

Practising Identity:
Emerging adults,
digital social technologies
and contexts for self

Jennifer Hagedorn

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With grateful appreciation to the Designer Explorers
who took to social media with gusto
and certainly did not censor themselves.

Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Jennifer Hagedorn

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Solitude is different from loneliness,
in solitude we're in dialogue with ourselves and the world,
loneliness makes us isolated and tongue-tied.

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Abstract

The emergence of digital social technologies throughout the lives of digital native emerging adults has had significant implications for the identity practices of these individuals, and consequently creates a diverse and emergent space for researching digitally networked practices. The pervasiveness of digital social technologies across blurred digital and physical boundaries has led to these technologies becoming heterogeneous spaces in which temporal and spatial contexts are destabilised. Now, these individuals are operating within networked publics, where the functions of digital social technologies enable contextual information to flow between individuals and their audiences in the form of visual and textual media.

These complex networked social linkages, characterised by the collapse and circulation of context, assist digital native emerging adults in developing a greater understanding of themselves and the identities they present to the world. However, as they traverse their social contexts through the multiplicity of digital social technologies available to them, unfixed contexts mean they are continuously drawing on their locational, material, situational and social contexts to develop identity performances. This research finds that the willingness of these individuals to adopt digital social technologies as part of their daily habits and routines has led to the creation of specific activities that give rise to an enduring context creation practice.

There are a number of methodological issues for digital ethnographers. Ethnography in digitally networked circumstances has, so far, been reliant on context as a stabilising factor, however what does it mean when context is destabilised? This research maps out this context creation practice by first asking how do digital ethnographers observe context, then, how do digital ethnographers *make sense* of context.

Situated within the field of design, this research takes a mixed-method approach to analysing the complexity and dynamics of context made visible through the identity performances of digital native emerging adults. It draws on digital ethnography methods, combining visual data analysis and interviews, to interpret the contemporary milieu of networked publics. It specifically focuses on the visual and textual aspects of visual media content produced

through Instagram. The key theoretical and methodological contributions of this research are a demonstration of how, through a digital ethnographic investigation exploring the identity practices of first year design students at a university in Sydney, Australia, it is possible to chart how contextual elements are drawn together by these young people within networked publics.

Through comprehensive exploration of the ways in which these digital native emerging adults establish activities of practice to negotiate the collapse and circulation of context, the research identifies four core activities that participants demonstrated particular competences in: coping with context collapse, negotiating the network, performing roles and circulating feedback. Exploring these dynamics demonstrates the ways in which digital native emerging adults embrace the changing typologies of digital social technologies as they negotiate the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In tracing a contemporary understanding of the role of context as a key part of emerging adult identities the research contributes to new understandings of digitally networked practices.

Keywords:

Identity, Practice, Digital Social Technologies, Emerging Adults, Digital Natives, Digital Ethnography.

Chapter One

Introduction

Social network sites are highly interactive mobile and web-based platforms that substantially and pervasively change how individuals communicate between themselves and their communities through the production, sharing, co-creation, discussion and modification of their own digital content. As an emerging field of research, there is much insight to be gained from investigating the impact social network sites have on the ways individuals develop identity presentations for their audiences in digitally networked settings. This thesis has identified two key characteristics of contemporary social network sites that provide a space for scholarly examination: the circulation context through new modes of identity production made possible by developments in interface design, and the context collapse that occurs through increasingly complex networked linkages between individuals and their audiences.

Social network sites and their modes of interaction are not fixed or stable. The increased mobility and pervasiveness of digital social technologies across blurring digital and physical boundaries has led to understanding these technologies as heterogeneous spaces in which the temporal and spatial become dislocated. As individuals traverse their social contexts through the multiplicity of digital social technologies available to them, they draw on their locational, material, situational and social contexts to undertake identity performances. The heterogeneity of contemporary social network sites results in the displacement of stable notions of context from which individuals can draw on for their identity performances. This encourages the emergence of new identity practices that harness context in ways that produce the most meaningful outcomes for their identities.

It is the emphasis on visual content creation and distribution as the primary mode of self-presentation through digital social technologies that this research explores. This research is an ethnographic examination of digitally networked practices, and demonstrates its contribution through the close examination of the content shared through digital social technologies by digital native emerging adults. Throughout 2012 and 2013, the Designer Explorer Project

collected data from a group of digital native emerging adult Instagram users based in Sydney, Australia. Through the collation, interpretation and analysis of this data, this research identified the four core activities of practice that participants demonstrated particular competences in: coping with context collapse, negotiating the network, performing roles and circulating feedback. Close analysis of the content produced for identity performances located within these activities of practice revealed that the collapse and circulation of contexts contributes significantly to the complexity of dynamics of context within networked publics. This chapter outlines the contemporary trajectory of digital social technologies and their associated identity practices, then frames these within the methodological context of digital ethnography and practice theory, before aligning these with the research methods used to analyse the Designer Explorer project.

1.1 Digital Social Technologies and Identity

Eminent sociologist Erving Goffman's scholarship has influenced the research of many digital social technology scholars, most commonly with applications of his theorisation of identity performance interactions and dramaturgy to networked contexts (Goffman, 1959, 1983). Goffman's theories highlighted the complex rituals that individuals undertake to manage their identity in social contexts. Contemporary social network sites provide networked individuals with vastly changed social contexts through which to produce their identity practices. Now, it is the creation and sharing of content with their audiences that provides the ongoing maintenance of an individual's *presentation of self* (Goffman, 1959) in networked contexts. This research embraces Goffman's theories and proposes that digital content shared by individuals through social networked sites is specifically engendered towards forms of identity production. However, just as social network sites are not fixed or stable, nor are identity practices.

Social network sites first emerged in the early 2000s as key sites for identity sharing. In traditional social network site settings, such as web-based platforms like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter, individuals use the functions of social network platforms for a range of activities in their self-presentation. These activities are primarily centred on creating public, or semi-public, 'uniquely identifiable profiles' and compiling 'friendship' connections to establish 'networked sociality' (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 208) through 'publicly articulated connections'

(boyd & Ellison, 2013, p. 158). Profiles are a representation of an individual's identity through the visual display of personal data, demographic descriptors (age, sex, location, 'interests' and 'about me' sections), and multimedia content—a process where an individual can literally 'type oneself into being' (Sundén, 2003, p. 3).

Modes of use have changed vastly since the development of Web 2.0 platforms (DiNucci, 1999) which emerged throughout the mid-2000s. Technologies converged (Jenkins, 2006) and individuals became increasingly mobile, resulting in access to ongoing dialogue between individuals and their online communities, and a blurring of the boundaries between online and offline contexts. This significant shift to mobile social network applications meant that individuals were no longer restricted to desktop-based social networking. Instead, individuals were thrust into digital ubiquity, where 'networked locality' (Gordon and de Souza e Silva, 2011) meant that contextualising themselves within particular locations became increasingly meaningful for individuals and their identity production.

The ever changing landscape of social network sites and the heterogeneous nature of digital social technologies mean that social network platforms are in a constant state of flux, a phenomenon Lev Manovich refers to as *social media diffusion* (2013, p. 47). In Western contexts, increased accessibility to mobile technologies for a wider spectrum of users (Pew Research Center, 2008) and further evolution in technological convergence resulting from interface design development and network accessibility has led to substantial changes in the ways in which individuals engage in networked contexts to perform themselves. The functions of digital social technologies catalyse both the consumption and spread of content both among, and often beyond, the networked contexts that individuals belong to. Furthermore, the sophistication of visual media content production capabilities available to individuals, such as those provided by platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, mean that individuals are able to produce increasingly sophisticated identity performances, rich in both digital and physical contextual information.

Now, online identity presentations of individuals are fused with contextual information from whatever location they happen to be at any given moment. As Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 211) suggest in their research, now 'context itself is mobilised, or performed, through ongoing

socio-technical practices, of intermittently mobile material worlds'. This extension of social context beyond single platforms has a great effect on the identity of individuals as they extend their identity practices across multiple platforms and combined online and offline processes that come together through the presentation of experimental and 'contextually-specific' content, or as Pink (2007, p. 129) posits, 'images with situated meanings'.

In acknowledging these key shifts, this research engages with the emergent social spaces and modes of content production that arise out of the blurring boundaries between online and offline contexts and orientates itself to these shifting typologies by using the neologism *digital social technologies* to express the mutability of social media, social network platforms and networked digital technologies. As a contribution to the scholarship on digitally networked technologies, this term allows this research to embrace the temporally and spatially unfixed paradigms of contemporary social network sites.

While this research centres around the investigation of data produced through Instagram, the term digital social technologies is used consciously throughout this thesis to describe this contemporary perspective and to delineate it from more traditional definitions of social network sites and social media, as Instagram is just one example of this new wave of digitally networked technologies. These new modes of sociality and material understandings of digital social technologies are described in greater detail in the following sections of this introduction, and expanded further in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies.

1.2 Digital Social Technologies: Shifting Typologies

As noted earlier, this thesis has identified two core characteristics of digital social technologies that establish a foundation for scholarly investigation. To operationalise these theories, it is helpful to more extensively describe the shifting typologies of digital social technologies. There are two key factors that drive these shifts: new forms of networked social linkages between individuals, and new conceptions of the dialectic between the digital and the physical.

Recent research has seen scholars reinterpret social systems into varying conceptions of 'networked-ness', where individuals are no longer situated within group-based social networks,

rather digital social technologies enable individualised networks where individuals can spread across many social groups concurrently (Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Litt, 2012; Papacharissi, 2011; Wellman, 2002, 2012). Now, social network platforms have shifted to 'social awareness streams' (Naaman et al., 2010, p. 189) in which the primary interactions individuals engage in through digital social technologies centre on the 'newsfeed' and streams of user-generated content (boyd & Ellison, 2013, p. 158). Social awareness streams locate individuals as part of networked contexts in which streams of content enable individuals to convey their identity to a range of diverse audiences, while concurrently engaging with the identities of members of their audiences through others' contributions to the stream.

The emergence of social awareness streams mean that individuals are now liberated from having to maintain a profile as the core of their identity performances. Social awareness streams are dislocated from fixed social network profiles because they engender identity through the production and sharing of content, rather than through explicit identifying information. Individuals maintain their identity practices through ongoing processes of sharing content such as images, videos, messages, links and memes that are representative of their own values and identity desires. As such, these streams are constantly changing shape as individuals regularly contribute new content. These streams can be understood as 'personalised social spheres' (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 313) or 'liquid social landscapes' (p. 310) in which networked sociality makes visible a range of introverted and extroverted behaviours from individuals as they create personalised contextually-specific content to contribute to the streams they are engaging with.

Within the context of this research, the self presents itself not as a stabilised entity but rather 'a site from which a person perceives the world and a place from which to act' (Harré, 1998, p. 3). The 'acts' that individuals undertake are identity performances—they are visible manifestations of an individual's notion of their self-context, at any given moment. Given the constantly shifting nature of social awareness streams, individuals are confronted with having to manage unfixed, temporal-spatial contexts when they use digital social technologies as part of their identity practices. This is of particular interest in this research because in these circumstances it can be challenging for individuals to establish a stabilised understanding of self if their identity is subject to ongoing maintenance.

A large body of literature has examined the implications for networked sociality and individual identity practices as a result of the blurred boundaries between online and offline. Because social network platforms primarily function to support ‘interpersonal connections’ that are used to ‘reinforce important offline relationships’ (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008, p. 422), individuals must learn the important skill of coordinating their behaviour across these realms (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1831). Importantly, individuals must develop practices that maintain coherency for their identity as they operate within these emergent spaces. Jurgenson (2009, 2012b), in extending Negroponte’s (1996) ‘bits and atoms’ which discussed the digitisation of material objects and everyday systems, describes the enmeshing of online and offline space as establishing a dialogue that allows identities to span both modalities fluidly and sets a precedent for this research.

In reflecting on the changing typologies of digital social technologies, the research proposes that individuals have developed specific practices that respond to these contexts. These networked environments are referred to throughout this research as *networked publics*—a proposition put forth by danah boyd (2008, 2014) and Kazys Varnelis (2008). Networked publics are spaces that blur the boundaries between online and offline contexts and challenge the normative interpretation of social structures as being constructed through a dichotomy between the digital and physical. Individuals congregate in networked publics because they are dynamic, malleable contexts that reduce the restrictions of distinct online and offline contexts. The functions of digital social technologies enable the two to merge, by pulling artefacts from online contexts into the offline contexts and vice versa, effectively allowing individuals a fluid, and often concurrent, dialogue between the physical and digital spaces they occupy. This establishes networked publics as social spaces that foster a range of interactions and relations between individuals and diverse audiences, both within and across specific networks.

An individual’s use of digital social technologies to engage with their identity can be a complex and nuanced process involving many factors. At any one time, individuals are operating across a range of media, technologies and spaces, while at the same time negotiating multiple and varying social relations. When individuals undertake identity performances in networked publics, they engage with various networked audiences. These audiences are constructed through different types of social ties, the visibility of connections and differing levels of

tangibility—that is, how closely they are positioned next to each other within a network. Most individuals imagine their audiences are made up of their ‘friends’ and ‘followers’—that is, their *known* audiences as made visible by ‘articulated friendship links’ on social network sites (boyd & Heer, 2006, p. 10). However, within publicly manifesting networked publics, this is not always the case. The functions of digital social technologies mean that individuals cannot always control or manage who their audiences are, and they can be connected with audiences who are *unknown* to them. Without knowing who their audience is, an individual has to imagine it. As such, individuals establish and maintain *imagined audiences* (Litt & Hargittai, 2016) created through their perceptions of who makes up their audience, both known and unknown.

