. While I didn't explain this relationship directly in my live monologues, I implied it by sometimes embodying mannerisms of the televisual personae behind me.⁴¹

⁴¹ In the context of this work, I would like to pay homage to *Restoring Inanna*, the live one-woman musical production, created and performed by my friend and colleague Raelene Bruinsma (2012). In this performance Bruinsma retells myths of the Ancient Sumerian Goddess Inanna. When not embodying Inanna, Bruinsma compares Inanna's experience of femaleness to contemporary experiences of it, in part by telling personal anecdotes that resonate thematically with the Sumerian myths. Although dealing with vastly different themes, presentation mode, and content, the way I enmeshed my autobiography and enacted personae in *All MySelves on YouTube and I*, was, in part,



Fig 31. Meredith Godley, *All MySelves on YouTube and I*, 2012, still from video documentation, 10 mins

The content of the autobiographic stories that corresponded to Robbo’s and Rochelle’s antagonistic dialogue, were based on my above-mentioned teenage experiences. Although I had been a victim in these stories, in recounting them I at times took a confident pose similar to that of Rochelle: positioning my left foot on the chair on which I sat, I erected my pendulating knee in such a way as to create a surface on which to plant my defiantly gesturing hand, all the while haughtily swiveling my neck back and forth. The confidence of these mannerisms represented parts of my self-history in which I felt I had become empowered in my sexuality.

Conversely, while recounting the victimised parts of my self-history, my demeanor transformed into subdued realism. This transformation represented the loss of confidence I felt in relation to my sensuality. At times, I even took on a Robbo-esque voice when recounting the put-downs that my high school boyfriend had directed towards me. Although Robbo helped tell part of my story, I did not consider him part of my self-concept. Rather, he represented real Others in my life, in this case the teenage boys who used to tease me. I employed obvious ‘teen-bogan’ (see definition of bogan in Chapter Two) stereotypes to create Robbo as a superficial and generic representation of ‘the teenage boy’. This helped consolidate

inspired by *Restoring Inanna* – as this show demonstrated how self-stories can be illuminated by performing the Other.

his Otherness. As Dunne (2006) suggests, one's self-story is inevitably connected to other people's stories and '[o]ften people experience feelings of constraint because they are living out a story into which they have been recruited' (111). So, although Robbo was not part of me, he was important to representing the problematic self-story, imposed on me by others.

Shelley's and Dhammapada's exchange formed a backdrop to some live autobiographic anecdotes that told my real story of anxiety management. The projected exchange between this pair created a less overt dialogue than that of Rochelle and Robbo. The sequence begins with a projection of *Michael Jackson Meditation*, in which Shelley acknowledges her anxiety problems and says that she's interested in learning breathing techniques for relaxation. She asks her viewers to leave links to useful relaxation breathing vlogs (2010). Dhammapada's *Breathing for Relaxation Pranayama* (2010) is then projected alongside Shelley's vlog. Shelley's voice is then turned down allowing Dhammapada's relaxed voice to be privileged as she relays her breathing technique. A live autobiographic story then features, where I talk about my experiences with panic attacks. While delivering this story, I emulate Shelley's anxious behaviour; her manically rushed, high-pitched speech, and her hair-tucking ticks. This story is followed by a projected meditation from Dhammapada. I then tell the real story of how I learnt to manage my panic attacks with meditation – emulating Dhammapada's relaxed speech in the latter part of the story. Fluidly transitioning between Shelley's and Dhammapada's idiosyncrasies in my live performance represented the way these contradictory identities co-exist as part of my real self-concept. Whilst at times my panicked nature overtakes and defines me, I know I can summon my visualisation-loving inner hippy to calm me. By editing these personae together in *All MySelves on YouTube and I*, I elucidated the reflexive relationship between these apparent disparate identities, to show their coherence. It is almost as if I was acting out Ochs' and Capps' (1996) postmodern theory of self-narrativity in which self-narrative is seen to assist postmodern individuals in storying their disparate experiences and identities together to create

a sense of self-cohesion: 'We use narrative as a tool for probing and forging connections between our unstable, situated selves' (21).

The technique of forming a coherent story between my disparate personae by displaying their footage simultaneously in different windows, recalls the way video artist Candice Breitz harmonises numerous performers in her multi-screened video installations. In *Queen (A Portrait of Madonna)* (2005), 25 different TV monitors each display video of an individual singing Madonna's classic eighties hit "Like a Prayer," unaccompanied by a backing track (Candice Breitz n.d). Although the difference between the performers' accents, singing skills and timing could result in a cacophony, their sounds and movements merge to form a collective choir.

Fig 32. Candice Breitz, *Queen (A Portrait of Madonna)*, 2005, 30-channel installation, 30 hard drives, 73 mins

The documentation of Candice Breitz's *Queen (A Portrait of Madonna)*, 2005, 30-channel installation, 30 hard drives, 73 mins, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The documentation of *Queen (A Portrait of Madonna)* can instead be accessed via <http://www.candicebreitz.net/>

So, although my original intention in hosting discrete vlogging personae on YouTube was to emulate the postmodern sense of fragmentation that is symptomatic of lacking a core self, I actually storied my multiple parts into a coherent narrative which ultimately revealed my self-concept.

The way I created links between my live body/self and the video-projected personae in in *All MySelves on YouTube and I* (2012), to foreground the self-conceptual reality of the latter, has parallels to Paul Sermon's performance installation *Telematic Dreaming* (1992). In this piece Sermon's video-projected televisual body enmeshes with the viewer's actual body to become sensually more real than the viewer's physical surroundings. In this work, the artist lay on a bed that was in a different location to the exhibition site. Within the exhibition site was another bed, which the viewer was invited to lie on. Projected onto this bed was live footage of Sermon's

body/self, which lay upon the off-site bed. Through a live stream of footage from the exhibition site, Sermon observed the movements of the viewer and accordingly responded to them. Essentially Sermon's projection was a simulated bedfellow for the real viewer. Because Sermon's image was projected onto a bed – a symbol of intimacy – the viewer became intimately immersed in it, finding his televisual presence more present than the live audience around them. While performing *Telematic Dreaming*, Sermon could observe his bodily movements on a monitor, which made him privy to how his projected image would appear on the viewer's bed. Sermon perceived this monitored body as producing the *real* intimate effect of *Telematic Dreaming* (Giannachi 2004, 106-108). As in *All MySelves on YouTube and I* (2012), in *Telematic Dreaming* the video-projected televisual body is authenticated through its very real relationship with the actual body.

Fig 33. Paul Sermon, *Telematic Dreaming*, 1992, video installation / Live performance
The photograph of Paul Sermon's video installation/live performance *Telematic Dreaming*, 1992, is unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The photograph of *Telematic Dreaming* can instead be accessed via
http://90.146.8.18/de/archives/picture_ausgabe_03_new.asp?iAreaID=489&showAreaID=491&imageID=62958

Being a media archive where one can host and re-watch their multiple performed identities whenever they want, YouTube facilitates one's storying of their different identities. Although the following quote refers to camera phones, it is relevant to YouTube, because both interfaces archive multiple self-representations in the one locus. The camera phone is used as 'as a kind of archive of a personal trajectory or viewpoint on the world, a collection of fragments of everyday life' (Willett 2009, 213-214). Willett suggests that compiling one's different self-representations in a digital archive assists in sustaining a self-narrative (219). Analysing Willett's assertion from the context of my study, I take her to mean that seeing different versions of the self in the one location enables one to make connections between them. After all, the postmodern individual uses narrative to forge disparate parts of themselves together.

American vlogger itschriscrocker – who will now on be referred to as ‘Crocker’ (from *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* [2007] fame), draws from his archived vlogs to story his different gender identities together. Since Crocker joined YouTube in 2007 his vlogs have captured the fluid transition of his/her gendered appearance and identity which has oscillated back and forth between ‘male’ and ‘female.’ For the last few years, he has predominantly *appeared* to embody male gender-identities. The trajectory of these transitions is summed up in his/her vlog *From Boy To Girl To Woman To MAN* (2011). The video cycles through numerous still images (some appear to be video stills, others photos) of himself as male or female.

Figs 34 & 35. itschriscrocker, *From Boy To Girl To Woman To MAN*, 2011, stills from YouTube vlog, 3.12

The still images from itschriscrocker’s videoed performance *From Boy To Girl To Woman To MAN*, 2011, 3.12 mins, are unable to be reproduced here due to copyright restrictions.

The videoed performance *From Boy To Girl To Woman To MAN* can instead be accessed via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4t04m0EoXY>

Because, as stated in Chapter Two, YouTube allows people to perform their multiple-identities, Crocker’s gender transitions were facilitated on the site. This is not to say that without YouTube Crocker would have not experimented with his gender identities. However, because his channel, and the whole of YouTube⁴² acted as an archive for these different expressions and the reflective text and video responses that they sparked from others, Crocker was able to get perspective on the course that his multiple gender manifestations took and story them together in *From Boy To Girl To Woman To MAN* (2011).