An individual’s attitudes and values are shaped by their social relations, as Goffman (1959) argued, and the interactions individuals have with others during identity performances provide individuals with a sense of social belonging and in turn affect the ways in which individuals present themselves publicly. In networked contexts, the world that individuals are ‘perceiving’ is their social context. The direct connection and the resulting interaction that individuals have with their audiences play a crucial role in the way in which they perform themselves. Both boyd (2011) and Papacharissi (2011) suggest in their research that imagined audiences have implications for the behaviours of individuals who often adjust their performances to fit the norms of a collective. Ostensibly, an individual’s identity is a product of their social environments, raising the question of how individuals reconcile their identities if their social environments and other contextual aspects are constantly shifting within the digitally networked contexts they belong to.

1.3 Digital Social Technologies: Ethnographic Spaces

Methods for researching digitally networked practices can, and do, have many possible modes. Through much of the literature the emphasis on a technologically deterministic perspective is evident in methodological approaches commonly used in researching digital social technologies (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Hochman & Schwartz, 2012; Manovich, 2013b, 2014, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015). The mix of data outputs in the form of visible media content and metadata has enabled existing research in the field to focus investigations

on large-scale data sets and longitudinal studies. However, these approaches used in examining the nature of identity through digital social technologies often do not delve deeply enough to allow insight into the complexity of these identities and the work that individuals put into producing them.

Technologically deterministic approaches to interpreting digital social technology practices engender particular perspectives and have the potential to desaturate nuanced insights. The state of flux that arises from the heterogeneity of digital social technologies challenges methodologies that situate specific social network platforms at the front and centre. Similarly, methodological approaches that emphasise data collection at a large scale can limit the level of detail that can be gleaned from what is often very rich and complex data. This research takes the stance that emphasising technology over the socio-cultural restricts researchers from being able to comprehensively examine the identity practices of individuals who use digital social technologies.

To approach and understand the complexities and potential of digital social technologies and the insights about identities that can be gleaned from them, there is a need for innovative methods for data collection, interpretation and analysis. Contemporary scholarship has expressed a need for expanded social media research methods that account for the increasingly diverse range of content available to researchers (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Manovich, 2013b; Manovich et al., 2014). Furthermore, there has been much work on expanding the fields of both visual and digital ethnography and, in particular, clarifying new approaches and methods for researching digital and visual ethnography using Internet contexts (Ardévol, 2012; Hine, 2000; Lapenta, 2012; Pink 2007, 2012; Posthill & Pink, 2012).

Horst and Miller (2012) highlight in their examination of digital anthropology that a shift from techno-centric methodological approaches to embracing the socio-cultural understandings of technology is significant, as 'what we experience is not a technology per se but an immediately cultural inflected genre of usage' (p. 29). The focus on the ethnographic aspects of digital social technologies rather than technical descriptions of specific digital social technologies, alongside the examination of social network data is significant because, as Horst and Miller (2012, p. 29) note, 'the technological artefacts of our digitally mediated world cannot be 'disaggregated into

their material as against their cultural aspects.’ This suggests that researchers need to undertake close readings of the practices that individuals undertake to understand the complexity of the processes of identity formation in networked contexts.

Lev Manovich (2013b, 2016), in collaboration with Nadav Hochman (2014), proposes a gradated approach to researching digital social technologies by analysing visual data at different scales to explore identity production more closely. Manovich and colleagues’ ongoing research examines large-scale social network data sets (Hochman & Manovich, 2013; Hochman & Schwartz, 2012; Manovich, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2016). However, their use of data visualisation techniques to explore visual patterns, dynamics and structures in user-generated photos has inspired the interpretation and analysis approaches embraced throughout this research such as the close reading of data to identify particular visual patterns and culturally produced and locationally specific ‘visual rhythms’ (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). While analysis approaches that embrace multiple scales of interpretation of digital social technology data can work effectively to reveal insights about the wider behaviours of collectives or groups of individuals, they are not always appropriate for investigating the identity practices of individuals, as large-scale readings of social network data can remove the embedded narratives that individuals convey through their networked identity practices.

As outlined in Section 1.2, context creation sits at the core of identity performances that take place through digital social technologies. A challenge with investigating context creation practice is that it is not stable; it is fluid and requires close examination in these circumstances to have epistemological value.

1.4 Digital Ethnography, Networked Publics and Context

This research employs digital ethnography as a theoretical foundation and a methodological pathway for making sense of the temporal and spatial dislocation of digital social technologies and the significance of context in identity practices that take place within networked publics.

Networked contexts pose a challenging space for ethnographers—particularly in understanding ethnographic field sites, ethnographic objects and the subjectivity of researchers within these

contexts. This research takes precedents from an extensive body of scholarship exploring the epistemological shifts in ethnographic methodology in a world with increased networked sociality. Tracing a body of literature from early virtual ethnography methodologies (Beaulieu, 2004, 2005; Hine, 2000; Marcus, 1995; Wittel, 2000, 2001), to present iterations of digital (Pink, 2008, 2012; Pink et al., 2016; Postill, 2008, 2010), visual (Larsen, 2008; Pink, 2007) and social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012) gives insight into the complexity of conducting ethnographic research in networked contexts.

George Marcus's (1995) seminal scholarship into ethnographic field sites based in online settings reconsidered traditional ethnographic methods through his proposal of 'multi-sited ethnographies' in which ethnography could be adapted 'to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space' (p. 96). Rooted in post-modern thinking in response to 'empirical changes in the world and therefore to transformed locations of cultural production' (Marcus, 1995, p. 97), Marcus's proposition was situated through an emphasis on the destabilised delineation between the 'local' and the 'global' (p. 98) and the emergence of new ethnographic 'objects of study' (p. 102) manifesting within networked contexts.

Marcus's multi-sited ethnographies situated ethnography as being able to be conducted online and offline. Given the new media 'objects' that arose from web interfaces, he proposed that conducting ethnographic studies via the Internet called for interdisciplinary approaches, and emphasised early methods and spaces constructed through, and by, media studies as worthy examples (Marcus, 1995, p. 106). Marcus proposed that ethnography could be conducted through 'tracing the social' (1995, p. 108) and the circulation of semiotic 'signs, symbols, and metaphors' that are visible in language use and print and visual media, that is to say, the 'tracing' of 'complex cultural phenomena' (p. 106).

Marcus's scholarship set a precedent for ethnography theorists such as Christine Hine (2000) and Andreas Wittel (2000) to interrogate emergent digital ethnographic methods with increased nuance. Hine (2000) saw the Internet as being able to be understood as both 'culture and cultural artefact' (p. 64). Her early scholarship into 'virtual ethnography' examines ethnography in networked contexts in three ways: the role of travel and face-to-face

interaction in ethnographic practice, the relationship between text, technology and reflexivity, and the making of ethnographic objects (Hine, 2000, p. 43). In her work, Hine rejects the notion of ethnographic holism in which researchers must seek epistemic triangulation of data when undertaking ethnography (2000, p. 41). Because engagements with digital social technologies are 'interstitial' for both ethnographers and their subjects, it is impossible to produce a holistic account of an informant, location or culture (Hine, 2000, p. 65). Rather Hine (2000) sees ethnography as a 'textual practice' and 'lived craft' that, in contemporary contexts, 'destabilises the ethnographic reliance on a sustained presence in a found field site' (p. 43). Instead, ethnographies involving digital social technologies are open to a range of methods of ethnographic enquiry and 'interpretive flexibility' (Hine, 2000, p. 64).

A core aspect of this research is its interpretation of digital and physical contexts. Historically, ethnography scholars have tended to emphasise, or at least concur with, the dichotomous positioning of digital and physical spaces. Hine (2000) notes that ethnographic insights can be drawn from both 'observation and interaction', particularly as online settings allow ethnographers to 'lurk', but challenges 'ethnographic authenticity' (p. 44) and suggests that these ethnographic methods in online settings are mitigated through verification in offline settings, although for Hine, this kind of triangulation could also be seen as the pursuit of ethnographic holism (p. 48). Hine (2000) reconceptualises this through her proposition that, particularly in online and mediated settings, ethnography be seen as 'mobile rather than multi-sited' (p. 64).

As Web 2.0 technologies became more prominent through the 2000s and ethnographic enquiry in networked contexts became more established within ethnographic methods literature, the privileging of the physical and material over the digital space began to dissipate into nuanced perceptions of the virtual as a ethnographic field site. Hine's scholarship is reflexive of the temporal and spatial dislocation created through concepts like networked publics and advocated for ethnography '*in, of and through* the virtual' (2000, p. 65), stating that the validity of ethnographic objects need not rely on face-to-face interactions with research participants, rather that the 'shaping of the ethnographic object as it is made possible by the available technologies is the ethnography' (p. 65). Researchers should not limit themselves to any one understanding of the Internet and the practices that take place within it.

As Hine (2000) notes, using the Internet as a field site offers a kind of 'ethnographic disruption' (p. 57) in which ethnographers are no longer bounded to physical places, challenging spatially bound ethnographic assumptions. In questioning the implications of networked publics and 'interconnectedness' (p. 59) as a boundless site for ethnography, Hine (2000) asks: 'how can there be a holistic study of a site if its boundaries are unstable and only occasionally enacted?' (p. 59) and, pertinently for this research, when considering the nature of audiences as individuals negotiate multiple networked publics concurrently.

Drawing on Manuel Castell's (1996) 'network society', Wittel proposed an 'ethnography of networks' (2000, par. 5), provoked by an observation of the dynamic movement and flows of networks, which consisted not only of the nodes at the end of each connection in a network, but also the connections between nodes (par. 5). Just as Hine (2000) saw 'connectivity as an organising principle' (p. 60), Wittel (2000) proposed that, rather than emphasising a dichotomy between the digital and the physical, digital ethnographers should employ 'a more relational perspective and concentrate on the similarities, connections and overlappings' (par. 22) between the two, in effect emphasising assemblages of connections. Multi-sited ethnography allows for closer examination of the movements and flows between networked nodes. However, problematically, and as Wittel (2000, par. 10) himself emphasises, this kind of examination has implications for a closer scrutiny of individuals, individual nodes and connections.

One of the core objectives of ethnographic work is to 'reveal complexity' (Wittel, 2000, par. 20). Wittel's early scholarship around virtual ethnography fieldwork problematises the difficulties in integrating context effectively across ethnographic data, as 'the lack of context, which is in this case the context of the offline or physical environment, does not reveal the complexity, but rather creates a reduction in complexity' (2000, par. 20). Wittel (2000) notes that connections between 'virtual' and 'real spaces' are underestimated (par. 20). Though, as outlined previously, a dichotomous interpretation of digital and physical space is challenged, Wittel raises a valid point in critiquing the desaturation and accessibility of context in digital ethnography methods.

In their methodological interpretations, John Postill and Sarah Pink's (2012) scholarship moves aside from the dominant paradigms of networks and communities to describe the 'messy web' (p. 125), marking a significant turn in methodological approaches to conducting ethnography in networked contexts. Postill and Pink's (2012) suggestion that ethnography conducted in these spaces should depart from conventional ethnographic practice as a necessity of the different types of digital practice, compilation, sharing and openness involved in research methods (p. 125) enables researchers to engage with concepts of 'routine, movement and sociality' (p. 123). In some respects, Postill and Pink's scholarship provides a foundation for digital ethnography with the authority to liberate itself from the constraints of traditional ethnographic holism towards an adapted approach that embraces the fluidity of networked publics.

This research builds on the foundation established by these methodological propositions to approach networked publics and context creation. It is one thing to perceive networks as a site of research, made up of nodes that are connected through flows of data. However, digital ethnography in these circumstances has, so far, been reliant on context as a stabilising factor, but what does it mean when context is destabilised.

As established throughout this introduction, the increasing pervasiveness of digital social technologies since this early digital ethnography scholarship means that now digital social technologies enable individuals engaging with networked publics to both view and contribute to the circulation of context, in real-time, as it is presented to audiences through identity performances. As such, this research considers practices of context creation as sites worthy of ethnographic examination.

The core hypothesis of this thesis is that emerging adults undertake specific activities of identity performance as part of their context creation practice when they use digital social technologies. It has been established that networked publics can be conceived of as 'ethnographic places' (Pink, 2008) where the boundaries between objects, materials and places are blurred, and also mutually constitutive of each other. Given this context, this research maps a context creation practice by asking the following questions: How do digital ethnographers *observe* context? and How do digital ethnographers *make sense* of context?

1.5 Research Methods

1.5.1 Positioning the Research

This research investigates the intricacies of the practices that individuals undertake when they develop identities and gives insight into the practices of emerging adults, an often-unconsidered population of digital social technology users. Previous research has focused on the implications of digital social technologies on the identities of teens (boyd, 2008, 2014, 2015; Horst, 2009) or more generalised populations of social network users (Bargh et al., 2002; Papacharissi, 2011; Rettberg, 2014; Walker, 2000) but there is limited scholarship on the impact of digital social technologies on individuals post-adolescence as emerging adults.

Psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) describes emerging adulthood as a significant transitional and developmental period for young adults as they move from adolescence through to full adulthood (typically 18 years to 25 years of age), focusing on those cultures, primarily anglo-American, that allow young people a prolonged period of role exploration through their late teens and early twenties. Emerging adulthood is a key period of identity formation for young adults. It is characterised by a 'high degree of demographic diversity and instability' (Arnett, 2000, p. 471), and emphasis on change and exploration. Some individuals transition from secondary education to tertiary education, an experience where young people undergo significant shifts in their sense of 'belonging' within social groups and their sense of 'becoming' as they negotiate their own autonomy as adults and subsequently their 'capability to navigate change' they experience during this time (Gale & Parker, 2012, p. 737).

The heterogeneity of emerging adulthood makes this period of life particularly 'rich, complex and dynamic' (Arnett, 2000, p. 477). This research is particularly interested in this period because the identity creation that takes place through emerging adulthood is often highly experimental and results in the emergence of multiple, temporally and spatially constructed young adult identities, as individuals respond to the heterogeneity of this stage of life. As discussed further in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.5, this period has historically been seen as 'transitory', in which young people are working towards

full adulthood by way of various markers of transition—suggesting that this experience is a prescriptive process that is homogenous across all young people. More recent youth studies scholarship has reconceptualised this approach and delineated the period between adolescence and adulthood as both empirically and theoretically distinct from other developmental periods (Furlong et al., 2011; Woodman, 2004, 2011; Woodman & Wyn, 2006).

To focus the investigation of emerging adults and its ethnographic intent even further, this research investigates a distinct population of emerging adults—those individuals defined generationally as *digital natives*. The term digital native is contested and its precise definition has been argued extensively through scholarship (Bennett et al., 2008; Buckingham, 2011; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Hargittai, 2010; Ito et al., 2010; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, 2011; Prensky, 2001a, 2001b, 2011, 2012; Thomas, 2011). This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, however, this research classifies digital natives as those individuals who belong to Generation Z (Gen-Z), born after 1990.

The research specifically investigates the identity practices of a small group of Sydney-based individuals who were born during the mid-1990s and were entering their emerging adulthood in 2012 and 2013 when this research took place. For individuals born during the mid-1990s, both their adolescence and emerging adulthood have been infused with the emerging forms of networked sociality facilitated by digital social technologies. As such, this research defines this group of emerging adults as digital native emerging adults, hereafter DNEAs. As discussed in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.5, by examining this group through the lens of the DNEA definition and reflecting that, for these individuals, this period is not defined by universal, immutable and prescriptive practices. Emerging adults negotiate their identity performances as culturally constructed (Arnett, 2000, p. 470) and in direct response to the particular contexts they are part of.

Significant for DNEAs has been the shift to online environments of networked sociality. DNEAs are the first generation to experience their emerging adulthood as bound to digital social technologies and the use of these technologies is ingrained in their everyday practices. They also have indelible knowledge and understandings about how to situate these practices within the often-shifting contexts they are part of.

1.5.2 Practice Theory and Digital Ethnography

This research is interested in how context is managed by individuals when they gather within networked publics and orientates itself around three theoretical conversations: digital social technologies, DNEAs and their audiences, and practices (see further: Figure 1.1). The production of networked publics, the contextual ecologies they encompass and identity performances that individuals conduct within them are not centralised, rather, they are in constant dialogue with each other. The following section describes this process in more detail through a description of the methodological framework employed by this research.

The research uses practice theory to examine the ways that DNEAs negotiate their identities, drawing on Shove et al.'s (2012) practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity framework, where *activities* come together through the enactment of diverse elements, that is, *materials*, *competences* and *meanings* (practice-as-performance), to produce a practice (practice-as-entity). When DNEAs present their identity performances to other individuals and, as in this research, the audiences of the networked publics they are part of, the practice becomes visible to researchers when elements and activities recur because they are produced and re-produced by individuals who are practitioners of that practice.

The identity practices that DNEAs undertake are just one part of the complex constellation of practices that make up the daily habits, routines and doings of DNEAs. Practice theory is interested in 'understanding and analysing the multiple dynamics of everyday life' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 13). Because digital social technologies are a normative part of the daily lives of DNEAs, positioning networked publics under the lens of practice means the activities that DNEAs undertake as identity performances can be examined at a much more detailed level, and as discussed previously, 'reveal complexity' (Wittel, 2000, par. 20).

Identities do not exist as standalone entities that DNEAs present to the world, but must be built from something. Practice theory provides a useful framework through which to understand and interpret the ways in which DNEAs harness various actions, objects, contexts and people to produce identity performances within networked publics. boyd (2014) offers an

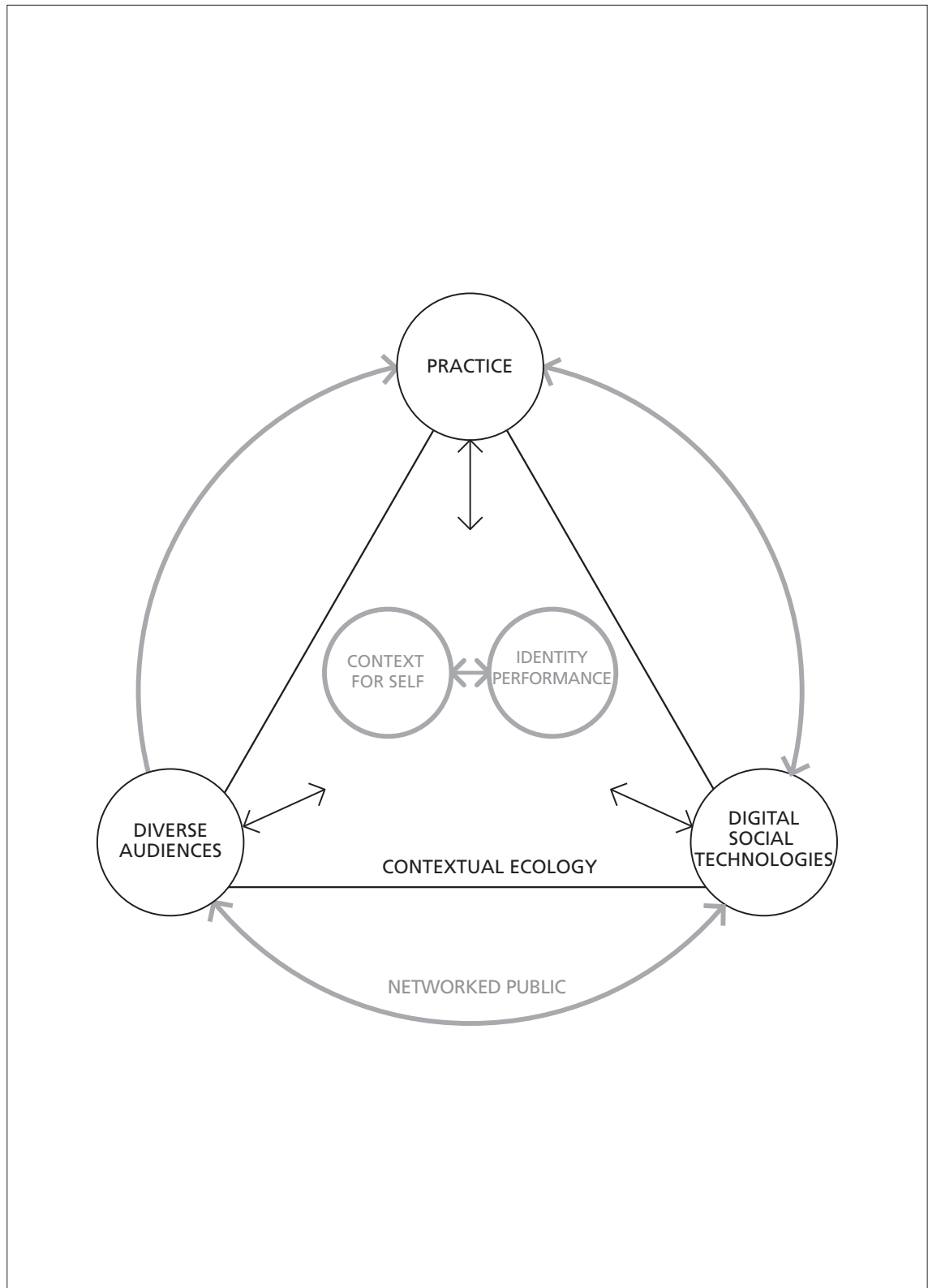


Figure 1.1: Theoretical conversations between digital social technologies, DNEAs and their audiences and practices.

analytical framework of four distinct ‘affordances’ of *persistence*, *visibility*, *spreadability* and *searchability* (p. 11) that shape how individuals engage with the mediated environments of networked publics. This research draws on practice theory to examine boyd’s categorisation by interpreting the functional aspects of digital social technologies into practice as material elements and is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5.

A core focus of this thesis is how context plays a fundamental role in DNEAs’ understanding of themselves and contributes extensively to their identity. To analyse the contexts within which DNEAs operate, the research uses Shove et al.’s (2012, p. 14) *elements of practice* in which the practices that individuals undertake are composed of *materials*, *competences* and *meanings*. This research positions these elements as *contextual elements*. The contexts that DNEAs draw on are separated into four categories: the locational, material, situational and social, each of which contains contextual elements that traverse the boundaries of online and offline spaces.

When contextual elements come together within networked publics, either through intentional or unintentional actions, they form what this research refers to as *contextual ecologies* where relational contextual elements cluster together. This more accurately articulates the nature of context as unfixed and mutable, subject to shaping from socio-cultural forces. In challenging the interpretation of territories or groups and communities as being bounded, Postill and Pink (2012) reference Pink’s (2009) *ethnographic places*, that are ‘constituted through the emergent relations between things and processes’ (2012, p. 124). Postill and Pink (2012) establish a link between theory and methodology that this research finds useful, through understanding the field sites and objects of digital ethnography as ‘constantly shifting configuration—or ecology of things—that encompasses web-based and material/local contexts’ (Pink, 2012, p. 128).

As established previously, rather than emphasising online communities as fixed ethnographic field sites, the primary investigation is of individuals’ practices that occur within the mutable conditions of networked publics. Just as this research uses the term contextual ecologies to describe the ways in which elements of practice come together within networked publics, Pink and Postill’s proposition of an ‘ecology of things’ complements and substantiates Shove’s contextual elements practice theory framework and, crucially, provides a methodology for

this research to interpret practices individuals undertake across multiple online, material and local contexts that occur across temporally and spatially diverse networked publics.

The primary concern of this thesis is the role that context plays in identity practices that take place through digital social technologies. As boyd emphasises, 'context matters' (2014, p. 39). Through using digital ethnographic methods to examine context creation practices and their contribution towards the cohesion of an individual's identity as they travel through the various networked contexts, this research provides insight about the identity creation practices of individuals in digital social technology contexts.

A core understanding of this thesis is that identities are socially constructed. As such, within networked publics, the functions of digital social technologies facilitate perpetual flows of contextual information between DNEAs and their audiences. DNEA selfhood is largely relational and in flux as the locational, material, situational and social contexts of individuals shift and change. As Harré (1998) notes, 'one's attitudes, for example, are rarely a stable configuration of dispositions, but appear now in one form and now another' (p. 7). Because a DNEA's identity is always shifting and re-forming in response to the contexts they are located in, individuals rely on their imagined audiences and social contexts to give them feedback and information about their identity performances so that their context for self can be reconfigured. This establishes a flow between members of networked publics, and contributes to the circulation of the practice (Shove et al., 2012).

When DNEAs gather in networked publics, the contextual ecology of that networked public is formed through the contextual elements that each member brings with them. As boyd and Heer (2006) note, 'context is not produced structurally but through the performative conversations of the collective' (p. 5). This research proposes that emerging adults undertake a discernible context creation practice that harnesses the malleability and mutability of networked publics as they create subjective *contexts for self* through the entwining contextual elements drawn from their locational, material, situational and social contexts. These contextual elements are integral to a DNEA's context creation practice. Contexts for self function as temporal-spatial constructs that change as new contextual elements are drawn into the contextual ecologies that are informing them. Contextual elements are transient and can move between

settings. As DNEAs are exposed to new contexts, the make-up of an individual's context for self changes, depending on the ways in which the contextual elements are integrated. The contextual ecologies contained within networked publics serve as a platform from which DNEAs can conduct identity performances. This research positions identity performances as *activities of practice*, which are the visible manifestation of an individual's context for self within a networked public.

The effect of social media diffusion means that an individual's identity travels with them into new digital social technology contexts. Individuals develop their identity through the production of contextually-specific content, created as individual identity performances and brought together through social awareness streams. Postill and Pink (2012) refer to ethnographic places as hosting 'clusters or intensities of things of which localities and socialities are elements' (p. 124) and, furthermore, 'traverse online/offline contexts and are collaborative, participatory, open and public' (p. 124). This suggests that when individuals join together in digitally networked practice, a critical mass occurs in which participants collaboratively pull together contextual elements to produce the networked public. As evident throughout this thesis, this research captures the production of a 'contextual ecology' which facilitates and makes headway in examining whether digital ethnography can observe and account for the fluidity of context creation practices across 'diffuse time space' (Marcus, 1995, p. 96).

Figure 1.1 illustrates the theoretical conversations that are discussed throughout this thesis: digital social technologies, DNEAs and their audiences, and practices and the flows between them that catalyse the context creation practice of DNEAs.