Although Crocker’s personal narrative involves numerous personae, it is clear that by re-authoring and telling it he achieves a sense of self-cohesion. In a number of his vlogs he addresses text and video responses that query whether his gender

⁴² As a YouTube celebrity, Crocker’s viral vlogs – whether unchanged, edited, or reenacted by others – have featured on more than just his channel.

identity is male or female. He most eloquently sums up his identity in the 2012 vlog *Dressing "Female" / Why I changed my look / Will I dress up again:*

I know I can be comfortable as both male or female aesthetically... I was wanting to get breast implants and before I committed to that journey, I needed to know what this journey was like [*projecting a male identity*]. And I hadn't explored both parts of myself, I've always said I feel male and female. So it wouldn't be fair to myself to only explore the female and just go get breast implants and not explore this part of myself... [*He then goes on to talk about the tattoo that reads 'complete' on his arm*] I want to um, to always live up to this first tattoo here and remind myself why I got it. I'm a complete person and I know both sides of my coin. There's a heads and a tails and then there's the middle of the coin. There's not just, you don't just flip it on one side and the other side doesn't exist anymore. So being a two sided coin, I need to start flipping myself and not just laying on heads or laying on tails. I'm comfortable when I'm in midair and when both get to comfortably spin. So maybe it's not even about one being on heads or one being on tails, maybe I just need to start spinning it (itschrisCrocker 2012).

So, by storying his gender identities together, with the help of YouTube, Crocker achieves a coherent self-concept.

In a similar way YouTube enabled me to story my different identities into a cohesive vision of myself. Although my personae were separated by different channels, they were all archived on the same website a short tap away from each other, allowing me to take a bird's eye view and make connections between them. As Robbo I left text comments on Shelley's site, and as Rochelle I left video responses for Robbo. Robbo 'favourited' a video from his FootFixHero alter-ego, and Shelley learned breathing techniques from Dhammapada. Seeing my personae together on YouTube and using the site's social and technical allowances to connect them revealed to me how I'd unified my different identities in real life.

My former assumption that multiple-identities would obscure my 'real' self was entrenched in the outdated ideas of an unchanging, singular essential self that I explored in Chapter Two. This viewpoint failed to take into account contemporary experiences of authentic multiplicity. In his discussion about YouTube vlogging, Strangelove (2010) advocates for an authentic pluralism. He suggests that the video

diary 'is the location of unstable, contested, multiple, and often incoherent selves... [that]... can provide us with a representation of social reality' (69), and further that a vlogger's self-multiplicity is illuminated by their *public* self-presentation. For instance, reflexive vloggers often critique the way their 'performance' selves – which they still consider part of their identities – dominate their more commonly presented everyday selves. This detracts from their intended presentations of self-authenticity⁴³ (75-76). The different presentation modes that video diaries can take also encourage vloggers to represent different sides of their self; different contexts naturally call for different identities. Rather than seeing these multiple selves as detracting from *the* real self, as the vlogger is sometimes scared that they will, Strangelove suggests that:

Each time we create a new context for self-expression, we also discover more aspects of self-hood. Instead of measuring online diaries against the notion of an authentic unitary self, we may be better off thinking in terms of authentic pluralism (76).

From the vantage of Strangelove's framework my personae are revealed as discrete, yet authentic; each provided a specific context for representing one of my real identities, or for encouraging some relevant storytelling, which revealed them. Ergo, my practice revealed what Strangelove calls the reality of authentic pluralism.

Strangelove's notion of the contemporary authentic pluralistic self seems predicated on fragmentation. However, I would suggest that a core binds the contemporary authentic plural self. To support this contention I will draw from psychiatrist Robert J Lifton's (1993) notion of the Protean Self to explain how iCulture's selfhood is both multifarious and anchored to a core.