1.5.3 Research Methods

As established in Section 1.3, there is a need to develop methodological approaches for investigating social media data sets more deeply, as not all social data is created equally and the homogenisation of social media into generalised data production spaces is problematic. At the same time, while large-scale studies of social media data give the ability to look at generalised cultural phenomena and longitudinal trends, they do not address the implications for context across digital social technologies. As described in Section 3.6, the research maps

the particular experiences of a precise group of DNEAs. Digital social technologies enable access to wide-ranging, dense primary data. This allows both a deeper-level and focused analysis on individuals, as well as a global, generalised analysis of the collective patterns of behaviour from the wider participant group. The methodological approaches used throughout this research are a direct response to these theoretical appeals of this context. One of the aims of this research is to approach data collection, interpretation and analysis sensitive to the potential of these new conditions.

By nature the contexts that DNEAs operate in and the practices they develop are both mutable and malleable, and are challenged in their conformity to one methodological approach. The core case study conducted through this thesis, synthesises useful elements from established methodologies in social science, focusing on digital ethnography, to approach the research enquiries appropriately. While the research is founded within an ethnographic methodology, the data collection, interpretation and analyses are discursive in their methodological impetus in response to the theoretical shifts that took place throughout the research project.

Of epistemic interest is the way in which the research is situated within the field of design. Through drawing on a combination of visual data analysis, interviews and digital ethnography approaches it contributes to new understandings of digitally networked practices. Applying a design approach enables the research to focus on the visual and material aspects of identity practices, specifically in its close analysis of the content produced through the digital social technology platform Instagram. Combining this with an analysis of the practice displayed throughout the case study, allows the research to more comprehensively explore the ways in which changing typologies of digital social technologies are embraced by DNEAs in their context creation practice as they negotiate the key developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Using digital ethnography, this research gleans its understanding from the subjective experiences of a group of DNEAs who are transitioning through their first year of university study at a design school in Sydney, Australia. Data is gathered through the Designer Explorer project, a series of digital ethnographic case studies undertaken in 2012 and 2013 investigating the context creation practice of the group. The Designer Explorer project took

place at the University of Technology Sydney first year design camp, an annual three-day event at Cockatoo Island, Sydney. The camp context established a locationally captive group of participants, who were diverse in their characters, yet united through the shared experience of their first year of design school. The extended period of time spent with these individuals resulted in the collection of a rich array of visual and textual digital social technology data. The highly specific context of the camp focused on the unique forces that impact the transition of this group of individuals as they move through emerging adulthood towards adulthood.

The multi-layered identity performances that become visible through networked publics pose new opportunities for ethnographic researchers. Within networked publics, identity performance takes place through distribution of ongoing, contextually based, content creation. It is therefore crucial to consider the effects that this may have in the collection of primary data during fieldwork, and throughout the interpretation and analysis stage of the research process, particularly considering that the formation of a networked public is a collective process. How do researchers interpret and make meaning from this data? At the heart of ethnographic practice is attendance, the co-presence of the ethnographer and the observed social situation (Wittel, 2000, par. 8). Wittel, like Hine (2000, p. 54), emphasises participant observation and a familiarity of the practices in and of virtual spaces as being core to undertaking digital ethnography. This raises the question: *How do digital ethnographers interpret and make sense of digital content that is produced by individuals, while taking into consideration that networked publics are co-constructed contexts—not just between members of networked publics, but also between participants and the researcher?*

Digital content produced through digital social technologies like Instagram and Twitter requires modes of ethnographic analysis that more precisely aid the interpretation of ethnographic objects taking into account the subjectivity of both the participants and the researcher in digitally networked environments. Hine (2000) explores the scope and potential of digital ethnography in her analysis of identity and authenticity in ethnography when negotiating a range of fieldwork contexts. Hine (2000) views networked publics as ‘virtual ethnographic field sites’ in which the interactions and content produced and consumed by the participants of networked publics become ethnographic texts that are tied to ‘particular circumstances of production and consumption’ (p. 52).

Scholarship from Sarah Pink (2012) considers the ‘spatial turn’ in visual ethnography methods. Pink (2012) questions how Internet ethnography might be re-conceived through ‘an alternative theory of place and multi-sensoriality’ (p. 118) and approaches ‘place’ as a theoretical concept ‘whereby it is better understood as an abstract means of understanding configurations of things and processes through which they are formed of change’ (p. 118). Pink (2012) also asks whether the concept of ‘multi-sensoriality’ may give ethnographers greater insight and understanding of visual practices in networked contexts (p. 113).

Semiotic interpretation of the content of ethnographic texts may be useful. It is also important to address the situated writing and reading practices which make those texts meaningful—that is, the interpretation of Instagram content by the researcher, or the stories that participants may tell in subsequent stages of data collection. Hine (2000) suggests that researchers should discern increasingly nuanced meaning from ethnographic texts by drawing on their own ‘socialized competence’ to interpret texts as ‘culturally situated artefacts’ (p. 51). Furthermore, Pink argues that archives of ethnographic material, such as photographic images, should be seen as collections of ‘individual images with situated meanings’ (2007, p. 129). This is particularly important for this research because the insights gathered are drawn from interpretation and analysis of visual Instagram data, and play a fundamental role in the structure of this thesis.

1.5.4 Inclusion of Images

The Designer Explorer project encompasses a diverse collection of data with visual Instagram content collected during fieldwork and interviews undertaken through 2012 and 2013. This data, and its subsequent interpretation and analysis, have been incorporated into the structure of this thesis in a range of ways. Images have been included throughout the thesis in three ways: the complete collection of images shared to Instagram through the research project; a series of image assemblages produced through content analysis disseminating core contextual themes shared throughout the project—‘context’ and ‘social’; and large screen captures of select Instagram posts from participants, which also includes textual and metadata information such as ‘likes’, geo-location information, captions, comments and @mentions. Sharing an assemblage of the data interpretation and analysis techniques used in the research affords the

opportunity to engage with the data and understand some of the interpretative decisions that were made through the research process.

A total of 608 images were collected from Instagram during the Designer Explorer project. The complete set of visual data has been collated and organised chronologically across the bottom of the pages of Chapters Five, Six and Seven, starting from page xxx onwards. Because the foundation of the argument being made through this research is based on context, it is valuable to convey contextual elements that were visible throughout the project. A cohesive presentation of all content produced by members of the Designer Explorer networked public throughout the case study helps situate the images temporally and spatially within the research process, as Pink (2007, p. 130) notes. This provides the option to view the data beyond the researcher's subjectivity—as is seen in the assemblages of images produced through thematic content analysis in Images 1–10, and the close analysis of key images in Images 11–26.

1.6 Thesis Overview

Chapter Two to Chapter Four outline the core theoretical concepts used throughout this research, while Chapter Five to Chapter Seven focus on the results of the ethnographic study.

Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies uncovers the trajectory of digital social technologies and situates the research through its explanation of the blurring boundaries between online and offline. It expounds the social systems that DNEAs are part of, drawing on Wellman's 'networked individualism' (2002). It describes the ways in which DNEAs congregate within *networked publics*. Networked publics are further explored through in-depth descriptions of the flows of engagement that occur between members of networked publics. It then positions networked publics as sites worthy of ethnographic examination, it outlines the use of hashtags as instigators of the production of content within networked publics and then introduces the ways in which this research *makes sense* of digital visual content.

Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self elaborates on Chapter Two through its in-depth investigation into the use of networked publics as key platforms for identity performances. The chapter unfolds the two perspectives of the self and identity and presents

the core assertion of this thesis, that DNEAs undertake context creation practice as they experiment with their identity in networked publics. It expands Chapter Two's description of networked publics by describing the *flows of networked publics* as scenarios that house exchanges between individuals and their social contexts when they undertake identity performances. It establishes that DNEAs' context for self is bound to the identity performances they undertake. It describes DNEAs more extensively, including their unique generational positioning, and hypothesises that they undertake particular identity practices that use digital social technologies. The chapter concludes by presenting the research context of the thesis.

Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance introduces practice theory more extensively and explains why contemporary interpretations of the theory provide an appropriate methodological lens for this research. It describes the ways in which activities of practice and their associated elements come together, supported by the theoretical premise of Shove et al. (2012), Schatzki (1996, 2002, 2012) and Reckwitz (2002). It reinterprets the practice lens by tilting its methodological approach to position networked publics within it. It describes contextual ecologies and explains how the wideranging locational, material, situational and social contexts of DNEAs are incorporated into the practice theory framework as *contextual elements*. It concludes by illustrating the ways that DNEAs, when operating in networked publics, draw contextual elements into contextual ecologies to use as resources in their identity performances.

Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project shifts in tone from the previous chapters to establish the theoretical positioning and methodological framework of the thesis by presenting the ethnographic investigation of the thesis—the Designer Explorer project. It describes the Designer Explorer participants as a small group of DNEAs. In explaining the methods used throughout the project for data collection and the interpretation phases of the project, Chapter Five establishes the University of Technology Sydney first year design camp as the main site of the investigation and spends time describing the *#designerexplorer* hashtag as the primary resource for production and consumption of content by the participants during the project. It describes the data collected during the project and presents an interpretation of visual data. Content analysis was used as a method of analysis to interpret visual data. As such, this interpretation finds that the Designer Explorer project participants collectively

co-constructed the Designer Explorer networked public during the project. The research is discursive in its approach, and the project developed to incorporate interviews with Designer Explorer participants as a way to gain insights into the subjective identity practices of individual participants. Chapter Five concludes by describing this second phase of data collection and establishing the framework for analysing the Designer Explorer networked public.

Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public describes the findings of the project in detail including the nature of the Designer Explorer networked public and the particular flows that occurred throughout the project. It incorporates practices, identity performances, context and sociality into its own framework and uses this to describe the ongoing negotiations between individual participants and their audiences. Chapter Six analyses four key activities of practices identified through the data analysis: *coping with context collapse*, *negotiating the network*, *performing roles* and *circulating feedback*. It illustrates these four activities of practice by showing examples of identity performances that took place throughout the Designer Explorer project.

Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self explores the significance of the four activities of practice identified in Chapter Six in playing a fundamental role in DNEA context creation practice. The chapter positions these activities as having significance beyond the Designer Explorer networked public by distilling two key concepts, *collapsed contexts* and *circulating contexts*. These two concepts, a direct result of the Designer Explorer networked public, are positioned as essential to DNEA context creation practice. The chapter concludes by situating these concepts within the wider scope of emerging adulthood, and presents evidence of the capacity of the DNEA context creation practice to move into other contexts.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion addresses the implications of the findings and analysis and concludes the thesis through presenting the significance of the research within the broader theoretical conversation of identity, digital social technologies and the application of ethnographic methods to examine digitally networked practices.

Chapter Two

Digital Social Technologies

2.1 Introduction

The landscape of social media, social networking sites and networked digital technologies is broad and offers many different trajectories for research, both theoretical and methodological. Digital social technologies are now integrated into the normative daily practices of many individuals, especially for DNEAs. As the use of social network platforms has moved from subcultural to mainstream normative practice (boyd, 2014, p. 7), digital social technologies have evolved in functionality through negotiation between users and technology developers as individuals adopt and adapt their use to suit their own purposes and goals. These developments in the functions of social network platforms offer space for the application of novel methodological approaches in digital social technology research. As Buckingham (2011, p. x) highlights, crucially, ‘technologies do not appear from nowhere: they are developed, designed and marketed in specific social contexts, which reflect broader economic, cultural and social factors. Technologies have possibilities and limitations (or “affordances”), but they do not produce social change themselves.’ Consequently, we are now in a position to explore and understand the *potential* of these technologies beyond their technical capabilities, through examining what they *enable* and *facilitate* for DNEA sociality and identity performance.

This chapter examines the trajectory of digital social technologies and addresses two significant shifts in the composition of digital social technologies which impact the ways in which DNEAs engage in practices of identity performance. The impetus of these changes lies in the ways digital social technologies enable individuals to coordinate their identity performances across the blurring boundaries of online and offline realities and the focus on visual content production and sharing via digital social technology platforms. Examination of this trajectory frames the core foundational concepts of this research that changing typologies of digital social technologies support the creation of highly social ecologies of contexts and should be

examined for their effect on individuals, their social worlds and the creation of contexts for self.

2.2 The Trajectory of Digital Social Technologies

Digital social technologies can be defined in the simplest of terms as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking, or as a tool for social interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In an attempt to define a vastly changing social and technical landscape, boyd and Ellison (2013, p. 158) refined their early definition of social network sites, describing social network sites as ‘a *networked communication platform* in which participants 1) have *uniquely identifiable profiles* that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can *publicly articulate connections* that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with *streams of user-generated content* provided by their connections on the site’.

The term *social network* emerged in the late 1990s and the term social media did not reach its contemporary notion until 2005 with the prevalence of Web 2.0 technologies. In contemporary discourse, the terms used to define social media, social networks and the process of interaction online have become ambiguous and as a result the terms social media and social network are often used interchangeably. This research draws on the definition described by boyd and Ellison (2013) and uses the term digital social technologies as a catch-all encompassing the many descriptors of these digital technologies. Principally, the term refers to the way we engage with social network platforms and highlights the dialogue between our social selves and the changing typologies of digital technologies.

As outlined in Chapter One: Introduction, this research focuses its account of digital social technologies from the Web 2.0 forward. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 to describe websites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier websites to enable users with the appropriate tools to generate their own content and subsequently share and collaborate within online communities, such as social network sites, blogs, wikis and video sharing websites (DiNucci, 1999). boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 214) denote the first recognisable *social network* as SixDegrees.com, which launched in 1997. Prior to this, through the 1980s

and 1990s, some of the typical features of contemporary social network sites, such as profiles on dating and blogging sites, friend lists on ICQ and MSN Messenger, had begun to emerge. It was SixDegrees.com, however, which first combined these features into an integrated social network.

Over the more recent decades since the emergence of these early networks, digital social technologies have developed into a range of contemporary social networks, notable for the increased ease with which users could generate their own text and image content. In the aftermath of the dot.com bubble burst of early 2000, Web 2.0 grew through the surge of interactive online forums and profile-driven social network sites such as Ryze.com launched in 2001 and Friendster in 2002. From 2003 onwards many different platforms were established, including the better-known MySpace (2003), Flickr (2004), Facebook (United States: 2004, worldwide: 2005), YouTube (2005), Bebo (2005) and Twitter (2006), as explained by boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 212).

As mobile technology developed throughout the 2000s and mobile smartphones became increasingly accessible and ubiquitous, location data and higher quality image and video content meant many platform-based social network sites could develop mobile platforms for smartphones and network-enabled tablets. Principal among these were Facebook (2011), Twitter (approximately 2010), as well as standalone mobile social networks such as Dodgeball (2005), FourSquare (2009) and Instagram (2010). The shift in accessibility to mobile devices in the mid-2000s meant social network site users were liberated from the desktop space and thrust into digital ubiquity, subsequently framing a dramatic shift in the typologies of use for individuals.

2.3 Blurring the Boundaries Between Online and Offline

As social network sites moved to mobile interfaces, digital social technologies became progressively more 'attached' to individuals and subsequently, an increasingly integral part of the normative daily practices of individuals. This 'attachment' and normativity of practice has led to a dismantling of the constraints set out by the notion of 'online' and 'offline' as the boundaries between the two have blurred.

Maintaining a distinction between these terms is problematic as it suggests that digital users inhabit separate spaces from those of non-digital users, and have the ability to turn on and off a particular aspect of self. This not only ‘separates and devalues digitally mediated experiences’ (Rey & Boesel, 2014, p. 173), but also diminishes and discounts online experiences of identity. Sociologist Nathan Jurgenson (2009), in referencing Negroponte (1996), refers to the ‘augmentation of bits in atoms’ as a way of explaining the dialectic between our interactions in ‘virtual space’ and our interactions in ‘physical space’; he repurposes the term ‘augmented reality’ to describe the enmeshing of digital and physical space as our interactions span both modalities. This research argues that, while there is a discernible dialectic between online and offline contexts, the notion of spatiality and the sociality practised in these contexts should not be presented as distinct from each other. DNEAs inhabit both online and offline spaces concurrently, fluidly and with ease; they do not simply disconnect from their ‘digital self’ when they step away from the screen.

The ever changing landscape of social network platforms and the heterogeneous nature of social media means digital social technologies are in a constant state of flux, a phenomenon Lev Manovich (2013) refers to as *social media diffusion* (p. 47). This fluidity consequently makes it challenging to develop stable theories about the practices involving digital social technologies. As established in Chapter One: Introduction, technological determinism engenders particular perspectives and the emphasis on this perspective is evident in methodological approaches commonly used in researching digital social technologies, subsequently limiting the potential insights that can be gleaned from data collected using social network platforms. boyd (2014, p. 8) addresses these issues in her scholarship, suggesting that research around social network technologies must transcend ‘particular technical moments,’ [...] ‘even if the specific examples used to illustrate those issues are locked in time.’

The research of Mimi Sheller and John Urry engages with wide-ranging contributions to the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm. While situated as part of a broader theoretical concept of mobility and sociality, this paradigm offers a framework in which to think about the relationship between physical spaces and increased connectivity and, importantly for this research, new understandings about the dichotomy between online and offline contexts. Sheller and Urry’s research challenges the artifice that physical spaces are ‘fixed geographical containers for social

processes' (2006, p. 209) and withdraws the emphasis on physical spaces as the most important aspect of DNEA sociality. The new mobilities paradigm argues a need for an ontological shift from interpreting distinct 'places' and 'people' and instead examines the complex relationality of places and persons connected through performances. There is no separation or contingent relationship between place and the activities that are enacted within them. Individuals now coordinate their lives and sociality in relation to digital information rather than in relation to physical context (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011, p. 3).

Subrahmanyam et al.'s (2008) research examines technologies as tools that support 'interpersonal connections' (p. 422) through the ways in which they 'reinforce important offline relationships' (p. 422). Similarly, Zhao et al. (2008) propose that as our social worlds now include both online and offline environments, individuals must learn the important skill of coordinating their behaviour across these realms (p. 1831). To this end, the typologies of use of digital social technologies shift the ways in which individuals conceive of themselves, their relationships and the spaces they occupy. Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) argue that locative technologies and mobile digital social technologies enabled a shift in the ways in which social life could be conducted, that we no longer needed to explicitly *log onto* the web because 'it is all around us' (p. 3). The removal of desktop-based access points and ubiquity of networked information leads to the creation of locally contextualised digital content, suggesting that offline contexts are influenced by the online contexts that are drawn into them by individuals using digital social technologies.

Moreover, networked spaces establish architectures that expand the way we comprehend and understand physical spaces and, importantly, the relationships that are enabled by them (boyd, 2014, p. 10). Humphreys (2008) takes this further in suggesting that an individual's experience of a space is based on their relations with others inhabiting that space (p. 344), suggesting that regardless of whether a DNEA is interacting with others physically or digitally, their experience of that space is bound to the social relations contained within it. This offers an interesting proposition, if it is understood that online and offline spaces are not dichotomous. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, Section 5.5, one of the key methodological challenges for this research was finding a way to conceptualise the shifting temporality and spatiality of digital social technologies and the subsequent

effect on the behaviours of individuals. Rather than see digital social technologies as simply providers of technological functions, this research embraced the mutability and malleability of these contexts as being a core aspect of the ways in which DNEAs engage with digital social technologies. And, crucially for this research, embracing them as ethnographic sites in which users can be probed and the content they are producing extracted for deeper level insight.

As digital social technologies are drawn into physical contexts, individuals no longer rely solely on physical objects for cues about expected social norms. Instead, DNEAs respond to what is available to them and embrace the multi-modality of online and offline contexts by drawing on relevant contextual elements. In Sheller and Urry's (2006) research exploring the new mobilities paradigm, they establish that context plays a significant part in the ways in which social worlds are organised. Sheller and Urry argue that social life is made up of multiple, often distant and extended connections, which are organised through particular 'nodes' (2006, p. 213). Importantly for this research, the new mobilities paradigm questions how context is 'mobilised' or 'performed' through socio-technical practices (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 211).

As this research argues, DNEAs who are linked over networked publics gather together elements from the locational, material, situational and social contexts of individuals into ecologies. For DNEAs this means drawing on both online and offline contextual elements. Two key ideas can be drawn from this: firstly, context plays a significant role in the interactions individuals have with digital social technologies; and secondly, physical spaces can be characterised by the social relations contained within them. As described in the following chapter, Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, the contexts of an individual are made visible through identity performances. Crucially, identity performances take place in social contexts because individuals rely on feedback from their audiences in order to construct their sense of self. The following section describes the social systems that DNEAs take part in.

2.4 Digital Native Emerging Adults and their Social Systems

At their core, digital social technologies are highly interactive mobile and web-based platforms that enable substantial and pervasive changes to the ways in which individuals communicate

between themselves and their communities through sharing, co-creation, discussion and modification of their own content. As boyd and Ellison (2007) note, key technological functions are relatively consistent across social network platforms, with the primary function of digital social technologies to connect individuals into social groups. The social cultures that emerge from these contexts vary, catering to both pre-existing social networks and those that are newly established. Other cultures connect strangers through shared contexts, whether that is their material, locational, situational or social contexts. boyd and Ellison emphasise the diversity of audiences facilitated by digital social technologies (2007, p. 210), in that individuals linked through common identities, or disparate groups of individuals, now come together through networked connections.

Recent research has seen scholars re-evaluate understanding social systems into varying conceptions of online community and 'networked-ness' (Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Litt, 2012; Wellman, 2012; Wittel, 2001). Wellman (2002, p. 10) notes: 'In networked societies, boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are both flatter and more complexly structured'. This changing structure of social groups and the modes of interaction between individuals result in the emergence of new dynamics that shape participation (boyd, 2011, p. 39). In their account of social network sites, boyd and Ellison (2007) note that early public online communities were structured according to 'topical hierarchies' and built around a fostering of communities of interest. However, as social networks have developed, so have their organising principles. boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 219) note: 'social network sites are structured as personal (or "egocentric") networks, with the individual as the centre of their own community' which, 'more accurately mirrors unmediated social structures', they reference Barry Wellman's proposition that 'the world is composed of networks, not groups' (1988, p. 37).

Wellman's (2002, p. 10) article 'Little boxes, glocalization, and networked individualism' highlighted a paradigm shift acknowledging this evolving social connectedness 'from being bound up in homogenous "little boxes" to surfing life through diffuse, variegated social networks'. Wellman coined the phrase 'networked individualism' to describe the ways in which we have moved from group-based social networks to acting as individualised networks, spreading our allegiances across many social groups through a mixture of strong and weak

social ties. Wellman (2002) goes on to suggest that digital social networks encourage changes in *network capital*, that is, the ways in which individuals both communicate and obtain resources from each other, as ‘the broadly-embracing collectivity, nurturing and controlling, has become a fragmented, variegated and personalised social network’ in which ‘autonomy, opportunity, and uncertainty are the rule’ (Wellman, 2002, p. 11).

Digital social technologies are now seen as playing a normative role in the support of sociality, a notion that has been developed through a range of scholarship. Citing Nancy Baym’s (2000) ethnographic accounts of online spaces for communication and community and tracing back to Howard Rheingold’s (1993) coining of the phrase ‘virtual community’, boyd and Ellison (2013) note, ‘early research on virtual communities explored how these collections of individuals transformed into communities with distinctive cultures, norms, and a sense of connection’ (p. 163). However, as ethnographer Andreas Wittel notes ‘communities are always constructed, never automatic, given or natural’ (2001, p. 62). In contrast to scholarship emphasising utopian and techno-deterministic perspectives of online communities, Wittel (2001, p. 62) claimed that a stabilised notion of the constitution of a virtual community was problematic. Challenging previous regimes of sociality that have clear boundaries, he described networks as ‘open social systems’ (Wittel, 2000, p. 64). Rather than perceive communities as fixed, he suggested that networking be seen as a practice (p. 52) where human-to-human connections are constantly shifting because network sociality is about social bonds that are continuously produced, reproduced and ‘consumed’ (Wittel, 2001, p. 72).

Given these early trends in online communities, it is not surprising that digital social technologies are the ‘primary mediators of human-to-human connections’ for youth (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 4). As established previously through Subrahmanyam et al.’s research, given the changing typologies of digital social technologies and the freedoms for new forms of engagement between individuals, DNEAs are now confronted with what boyd (2008) refers to as ‘context collapse’ (p. 145). Context collapse is a concept that refers to the effects that an individual contends with as spatial boundaries and social contexts collapse through the combining of diverse networks, obfuscating social roles and bringing together diverse audiences ‘who might not normally be co-present’ (boyd, 2008, p. 145). Drawing on Joshua Meyrowitz’s (1985) thesis, boyd (2008) proposes that when the contextual boundaries of networked spaces

blur, individuals need to establish new identities and take up new behaviours and roles in order to adequately negotiate this re-shaping of social structure (p. 145), meaning that DNEAs are now confronted with the task of coordinating their behaviour and relationships across the blurred online-offline spaces of digital social technologies. This thesis proposes that DNEAs have developed practices that allow them to embrace context fluidly and with ease.

DNEAs are actively engaged with digital social technologies as part of their normative daily practices. As they adapt from being profile-centric to *social awareness streams*, which emphasise the sharing of content and other forms of networked sociality, networked individualism shifts to what boyd (2014) refers to as *networked publics*. Networked publics have become an integral part of the way in which DNEAs engage socially. Networked publics are publics that are restructured by digital social technologies. As boyd (2014) highlights, publics are social spaces that enable communities of individuals to gather together, connect and ‘hang out’. Like general publics, networked publics have similar competences, however they have different characteristics because they are public ‘both in the spatial sense and in the sense of an *imagined community*’ (boyd, 2014, p. 9), as they operate as social constructs across offline and online spaces that enable public visibility, and allow individuals to see themselves as part of broader communities. boyd (2014) suggests that, while individuals do still negotiate their social landscapes through congregations in physical locations, social media platforms are significant because they provide a public place for individuals to gather and socialise with their peers informally (p. 5). It is within networked publics that individuals create spaces for themselves that negotiate a variety of social and cultural factors, unrestricted by ties to physical locations.