Lifton (1993) contends that the individual has become many-sided to cope with the restlessness and flux of our time (1). Although the Protean individual is multifarious, Lifton differentiates it from the postmodern individual. Where the incongruent

⁴³ See Chapter One for Strangelove's assertion that vloggers seek to convey their authentic selves with online confession.

identities of the postmodern individual result in the disintegration of a coherent core, and thus the disappearance of the self (8-9). The Protean individual does not lose their sense of personal meaning or coherency despite being multifariously adapted for modern life. Instead, the threat of personal disintegration that comes with social flux spurs the Protean individual to actively seek out orderly authenticity (74 & 90). The Protean individual's 'I' (their active self) determines and uses a core set of principles as a guide to combine their various identities. So, although the protean individual is multifaceted, they are also reflexively integrated (91).

Strangelove (2010) contends that through their confessions, vloggers seek to portray an authentic self, in order to gain a sense of stability in our fragmented, uncertain postmodern times (68). As seen in his case studies, these authentic self-portrayals depend on the vlogger's reflexive awareness of their vlogs and how they are received. Such reflexivity implies that although multifarious, the vlogger, like the Protean Self, has a central 'I' to make decisions about the self. To story the journey of his oscillating gender identities, vlogger Chris Crocker, as one example, also needed to implement a decision-making core. Thus, although twenty-years old, Lifton's notion of the Protean Self has currency in contemporary Internet expressions of the self, which are defined by their reflexively directed multiplicity.

My real, reflexive core was also revealed through my practice on YouTube. Performing multiple identities on a site, which enables reflexivity, narrativity and networking tempted my directorial artist self to reflexively shape my personae and to story them together. Because my artist-self storied together my personae in a way that reflected the personal narratives of my self-concept, it was akin to my real reflexive core self. Because my vlogging practice allowed me to express multiple sides of myself, while storying them together with my reflexive core to make a coherent whole, it facilitated my participation in contemporary subjectivity. Thus it revealed a very close relationship between my multiple-identity performance practice and self-concept.

With our vlogging practices, both Crocker and I engaged in the multifarious, yet coherently cored contemporary subjectivity facilitated and encouraged by iCulture. Ultimately then, like other performance artists, I presented myself (albeit a less direct and more contemporary version of the self) during performance. To bring this discussion back to the contemporary art context, here I consider Crocker a performance artist – the reasons for which will be explained below.

Because his vlogs often show him (a young white male from a socially conservative Southern-American community) vlogging in ‘talk black’ style, while embodying a pastiche of ‘marginal characteristics—effeminate, Southern, flamboyantly gay at a young age, uncensored’ (Sanders 2007) they are subversive and have been compared to performance art. Eli Sanders says about Crocker’s performance style:

At first, I'd figured this level of border crossing and taboo tweaking had to be emanating from an urban area, from a source steeped in cultural collision and promoting some sort of high-concept agenda. I'd guessed Chris was an art student, young looking but not actually that young, who was lying about his age and living somewhere in Manhattan... The gays I know who have never lived in a small, conservative town (people like myself) thought Chris must be an ironic urban art-fag with something to say about the absurdity of fagginess or race relations (Sanders 2007).

After visiting and interviewing him, however, Sanders found out that Crocker was indeed a young white male from a conservative Southern town. In vlogging he presented his self, while slipping in and out of personae like other vloggers, such as yourchonny who was discussed in Chapter Two.

When I first viewed Crocker’s vlogs in 2007, before I read Sanders’ article, I also wondered if he was an artist. His performance style lent itself to multiple defining features of performance art, such as mundane autobiography, ‘unprofessional’ performance styles, multiple-identity performance practice, and, most importantly, an extreme aesthetic of self-focus. Furthermore, the way his commentary challenged social conventions emulated attitudes often seen in contemporary art.

Additionally, in those early days he categorised his vlogging style as ‘art’.⁴⁴ While I am not privy to the performance intentions of Crocker, or whether or not he classes his vlogging practice as performance art, in the following analysis I consider his vlogging outcomes to be interchangeable with performance art. From this position, I consider Crocker a unique contemporary performance artist who conflates intimate self-depictions with video on iCulture’s YouTube, and so presents a heightened aesthetic of self-focus that is relevant to the discussions of online selfhood within this thesis.

Like other performance artists, Crocker and I perform our selves in our artwork. However, the selfhood within our work differs from that of earlier performance artists who use their bodies as their main mediums, in several ways. Unlike Acconci and Nauman, the multiplicity of the roles we play debases a consistently recognisable ‘self’. However, unlike Sherman, who also plays multiple-identities, we coherently order our personae to present our core self. While Nikki S Lee imbues her personae with herself, she lacks access to the heightened revisability of an online archive like YouTube, and so her practice may not allow her to as intensely engage in self-storying. Revealing how selfhood is expressed and influenced by iCulture, Crocker’s performances and mine reveal new ways for performance artists to engage with and express themselves in an Internet age. We have brought the multifarious, coherently authentic reflexive self to the core of performance art practices.