As discussed earlier in Section 2.4, Andreas Wittel’s (2000) account of networked sociality is based on ‘potentiality’ and ‘temporality’ (p. 71), in that groups who gather and connect through networked publics are never fixed. The connections between individuals within these contexts are constantly shifting as they are continuously produced, reproduced and ‘consumed’ (p. 72). Certain contexts may privilege membership within a networked public to certain people, and in some cases, marginalise others (Hargittai, 2008, 2010; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). This research does not claim that its account applies to all DNEAs, rather it makes use of the concept of a networked public as a structure through

which to interpret the shifting temporalities and spatiality of digital social technologies—and questions how some DNEAs position themselves within this.

As described in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, this research investigates the digitally networked practices of a specific group of DNEAs based in Sydney, Australia, tracing the particular ecology of their networked public, through the use of ethnographic methods. It acknowledges that this may limit a more comprehensive account of groups that engage with networked publics. As explored in the following section, the collapsing contexts produced by these shifting networked social systems facilitate the emergence of new practices, in which contextual nodes—as resources—are exchanged between individuals as they negotiate networked publics and their contexts for self. The approaches employed in this research constitute networked publics as ethnographic field sites and provide an opportunity for further scholarship to apply these frameworks in future investigations of other networked publics.

2.5 Networked Publics: Ethnographic Sites

Networked publics offer researchers the circumstances to undertake ethnographic investigation. Scholarship argues that digital social technologies provide researchers the opportunity to undertake reflexive methodological approaches within digital ethnographic practices (Ardévol, 2012; Hine, 2000; Pink, 2007, 2012). However, there are a range of concerns around the methodological approaches used in this research, and the impact they may have on theoretical conclusions produced from an digital ethnographic approach including emphasising a specific technology, platform or media, and overstating the scope of the digital ethnography taking place. How do researchers make sense of networked publics as ethnographic field sites?

As outlined in Section 1.5.2, boyd (2014, p. 11) offers an analytical framework of four distinct ‘affordances’ that shape how individuals engage with networked publics which are: 1) *persistence*: the durability of online expressions and content; 2) *visibility*: the potential audience who can bear witness; 3) *spreadability*: the ease with which content can be shared; and 4) *searchability*: the ability to find content. This framework establishes an interpretative framework through

which the functions of, and subsequent interactions that individuals have with, digital social technologies can be analysed. As described in greater detail in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, boyd's categorisation of the functions of digital social technologies that 'afford' particular interactions within networked publics can be interpreted as material elements of practice. By understanding the functions of digital technologies as contextual elements, this research shifts away from technical descriptions of *specific* digital social technologies and instead examines them as elemental factors in the overall process of DNEA context creation. While boyd's research primarily focuses on teenage use of digital social technologies, her proposal is applicable at a much wider scale—networked publics are particularly relevant to DNEAs given the generational positioning of these individuals, and the normative use of digital social technologies in the daily lives of these individuals. As discussed in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.5, networked publics directly facilitate the freedoms, mobility and autonomy fundamental to the period of emerging adulthood.

The overall composition of a networked public is co-constructed by groups of individuals using available contextual elements to produce activities of practice that belong to specific networked publics. In this sense, networked publics operate as 'collectively imagined communities' (boyd, 2014, p. 10) in which gatherings of DNEAs are motivated to coordinate their identity performances as they produce a practice. Groups of individuals come together through shared skills and understandings about particular practices. When groups of individuals are unified through membership of a networked public, they work together to construct new realities for audiences to consider. To present this shared image of reality, individuals and collectives actively work towards the 'creation, maintenance and destruction of common understandings of reality' (Kivisto & Pittman, 2008, p. 272). Just as an actor in a play would use 'scripted dialogue, gestures, props, costumes and so on' (Kivisto & Pittman, 2008, p. 272) in their performance, individuals, working in *teams*, construct new realities for audiences to consider.

At the same time, networked publics are also spaces that facilitate DNEAs acting autonomously within them as they work towards creating their context for self. The actions of individual members play a crucial role in the ways in which networked publics are shaped and reshaped. Digital social technologies create context collapse where the audiences that an individual is

engaging with may be made up of large diverse audiences (Litt & Hargittai, 2016). Networked publics enable individuals to engage with multiple audiences concurrently. Moreover, the dynamism of networked publics actually *encourages* individuals to maintain diverse audiences. For example, digital social technologies have functions which enable social network ties to become visible, such as lists of friends or followers. The ‘articulated friendship links’ (boyd & Heer, 2006, p. 10) allow *known* audience members to be identified. However, the same functional elements of digital social technologies that allow visibility within networked publics also enable invisibility. Indeed, some audience members may engage with a networked public, yet not actively engage in producing content within a networked public, meaning that at the same time individuals have *known* audiences, they also have *unknown* audiences.

Each individual member of a networked public has their own imagined audience as they take part in networked publics. Sociologists Eden Litt and Eszter Hargittai (2016) examine the make-up of the imagined audiences individuals think about when they share content through digital social technologies. They identify two types of imagined audiences which individuals negotiate when posting on social network sites: *targeted audiences* and *abstract audiences*. In both cases, imagined audiences are constructed of a range of social ties, including personal, communal, professional and phantasmal ties, which are illusionary relationships, sometimes between famous people, animals and brands. Crucially, the audiences that DNEAs negotiate within networked publics are not fixed or stable.

Litt and Hargittai’s research suggests that individuals fluctuate their thinking among different audiences depending on their personal rationale for sharing content: ‘when users had an abstract imagined audience in mind, they at times were more focused on the act of self-presentation and their rationales for sharing content, rather than the receiving audience’ (2016, p. 7). This competes with scenarios where individuals did envision a target imagined audience when sharing content. Litt and Hargittai note that individuals ‘tended to have audience goals, and were more focused on an end-receiving audience’ (2016, p. 7). An individual’s identity performances are directly influenced by the type of audience they imagine they are constructing content for, whether that be targeted or abstract.

However, Litt and Hargittai's research into the imagined audiences of individuals highlights the difficulties of comprehending a nuanced and specified understanding of the audiences individuals may imagine at the moment of identity performance. Individuals may simply have a desire to share something with an abstracted imagined audience, suggesting that individuals may not specifically construct the content of their posts to target a specific audience. Litt and Hargittai's research participants, who were English speaking social media users 18 years old or older living in the United States, indicated through survey data that abstract imagined audiences were when they were not thinking of anyone specifically when they shared a post on social network sites. However, it could be argued that this may change through the process of consideration about their rationale for sharing and Litt and Hargittai do indicate the hazards of research in this space (2016, p. 7), when they highlight that some research participants' abstract imagined audiences shifted to targeted imagined audiences as they clarified for themselves their process, emphasising the fluidity of networked public contexts.

2.5.1 The Flow of Networked Publics

Networked publics are significant for this research because they operate in two crucial ways: firstly, they provide a framework for understanding how groups of DNEAs gather together and produce context; and secondly, they are fundamental to the ways in which individuals negotiate their own contexts for self. As this thesis proposes, contexts for self are located within networked publics. As dynamic spaces, networked publics directly facilitate engagement and sociality between DNEAs that assist in the production and reproduction of practice. Networked publics serve as a springboard from which DNEAs can conduct identity performances for their audiences and receive feedback about these performances and subsequently enable an individual to re-form their notion of themselves.

As explored in subsequent chapters, these identity performances, functioning as activities of practice, make visible the contextual elements that DNEAs employ in their context creation practice. Figure 2.1 illustrates the flow of networked publics. The identity performances DNEAs enact as outward expressions of self leave material evidence and visible traces for audience members to respond to, and potentially take up as contextual elements of their own practice. This process is circular: the feedback individuals receive on their identity

performances from the contextual elements of networked publics contributes to subsequent re-forming of an individual's context for self. Ongoing performances engender the addition of further contextual elements as contexts for self circulate. As contextual elements change, so does an individual's context for self. The dynamism and flexibility encourages DNEAs to become members of networked publics. As explored in the following chapter, Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, DNEAs are drawn to participate in networked publics as they move through their emerging adulthood. This thesis responds to the questions: *how are networked publics located and, importantly, how can researchers access networked publics?*

2.5.2 Hashtags: Sites of Production and Consumption

Hashtags are short keywords, prefixed with the hash symbol ('#'). While they were established originally on Twitter, their use spread across the spectrum of social network platforms including Instagram and they are now common across them. Hashtags make the content attached accessible to anyone with access to that tag. Importantly, hashtags work to coordinate 'distributed discussion between more or less large groups of users' (Bruns & Burgess, 2011, p. 1). As discussed in the previous section, networked publics have different characteristics from other publics in that they enable *persistence*, *visibility*, *spreadability* and *searchability* (boyd, 2014, p. 11). A hashtag, as apparatus of social network platforms, offers a way through which to identify these qualities within a networked public. Indeed, the 'publicness' of hashtags means they neither rely on, nor is their content restricted to, existing connections through *follower* networks. A hashtag's basic capacity is to create a connection between content and the users sharing that content, and enable others to access that content. Hashtags are an effective way of making networked publics visible and accessible and, as such, are effective at coordinating users from diverse networks.

Hashtags also offer increased methodological value in their meaning-making potential. Hashtags evoke particular forms of use, as Hochman (2014, p. 2) explains:

Words (such as tags) or numbers (such as location indication, or time) are not meant to explicate an image (as an indexical sign) but rather to group it with all other images that share data similarity.

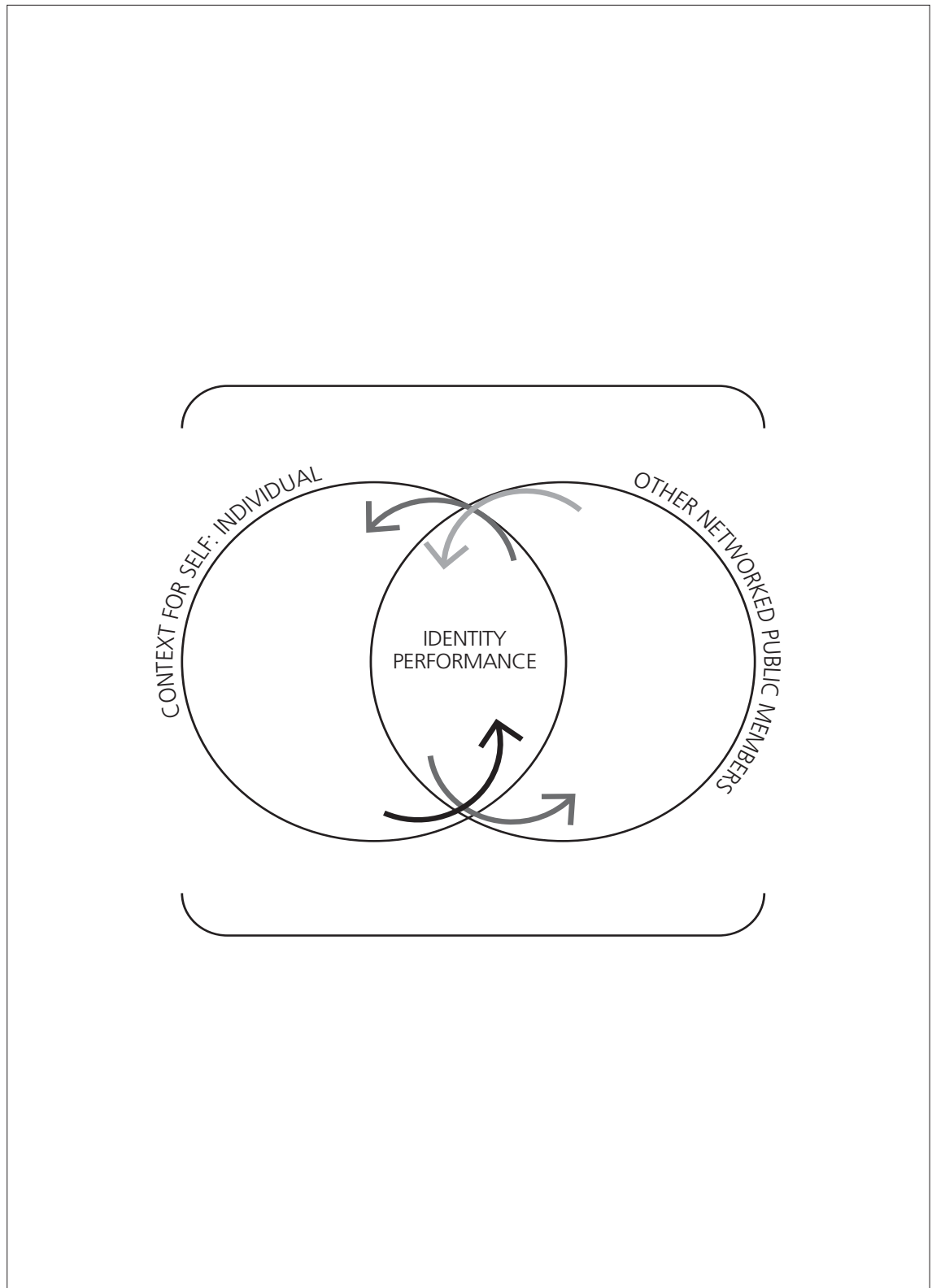


Figure 2.1: The flow of networked publics.

Instagram images are rich with metadata, including the username of the creator, the exact time the photo was taken and the exact location from where it was uploaded. This location is demarcated by longitude and latitude information that, when cross-referenced, ‘creates a unique dot on the world’s map’ (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012, p. 56). While this metadata can be tracked and publicly shared, geo-located photos can be collected, and there is significant value in capturing the content shared through a hashtag. For a hashtag to become identifiable, it should work to group content and images that share data similarity. This shared data similarity can be examined closely through qualitative methods. As Pink et al. (2016) highlight, if technologies are considered through the lens of digital ethnography, they are functional, and ‘they may be bought with a particular feature in mind, but may also serve other cultural purposes in appropriation’ (p. 63). In this sense, hashtags, as technological elements, serve this research functionally in the way they enable the production of networked publics and in the ways they provide access to the ethnographic aspects of digital social technologies.

In the context of this research, hashtags function within networked publics in two ways: as sites of production and sites of consumption. As explored further in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, the hashtag *#designerexplorer* was nominated by the researcher to be used by a group of DNEAs who were university students participating in their first year design camp at Cockatoo Island in May 2013. The hashtag facilitated the coordination of the Designer Explorer networked public during the period of the design camp through its ability to gather a diverse group of individuals together, in a networked context, through the production and consumption of content being distributed via the hashtag. The question now is: *How do we make sense of the digital visual content shared throughout the Designer Explorer project?*

2.5.3 Making Sense of Digital Content

Recently, Internet studies scholars Tim Highfield and Tama Leaver (2015) have expressed a need for expanded social media research methods ‘which more directly and consistently incorporate visual content, from collecting data from image sharing platforms to approaches to processing and analysing photographs, images, or videos’ (p. 2). Indeed, Pink (2012) argues that ‘doing Internet ethnography does not have to mean inventing new visual methods. It does

nevertheless involve working with a methodological approach that can encompass visualities, visions and ways of looking that are both online and offline' (pp. 127–128).

Manovich et al.'s *Selfie City* project (2013b) and Manovich et al.'s *The Exceptional & The Everyday: 144 hours in Kiev* (2014), both using Instagram images that had been shared publicly with geo-location attached from 17 to 22 February 2014, illustrate how social media data does not have to restrict itself to looking at large scale patterns, or to a society-scale understanding of interactions. Rather, a methodological approach of 'data ethnography' that combines 'distant reading' of patterns with a 'close reading' of specific artefacts can make the individual visible through focusing on the content of images, as opposed to only their visual characteristics (Hochman & Manovich, 2013, par. 4). Highfield and Leaver (2015, par. 7) attribute investigations like the Selfie City project as making headway into methodological approaches that configure both generalised analysis of large social media data sets against a deeper-level analysis of data where visualisation techniques are used to organise images by metadata and/or visual properties.

It is the emergence of multi-scaled readings of social media data from researchers who offer data analysis and interpretation processes that reveal new insights into digital social technology data. Manovich's 2015 *Phototrails* project (<http://phototrails.net/>) looks at large-scale data sets of Instagram photos, using data visualisation techniques to explore visual patterns, dynamics and structures in user-generated photos, illustrating the ways in which globally-shared media and metadata can be used to study patterns on multiple scales and further proposing social media as a tool for reading local social and cultural events (Hochman & Manovich, 2013, par. 4). Through Manovich's work, with each scaling down and constraining of data, there is a gradation and further defining of methodological approach, enabling an increasingly nuanced qualitative analysis.

One of the core problems identified by this research is the instability of context that occurs within networked publics. This affects not only the nature of the collection of images, but also the interpretation and analysis of specific images produced during the project. Returning to Pink (2007), who argues that archives of ethnographic material such as photographic images should be seen as collections of 'individual images with situated meanings' (p. 129),

this research asks how can digital ethnographers make sense of the digital content that is produced by varied individuals, while taking into consideration that networked publics are co-constructed contexts, both between members of networked publics, and also between participants and the researcher.

Previously visual ethnography has been able to convey the 'conventional photographic moment' (Pink, 2007). However, given that image production and image producing techniques are constructed and contextually specific, visual content produced through digital social technologies such as Instagram produces new photographic practices.

Hochman (2014) uses 'atomization' as a method for understanding and interpreting content shared on social network platforms. He suggests that researchers have shifted their analysis from simply making a semiotic interpretation of images (looking at an image from an external perspective in order to discover symbolic meaning) to grouping image content in meaningful ways that reveal 'connections, relations and patterns with other images in a collection' (par. 5). To examine the movement and circulation of the #designerexplorer Instagram images, this research explicates *atomization* as compositorial to describe the process that emerges from this practice.

In determining the processes of interpretation and analysis of specific images produced within this research specifically, the thesis draws on the scholarship of visual methods researcher Gillian Rose (2012). There are three core aspects of an image that can be examined: the site of its production, the site of the image itself, and then the site of the images' 'audiencing' (Rose, 2012, p. 40). This distillation provides many avenues for inspection and deeper-level analysis of visual content produced through digital social technologies. Rose's framework enables this research to examine the circulation and flow of context through positioning digital visual content from a range of perspectives and seeking ethnographic insight not just from the researcher's subjectivity, but also through further inquiry with the research participants themselves.

This research understands that content produced through Instagram is co-constructed and contextually specific. Interpreting the images produced through digital social technologies

requires an understanding that images have both social and technical meaning. In examining the hybridity between the technical and social, mobility and urban studies scholar Jonas Larsen (2008) sees digital photography practices as a 'technological complex with specific affordances *and* a set of embodied social practices or performances' and also 'mutually determining' (p. 143). This is made more compelling for this research specifically when Rose suggests that 'our use of images, our appreciation of certain kinds of imagery, performs a social function as well as an aesthetic one' as it says something about 'who we are and how we want to be seen' (Rose, 2012, p. 40). These perspectives are valuable to this research as it requires refined analytical frameworks that enable ethnographic readings that acknowledge the technological and sociological trajectories of digital social technologies concurrently. It also challenges the modes in which researchers analyse digital social technology content.

2.6 Conclusion

Digital social technologies do not exist as standalone entities that provide one-off spaces for single purposes; they are part of a complex temporal-spatial network of interactions. By empirically engaging with the content shared by individuals through digital social technologies and mining the contextual and situated information produced across different contexts, we can comprehend the mediated spaces that now make up the networked publics DNEAs engage with. As established in this chapter, recent research has argued that there is a fundamental shift in the way we understand physical space as a result of the proliferation and pervasiveness of mobile technologies in everyday lives. This has seen the boundaries between online and offline contexts blur in such a way that DNEAs must now alter their social practices as they consider their contexts of self.

Many scholars of digital natives discuss the significance for young adults of the convergence of the online and offline worlds. Considering this in the context of a DNEA context creation practice, DNEAs are responding to the functions of social technologies. Regardless of how a social network platform's architecture and interface may prompt or guide particular interactions from users, the people who use them are individuals with highly subjective and individual social media practices that are purpose-led towards their identity performances.

The functions of digital social technologies offer *potential* that can be taken up by DNEAs as *activities of practice*. The *possibilities* and *limitations* of digital social technologies are made explicit through their relation to other elements of practice, including competences and meanings, as explored in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance.

Digital social technologies afford new modes of interaction with our social worlds and result in a fundamental shift in our perceptions of the contexts in which we interact. DNEAs negotiate their identity performances among the activities of practice undertaken by their peers as they gather together in networked publics. The changing typologies of digital social technologies into networked spaces that blur the boundaries between online and offline spaces allow DNEAs to claim a sense of place, connectedness and, crucial to this research, provide an ideal platform for their identity experimentation. As DNEAs explore their contexts for self, they undertake identity performances that are supported by digital social technologies. DNEAs are agentic individuals in a symbiotic relationship within social systems in which individuals both produce and become products of their identity performances. Identity performances do not happen in isolation, they are bound by the sociality provided by networked publics, and it is within networked publics that an individual's context for self emerge. Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self describes the identity practices of DNEAs more comprehensively and formulates a picture of the participants engaged in this research project.

Chapter Three

Networked Publics: Contexts for Self

3.1 Introduction

This research specifically seeks to understand the ways in which DNEAs engage in networked publics to support the creation of their contexts for self and the subsequent identity performances they undertake. The research examines a group of DNEAs who are transitioning through their first year of study at an Australian university. They are a unique group due to the convergence of two significant factors: first, the generational positioning of the age group known as Generation-Z (Gen-Z) youth (Howe & Strauss, 2000); and second, emerging adulthood—the period of life-course that individuals experience as they move from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This thesis argues that the participants in this research belong to a sub-category population defined as digital native emerging adults (DNEAs). By examining research participants through the lens of this definition, and reflecting that this period of life is not defined by universal, immutable and prescriptive practices, we can see how emerging adults negotiate their identity performances as culturally constructed (Arnett, 2000, p. 470).

The research focused on DNEAs who were first year university students participating in Designer Explorer. This highly specific context focuses on the unique forces that impact the transition of individuals born into Gen-Z as they move towards adulthood. This research considers identity as a key concern of the digital realm and proposes that digital social technologies are complicit in the production of DNEA identities. As discussed in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, changing typologies of digital social technologies, that is, the formation of networked publics, are embraced by DNEAs in their context creation practice as they negotiate their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Existing scholarship suggests the prevalence of digital technologies throughout Gen-Z youth has a strong correlation with their identity performances. The experience of emerging

adulthood as a key period of identity formation is characterised by its 'high degree of demographic diversity and instability' (Arnett, 2000, p. 471), resulting in the emergence of multiple, temporally and spatially constructed young adult identities that are reflective of 'the emphasis on change and exploration that individuals experience during this period of life' (p. 471). Further scholarship has examined the roles of digital social technologies as part of self-presentation from a variety of perspectives: boyd (2007, 2008, 2014), Horst (2009), Horst and Hjorth (2013), Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011), Papacharissi (2011) and Zhao et al. (2008) have all examined the emerging contexts for researching identity and digital social technologies.

This research considers identity in two ways: first, identity creation is relational and socially bound; and second, identity performance is contextual and is a constantly shifting temporal-spatial construct. DNEAs experience significant shifts in their contexts as they transition through their emerging adulthood. These contextual moves, underscored by an impetus towards high identity levels of experimentation, and the fluid typologies of digital social technologies make it challenging to present DNEA identities as stabilised entities. Rather, as discussed in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, this research embraces the mutability and malleability of their contexts and suggests that the identity performances that DNEAs make are directly related to an ongoing and circular process of context creation. As introduced earlier, the nascent context of the merging relations of online and offline spaces creates new forms of social life. Emerging adult identity is shaped moment to moment by the networked publics DNEAs both engage with and create for themselves, meaning that the contexts for self of individuals are socially bound. The social relations that an individual has, whether these are relationships with relatives, close friends, peers and even strangers, act as a contributing contextual factor and influence how an individual sees themselves. DNEAs are inculcated into practices that engage the self as a product of the social contexts they are engaged with and identity is a manifestation of that product. Identity performances are directly situated around how DNEAs see themselves in relation to others.

As explored in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, this research does not create a biography of its individual participants; rather, it is the conditions that constitute a singularity

of personhood and enable identity performances to emerge that this research finds compelling. The intention of this research is not to define identity per se; rather, it asks: *what are the characteristics and specific circumstances of context creation by DNEAs that constitute identity performance?* and *how do contextual elements circulate within a context creation practice as DNEAs negotiate their contexts for self?*

The freedom of exploration enabled throughout emerging adulthood results in the emergence of multiple, temporally and spatially constructed young adult identities, reflective of the changing contexts emerging adults are situated in. Importantly for this research, it is the highly temporal and spatial contexts that digital social technologies provide that establish an ideal space to examine ongoing identity performance of DNEAs. The notion of the self is extrapolated through emphasising that an individual's context for self is not a stable entity, but a 'site of perception' through which a DNEA can view the world and act upon through their identity performances. The processes of identity performance are then presented. The venerable identity performance scholarship of Erving Goffman (1959) is used to disseminate digital social technologies and examine the presentation of the self more closely through the framework of networked publics. The chapter then moves to describe DNEAs and the particular theoretical circumstances which make these individuals worthy participants in ethnographic research, and places them within an Australian context.

3.2 Unfolding Identity and the Self

As DNEAs negotiate their autonomy through their emerging adulthood, they demonstrate identity exploration behaviours, adopting different roles, testing and trialling different aspects of self through the performance of different roles, based on expectation, conceptualisation or idealisation of what it means to be an 'adult'. What is unique about digital native emerging adulthood is its circulating, and ultimately fluid, contextual scenarios provided by digital social technologies that facilitate new practices around the production of contexts for self and the visible manifestations of them.

In establishing its theoretical foundation of identity performance, this research draws on the early identity creation scholarship of eminent sociologist Erving Goffman. In Goffman's

(1983) account of *symbolic interactionism* and *dramaturgical analysis* he examines the ways in which identity performance are directly bound to social structures through what he refers to as the *interaction order*. Goffman (1959) argued that the interactions that we have during identity performance give us a sense of our social belonging and in turn affect the ways in which we present ourselves publicly. Goffman expounds:

The self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (Goffman, 1959, pp. 252–253).

Goffman is at the core of this research, as the identity of DNEAs is a product of the particular contexts they are negotiating. Their emerging adulthood is infused with digital social technologies (almost unavoidably so). Consequently, they take up and integrate digital social technologies as part of their negotiation of their own contexts for self—they adopt and adapt these digital social technologies to suit their own purposes and goals. Furthermore, the social context of networked publics enforces new perspectives on the effect of digital social technologies on the lives of DNEAs. Moving beyond examining these technologies from a purely functional perspective, these new contexts of sociality lend themselves to an increasingly nuanced consideration of how these technologies are integrated by DNEAs into their lives as they work towards understanding self as they are transitioning through their emerging adulthood.