Our performance practices also extend perceptions of the self-absorbed performance artist. Both of our vlogging practices are informed by feedback from other YouTubers (as is artist Hennessy Youngman’s vlogging practice on YouTube – see Chapter One). Not only does this engender a communality that negates Krauss’ socially isolated narcissist, but it also affects our reflexive self-storying. For instance, in *Michael Jackson Meditation* (2010), Shelley says that her decision to meditate

⁴⁴In YouTube’s early years, vloggers could subcategorise their channel into genres such as ‘music’, ‘comedy’, ‘people and vlogs’, etc (YouTube 2007).

was informed by YouTuber comments that ridiculed her anxious self-presentation. Shelley's quest to manage her anxiety was spurred by my reflection (in her *Persona Journal*) on YouTuber comments that ridiculed her manically anxious behaviour. In one text response to Shelley's vlog *Thrill the World Perth 2009*, YouTuber less123 states 'coo coo' (2009). These comments inspired me to develop Shelley in such a way that she would become aware of her issues with anxiety and would try to deal with them. Thus, in subsequent vlogs, she acknowledges that these derisive user comments, 'however nasty' (*Michael Jackson Meditation 2010*) allowed her to recognise her angst about Michael Jackson's death and encouraged her to manage it with meditation. This persona development was also inspired by Giddens' reflexive project of the self and its presence within online culture (see Chapter One). Shelley revised herself based on the lifestyle choices available to her online (e.g. by watching and learning from mediation vlogs on YouTube). Other than Shelley exhibiting reflexivity, by reflecting on and changing herself, her development also speaks to my creative reflexivity. Here, I reflected on relevant theory and YouTube comments to develop her persona. While, in Chapter Two I suggested that YouTuber comments enabled me to reinforce my personal biases about 'shallow' New Age spiritualists in a way that inhibited my creative development of Dhammapada's persona, it is evident that YouTuber comments also enabled reflexive creative processes and persona development. Creatively engaging in this social feedback also inevitably articulated and reinforced my own reflexive self-story of anxiety management. Similarly, by responding to his audience's questions about his gender identity, Crocker articulates and thus further develops his own self-story. By seeing ourselves through our audience's eyes' Crocker and I objectify ourselves. In this sense, we do not become skewered on our own subjectivity like Krauss' (1976) video artist. Furthermore, by using these objective reflections to develop our self-stories, we engage in a creative and personal reflexivity beyond Krauss' narcissistic video artist who remains trapped in the stasis of their own image. Crocker's and my vlogging practices suggest that performing oneself on the socially networked Internet enables a connective self-development. This finding challenges views that posit iCulture and performance art as narcissistic

(also see Aboujaoude in Chapter One) and gives insights into how performance artists can engage with contemporary selfhood online.

In this chapter I have shown that by vlogging multiple-personae – who I artistically storied together on YouTube and in the live art space – I expressed my real identities and their personally storied cohesion. In the process I have revealed an iCultural selfhood that is multifarious, yet centred and suggested new ways that performance artists can engage with contemporary selfhood.

CONCLUSION

This research has sought to understand how a multiple-identity performance practice relates to the performer's self-concept. Through autoethnographic analysis I considered if and how I related my Othered YouTube vlogging personae to myself. The different roles I swaddled myself in on my personal costume shop of YouTube did not disguise me or conceal my 'real' self-presentation – which I had avoided for fear it was narcissistic. Rather, they evoked different parts of me. Furthermore, the way I storied these personae together within my practice reflected how I commingle my different identities to form my own coherent self-concept. My study of YouTube vlogging revealed these findings and further suggested that multiple-identity performance practice enables performers to relate to their self-concept by voicing and then storying together their different identities. I have suggested that this type of multifarious cohesion defines contemporary self-concepts. Because it epitomises experiences of iCultural selfhood, I have particularly discussed YouTube vlogging in the context of contemporary performance art practice that seeks to deal with notions of identity. These findings offer insights for other performance artists who want to engage their practices with issues of contemporary selfhood.

In Chapter One, “Narcissistic Self-Presentation and iCulture” (“Part One: Self-Denial”), I used Christopher Lasch’s (1979) ideas about the culture of narcissism and Rosalind Krauss’ (1976) conception of the narcissistically implosive video artist to contextualise the self-focus I attributed to my art, and to contemporary art in general. I further used these theories to elucidate my associated guilt-complex. Lasch contends that culturally promoted self-focus results in individuals who are isolated and whose lives lack meaning because they cannot contribute to the collective, or ‘greater good’. Krauss proposes that by watching and re-watching images of their body/self to generate content, the video artist subjectively implodes and does not contribute to broader artistic dialogues. Representing myself in my artwork, I feared that my practice did not contribute to anything outside of myself, and that it was therefore narcissistic. As a result, I made videoed performance art

the main medium of my practice and used my body/self as an ironic vehicle to critique the self-focused narcissism of contemporary art. I looked to the sixties and seventies videoed performance art practices of Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci to inform my intended aesthetic of self-focus.

I found a similar, but more intense, aesthetic of self-focus when I stumbled across YouTube vlogging. Within the framework of Lasch's and Krauss' ideas about narcissism, I initially analysed YouTube vlogging to be narcissistic. By contrast however, the YouTube community accepted and celebrated these self-focused vlogs. As a result I realised that YouTube vlogging was part of an iCulture that depends on public self-presentation for self-affirmation and self-conceptual development. The aesthetic of self-focus within vlogging is perhaps more intimate and intense than in seventies and contemporary performance art because the iCultural individual's sense of self depends on it.

My articulation of iCulture in Chapter One contributes insights into how contemporary social networking sites, such as YouTube, facilitate the expression and construction of self. The way YouTube vlogging conflates self-framing video with intimate confessions, extends the aesthetic of self-focus established within seventies videoed performance art, in a way that hasn't been done in contemporary art. Seamlessly extending this aesthetic, I contend that YouTube is a pertinent site for performance art. Although contemporary performance art may not have consolidated the seventies aesthetic of self-focus, I assert that engaging with this aesthetic, which has iCultural currency, provides one way to illuminate contemporary issues of selfhood. My Chapter One findings are particularly pertinent to the field of performance art, revealing vlogging as a way of artistically reflecting on contemporary experiences of selfhood and contemporising the aesthetic of self-focus.

Even though I hosted my performance practice on YouTube as a means of exploring vlogging's self-focus, ironically I tried to avoid focus on my own self for fear of my

practice being narcissistically implosive. In Chapter Two, “Not Acting Myself – Performing Everyone But Me” (“Part One: Self-Denial”), I unpacked the mechanisms of self-avoidance I engaged in my practice. Sherry Turkle’s (1995) studies into early Internet roleplayers (MUDers) offered a template for my performance practice on YouTube. Turkle posited that on roleplaying Internet sites MUDers performed discrete multiple personae separate from their everyday selves. Thus, online the MUDer experienced a decentred postmodern sense of self. By performing multiple non-autobiographic personae separated by different YouTube channels, I found that I could emulate the MUDer’s online corelessness, to create a feeling that my real body/self was concealed on the other side of the computer.

I also found that I could avoid myself by consistently feigning the Other through acting. This practice challenged perceptions that performance artists shun conventional theatricality to perform themselves (Marsh 2014, Allen 2013). While other contemporary artists such as Linzy (2010-2014) and Trecartin (2004) also act, they purposely produce unrealistic characterisations to pronounce their critical presence. Like Cindy Sherman does in her photographic practice, I treated my personae as simulations and parodies in order to emphasise the differences between them and me and thus overstatedly perform everyone but myself.

In Chapter Three, “Déjà vu – Acting and Self-Revelation” (“Part Two: Self-Revelation”), I outlined how moments of déjà vu sparked my realisation that acting evoked what McGaw (1975) would call my inner resources to implicate my self-concept. The Stanislavskian (1961) and Strasbergian (1987) acting techniques I implemented involved reliving autobiographic emotional memories for the effect of producing performances that looked ‘real.’ This was useful for my purpose of convincingly cloaking myself in the Other. However, it evoked my real self during performance and while re-watching my videoed performances. Although I wasn’t acting myself, I revealed real intimate feelings in front of the camera. In this sense, like other performance artists, I essentially performed myself.

While this finding contradicts my original intention of avoiding self-presentation with acting, it offers performance artists new ways of performing, but perhaps not entirely revealing, the self. The sense of intimacy that came with my *real* acting allowed me to engage in the iCultural aesthetic of self-focus, to comment on contemporary notions of selfhood in a way that ‘fake’ acting, which is more commonly used in contemporary performance art, does not. Being relevant to an iCultural context, where intimate self-expressions are performed alongside acted caricatures, my ‘real acting’ offers insights to other performance artists about how to perform within an iCultural environment.

In Chapter Four, “Personae and Personal Identities: Storying All MySelves Together on YouTube” (“Part Two: Self-Revelation”), I argue that, more than just evoking my inner resources, performing Othered personae ironically enabled me to express my real personal identities. I used Drama Therapy’s concept of distancing – where participants voice repressed parts of themselves through indirect symbolic theatrical expression (Landy 1996) – to explain the inadvertent revelation of my identities. Being distanced from my personae allowed me to express parts of myself that were too challenging to voice directly.

As my vlogging personae represented different parts of myself, their interactions on YouTube and in my performance installations echoed the way I story my different identities together in real life. This point was explained within the frameworks of the Narrative Self and Narrative Therapy (Ochs and Capps 1996). Narrative Therapy (Dunne 2006) was used to explain how, with my personae, I restoried some of my problematic past experiences and identities. Storying together my vlogging personae/personal identities implied the existence of a reflexive artistic and personal core.

Although I had originally performed multiple-identities to emulate the fragmented, coreless (and thus *selfless*) online postmodern subject, by storying my personae I cohered my multiple identities and demonstrated reflexivity indicative of an

organising core self. This multiple, yet coherent ordered self was contextualised within Lifton's (1993) notion of the Protean Self and was viewed as characterising iCultural selfhood. The conflation of my virtually projected and 'real' offline self in *All MySelves on YouTube and I* (2012) particularly symbolised that my personae are anchored by the consistency of a real core self. Although performances from other artists, such as Paul Sermon, combine virtual and real experiences to comment on their interchangeability within contemporary communication systems, *All MySelves on YouTube and I* is unique in doing so to provide insight into iCultural selfhood. It can thus offer other performance artists practical insights about ways of artistically conveying contemporary experiences of self. This notion of the online self being anchored to a core reality is relevant to the contemporary Internet that has infiltrated everyday existence. Furthermore, it challenges postmodern notions that separate online identities from the 'real' self.

Particularly in relation to the above point, I contended that the archival potential of a vlogger's YouTube channel provides them with the perspective needed to create storying links between their different vlogging/personal identities. Chris Crocker's vlogging practice, for example, in which he stories together his diversely gendered identities to form a coherent self, was contextualised within contemporary performance art and analysed alongside *All MySelves on YouTube and I* (2012) to demonstrate how contemporary performance art can engage with iCultural selfhood. Articulating Crocker's vlogging practice as performance art highlights the relationship between the two, while also illuminating the possible forms performance art can take within an iCulture.

Because vlogging practices are socially interactive and reflexively driven by this interaction, they negate the narcissistic social isolation and personal stasis that Krauss (1976) attributes to videoed performance art. This study revealed YouTube as a place where performance artists can engage in the aesthetic of self-focus that was established in seventies video art, while simultaneously maintaining social connections and reflexive self-development. Because, as I have suggested, self-

conceptual developments rely to a significant degree on the projection of a self-focused aesthetic within an iCulture, my study posits this aesthetic as a means of expression that other performance artists wanting to comment on contemporary selfhood can utilise.

At my online costume shop, I enrobe myself in imaginary roles. Unrecognisable, I burst from the screen to find myself in a moment. I gaze into the pond, seeing my reflection joined by the mirrored masks of others. Our reflections are solid, yet together we are held afloat by what lies beneath. No longer flooded with guilt by my own self-reflection, I will shamelessly continue gazing.

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APPENDIX 1: PERSONAE VLOGGING VIDEOS

This is a list of original work by Meredith Godley. It pertains to her multiple-personae vlogging practice hosted on YouTube. To see the work in-situ, please pursue provided URLs. URLs under folder titles link to persona channels and URLs under videos link to specific videos. Order of work in each folder is chronological, based on when vlogs were made and uploaded.

Folder 1: ShelleyFeeltheMelody

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ShelleyfeeltheMelody>

Shelley_Feel_the_Melody_Michael Jackson Tribute, 2009, video, 4.47

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHcADXhIICs&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Thrill the World Perth, 2009, video, 3.34

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgBZtoWHMxM&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Thriller Dance Practice for Thrill the World, 2009, video, 8.29

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaCDZEFk6mw&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Thrill the World Perth 2009, 2009, video, 10 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBpEh4zxVR4&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

'Michael Jackson's This Is It' movie review, 2009, video, 6.19

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyOVnYv1Pr0&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Michael Jackson is not alive and TTW thank you Weng, 2009, video, 5.25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-04XQCiXdw&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Blog About Prince and Paris Jackson, 2010, video, 5.35

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_B9Z2SqLUc&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg

Michael Jackson one year anniversary Tribute- Man in the Mirror, 2010, video, 8.37

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YaziRgffQ8&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Michael Jackson Meditation, 2010, video, 4.35
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ5cAM3J-nY&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Michael Jackson - Inspirational Idea, 2011, video, 4.52
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjeeUza-tBo&list=UUw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Michael Jackson Dance Lesson, 2011, video, 2.35
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw5Aj5EoHRNczMRmgZAOaBg>

Folder 2: DevineDhammapada

<https://www.youtube.com/user/DevineDhammapada>

Path to true happiness, 2010, video, 5.50
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=letJhfYcvT0>

Guided Meditation- DevineDhammapada, 2010, video, 10 mins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e3Rrl6kiZ8>

Breathing for Relaxation – Pranayama, 2010, video, 9.52
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hm6nZ7xcOk>

Laws of Attraction and Chakra Cleansing, 2011, video, 8.39
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzEkDaVzSyM>

Positive Affirmations, 2011, video, 8.15
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLHRp5S2qc0>

Folder 3: TheRobbo93

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheRobbo93>

YouTubeRobbo93, 2009, video, 3.32
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEBP8QF0DOg>

End of Year 11 Blog, 2009, video, 3.34
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MD8rcDq7skw>

Sorry Rochelle Blog, 2009, video, 2.19
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjvEQsIMkLc>

Robbos facial hair, 2010, video, 4.10
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmWKnEcw8_o

Robbos reply to rochelles whack vid, 2010, video, 6.08
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWjsiAQDWag>

Folder 4: FootFixHero

<https://www.youtube.com/user/FootFixHero>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCiInjaqfE0>

holy socks and feet, 2010, video, 5.40
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxZql8VYLCM>

fluffy slippers and cream tribute to strumpers, 2010, video, 3.59
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uc2S0320FEE>

Folder 5: rochellebell17

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWMxwqyDwze8QdsNpNX5pTg>

Rochelle's Response to Robbo's 'facial hair', 2010, video, 5.23
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaDx6a66Ktw>

Rochelle's Response to Robbo's Response, 2010, video, 7.44
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZ8yZdGJC0o>

Robbo's secret, 2010, video, 3.15
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9PAI-PS__w

APPENDIX 2: VIDEO WORKS AND EXHIBITED PIECES 2008-2014

This is a list of original work by Meredith Godley. It pertains to the live art and video work she made in conjunction with her multiple-personae vlogging practice hosted on YouTube. To see the work on YouTube, please pursue provided URLs.

HerTube 2008, live performance/video installation, 14 mins. Exhibited in "Floorwork: Live Art", The Moores Building, Fremantle. Collection of the Artist
Video documentation available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/HerTube25>

and:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AllMySelvesonUTube>

All MySelves on YouTube, 2010, video work, 10 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AllMySelvesonUTube>

All MySevles on YouTube, 2011, live performance/video installation, 15.28.

Originally exhibited in "Solo Spot", Blue Room Theatre. Footage was damaged, so re-filmed performance at home. Collection of the Artist.

Video documentation available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AllMySelvesonUTube>

All MySelves on YouTube & I, 2012, live performance/video installation, 11.05.

Exhibited in "Kiss Club", The Centre for Interdisciplinary Art, West Perth. Collection of the Artist.

Video documentation available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AllMySelvesonUTube>

All MySelves on YouTube & I, 2012, video work, 11.12.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AllMySelvesonUTube>

All MySelves on YouTube and I, 2014, live performance/video installation, 16.23.

Exhibited in "SoDA14", John Curtin Gallery, Bentley. Collection of the Artist.

Video documentation available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLa3mkmgcFc>

APPENDIX 3: Copyrighted Material

Dixon, Steve. 2011. "Proliferating Identities in New Media Performance and Cyberculture." Unpublished article, accessed via personal email communication, August 11, 2011. Article quoted in Chapter One from pages 38-39.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Dixon', written over a horizontal line.

Name: Professor Steve Dixon

Position: President

Date: 28th March 2016

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