While, theoretically, an individual's identity is often seen by default as *uniqueness*, much of our identity creation is classified as 'belonging' or as a collective behaviour. As psychologist Rom Harré (1998, p. 6) points out, often a person's 'identity' is not the manifestation of that

individual as the singularity of a ‘unique person’, but rather identity, in the general sense, represents the group, class or type that an individual belongs to. When we conceive of a person as a singularity that person has ‘no attributes other than a position in time and space’ (Harré, 1998, p. 8) and it is through the coming together of an individual’s notion of self and their social world that an individual’s identity is created.

This research embraces contemporary identity scholarship from Harré and sociologists Peter Weinreich and Wendy Saunderson (2002), whose research approaches the analysis of identity as a way of accessing and understanding *selfhood* or *personhood*—expressed in this thesis as an individual’s context for self. Harré (1998) notes a sense of self is a ‘basic feature of human life’ (p. 8) and importantly the self should be understood, not as an entity, but rather ‘a site from which a person perceives the world and a place from which to act’ (p. 3). It is a sense of self that directly contributes to the ways DNEAs perform identity within networked publics.

The self is a complex artefact that can be considered from multiple perspectives, and indeed, selves are demarcated in several ways throughout existing scholarship. Harré (1998) classifies individuals as having three distinctions of self. Self 1 is the way an individual sees themselves and Self 2 is the way others see them, Self 3 emphasises the social aspects of self. Both always centre around the ‘display’ of identity to an audience, whether individuals are in dialogue with the audience or not. As described in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.4, some audiences may include strangers. These identity displays are also integrated with both conscious and unconscious understandings an individual has of themselves. While individuals work hard to create cohesive displays to their audiences, they can be disrupted by the unconscious influences of Self 2. As Harré (1998, pp. 92–93) notes, ‘a person’s beliefs about the attributes that he or she believes they are presenting are themselves attributes of that person, and so part of the Self 2. But in the actor’s self-concept they will be registered, for the most part, only as the persona he or she believes they are presenting’. However Harré (1998, pp. 92–93) notes that this understanding of themselves ‘may not be fully conscious or well articulated’. The ways in which an individual experiences their own performed identity differs from the ways others experience their presentations of self.

This research sees the self as an inherently social product that is produced and reproduced in response to a variety of contextual factors. Harré (1998) distinguishes a third self, Self 3, which emphasises the inherently social aspects of self. As individuals undertake identity performances through visible displays of identity, they speak and act out a persona as they intend others to see it. The audience, who then attribute a 'personality' or 'character' to the individual, interprets these displays. Self 3 is the embodied self, referring to the 'totalities of personal impression we make on other people' (Harré, 1998, p. 5). For Weinreich and Saunderson (2002), the self, or *personhood* as they describe it, is comprised of three aspects, 'the *singular agentic*, the *reflective* and the *publicly expressive*' (p. 34), in which individuals reflexively engage with their sense of self and their identity performances. Zhao et al. (2008) present an individualistic perspective that locates selves as orientated towards an individual's audience. They suggest that when individuals *display* their identity they are making 'identity claims' that negotiate their *true selves*, *real selves* and *hoped-for-possible selves* to others (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1832). This suggests a goal-orientated approach to identity creation by individuals.

While Harré's scholarship deals more precisely in the semantics of three distinct notions of self and their differentiating characteristics, these conceptions do contribute extensively to understanding selfhood in the context of the individual and the social. Harré (1998) notes that our selfhood is largely relational and in flux as our social and material environments shift and change: 'One's attitudes, for example, are rarely a stable configuration of dispositions, but appear now in one form and now another' (p. 7) and will change as individuals move into different contexts and engage with different people. Borrowing from Apter (1989, p. 75), Harré interprets displays of personhood as expressing 'a sense of personal *distinctness*, a sense of personal *continuity*, and a sense of personal *autonomy*' (1998, p. 6).

This proposal is also supported by Zhao et al. (2008) who see identity not as an 'individual characteristic' or an 'expression of something innate in a person' (p. 1831). Zhao et al. (2008) propose that an individual's identity is a social product that is the 'outcome of a given social environment and hence performed differently in varying contexts' (p. 1832). As this research emphasises, it is the contextual elements available to individuals that contribute to their contexts for self, and subsequently contribute to contextually-specific identity performances.

These scholarly demarcations of identity are aligned through the concept that, while an individual's self is distinct from a fixed impression of an individual's identity, an individual's identity performances and outward manifestations of self are inextricably tied to an individual's internal context for self. As explored in Section 3.4, DNEA identity is a temporal construct that is continuously worked at through visible performances of identity that are orientated around an individual's own context for self. Harré describes an individual's self as being constructed by 'evanescent properties of the flow of public and private action' (1998, p. 68). As described in Sections 3.2 and 3.4, it is these flows of actions that this research is interested in. Harré (1998) describes the coming together of flows as a singularity, where as individuals' selfhood shifts and changes through patterns of 'modulating dispositions and powers, coupled moment by moment to ephemeral manifestations of those powers in public and private action' (p. 8), a DNEA's context for self is perpetually shaped by the contexts they are exposed to, continuously evolving as individuals adapt to the contexts they are engaging with.

As explored in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, DNEAs create contextual ecologies made up of contextual elements drawn from the locational, material, situational and social contexts they are part of. These contextual ecologies are both malleable and mutable and shift as the contexts of individual DNEAs change. Because the contexts for self formulation by individuals are bound to these contextual ecologies they are subject to the same forces of change, making it a challenging context to research, particularly at an individual level.

Theoretically, this research is interested in the practices that DNEAs use in the creation of their contexts for self. This research proposes that their context for self acts as a 'site of perception' (Harré, 1998, p. 8) through which a DNEA can view the world, and act upon this through their identity performances. By treating contexts for self as malleable contexts that are positioned within circulating flows of action, the research's emphasis lies not on each individual's context for self, but rather it identifies the elements and activities that DNEAs undertake in their context creation practice.

3.3 Identity Performance

This research does not define identity and the self as fixed; rather, it sees DNEA identity as a temporal construct that is continuously worked at through a performance process orientated around an individual's context for self. As explored in the following sections, DNEAs construct their contexts for self within networked publics that facilitate processes of experimental identity performance and feedback from audiences which contribute contextual elements to an individual's context for self, and subsequent ongoing identity performances. As discussed in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, performances are constructed through knowledge and understandings DNEAs have about their context creation practice.

Within Goffman's dramaturgical approach to understanding the *presentation of self* (1959, 1983) and the ways in which individuals express themselves publicly through the performance of identity, he argues that every individual presents two different kinds of sign activity: 'the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*' (1959, p. 2). This is not unlike Harré's previously described 'identity displays' (1998, p. 6). The signs we *give* are typically verbal, and the signs we *give off* are the non-verbal cues that situate and verify the things we say. Individuals express identity through a multiplicity of co-existing signs and an individual's identity is an *outcome* of the arrangement of these signs. In the context of this research, Goffman's ideas emphasise the ways in which DNEAs draw contextual elements, or in the language of Goffman 'co-existing signs', together in order to make identity performances visible within networked publics.

Goffman's theories made visible the idea that an individual's identity could be perceived as a temporal and spatial experience, marked by the *roles* that individuals take up in their relationships and engagements with others. Using the metaphor of the theatre, Goffman analysed the relationship between performance and life. As in theatrical performances, in social interactions individuals are situated in different regions, described by Goffman as the front region (onstage) and the back region (offstage) in which certain sign-systems are used in *performing the self* to an *audience*.

Goffman viewed these regions as places where characters are enacted. When in the ‘front region’, in front of an audience, the positive aspect of the idea of self and the desired impression are highlighted, while the ‘back region’ is considered a hidden or private place where individuals can be ‘themselves’ and get rid of their role or identity in society. However, the back region ‘where the more authentic self resides’ (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 307) acts as a place ‘where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 113). It is here that individuals act differently, and sometimes in contradictory ways, to the front region, where their own motivations, goals, and beliefs might differ from what is socially expected or acceptable of them. They present an idealised self in the front region. In negotiating the interplay between front and back regions, individuals carefully control access to the back region.

As individuals contribute to performances, they take up roles that they use when they perform a ‘part’ or ‘routine’ of a performance where the personal front is managed by prevailing standards and rules of the particular contexts they are situated within (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). Bolstering Goffman’s theories, Internet sociologist Katherine Walker, in her study of the presentation of self on Internet home pages (2000), explains *role* as generally referring to ‘expectations surrounding a given status, or to the patterns of behaviour associated with incumbents of that status’, and as such, ‘people assume knowledge of that person’s identity’ (p. 102). Furthermore, a role encompasses ‘not just the expectations of others but also a reflexive element; an actor uses his or her imagined performance of a role as a basis for constructing identity’ (Walker, 2000, p. 102).

The core argument of this research is that DNEAs who are situated within networked publics undertake a specific context creation practice that draws together contextual elements into context ecologies that help situate an individual’s context for self. The imagined and perceived social positioning of themselves influences the roles that individuals devise for themselves in the back stage. This positioning is informed by the locational, material, situational and social contexts of each individual, as well as their desired and idealised self. As Walker (2000, p. 102) highlights from McCall and Simmons (1978, p. 65), individuals intuitively create imaginative views of themselves, in which they like to think of themselves being and acting as an occupant of that position (p. 65).

Networked publics provide a platform through which DNEAs can undertake identity performances. As established in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, DNEAs negotiate multiple and diverse audiences through networked publics, making their context for self an incredibly complex process of negotiation for an individual. This research emphasises that a DNEA's context for self is in a constant state of flux as they negotiate networked publics and a DNEA's notion of themselves cannot be distinguished from the social context in which it exists. DNEAs work towards establishing 'socially desirable' impressions for their audiences and carefully *shape* their identity to incorporate new ideas about how they want to be perceived (Zhao et al., 2008 p. 1832). Palfrey and Gasser (2008, p. 32) highlight that digital native identity creation is constructed within a feedback loop, where online expressions of identity reflect an individual's perception of their own identity and are simultaneously influenced by an individual's perception of how others think of them. As detailed in Section 3.6, networked publics provide the ideal context to examine these behaviours.

The front region maintains different kinds of behaviour from those of the back region; when in the front region, individuals execute what Goffman refers to as *decorum*, where the personal front is managed by prevailing standards and rules of particular contexts. As Goffman (1959, p. 121) highlights, the moment in which an individual moves between the front and back stages can be the most revealing. For this research, it is this moment that provides further insight into the particular proficiencies DNEAs have for context collapse. The continued presence of an audience allows individuals to undertake a process of *impression management* as they conduct visible identity performances in the front stage, where they can adjust their behaviour and selectively give and give off details to suit their own purposes and goals. Within an identity performance, individuals participate in interactions, or 'encounters' as Goffman describes them, with others, who contribute to the performance as audience members, observers or co-participants.

The expression of self is an inherently social process that involves circulating public proclamations of identity from individuals, which, as noted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5.1, are then endorsed by members of an individual's audience through feedback. An identity is established when these proclamations and endorsements coincide with each other. As DNEAs negotiate their contexts for self within the contextual ecologies in which

they are situated, they look to role models, such as ‘family, teachers, colleagues, supervisors and peers’ (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 12) for prompts and endorsements about their identity performances. These endorsements provide DNEAs with affirmation about their contexts for self and contribute to the ongoing reproduction of practice, as discussed in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance. The next section describes identity performance processes more specifically as they relate to networked publics and digital social technologies.

3.4 Networked Publics, Identity Performances and Contexts for Self

The malleable contexts of networked publics, supported by functions of digital social technologies, enable a range of interactions and relations between individuals both within specific networks and across networks. This section highlights how identity performances are configured within networked publics and establishes a foundation for further discussion in the following chapter, Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.5.

The identity performances that DNEAs undertake within networked publics function in two ways: firstly, as a manifestation of an individual’s context for self; and secondly, as an activity of practice that other members of networked publics can respond to.

Figure 3.1 describes the ways in which identity performances flow within networked publics. Building on Figure 2.1, it applies Goffman’s front and back stage regions to a networked public framework. As described previously, Goffman viewed these regions as places where individuals enact different, and sometimes contradictory, characters. As DNEAs operate within networked publics, it is in the front stage where they take up roles and produce visible identity performances for their audiences. The roles that individuals devise for themselves are influenced by the imagined and perceived social positioning of themselves, informed by the contexts of individuals.

Contextual elements are drawn from the interlinked locational, material, situational and social contexts that DNEAs are part of, and formulate contextual ecologies. The entwining of these contexts results in what this research refers to as contexts for self—a malleable, mutable entity that is positioned as a dynamic part of DNEA identity performance. The blurring boundaries between online and offline contexts means that DNEAs undertake identity performances that are intertwined across medium and method of production and are indiscriminate in the ways in which they are organised—that is, the functions of digital social technologies allow for variegated modes of identity performance and DNEAs adopt and adapt these functions to suit their own purposes and goals. As boyd (2015) notes in her scholarship about teenage use of social network sites, ‘given their situation, values, and knowledge, they engage with technology in ways that makes sense to them’ (p. 11), a notion that can easily be extended and applied to DNEAs.

The roles that DNEAs take up in their identity performances are subject to impression management tactics that are a response to an individual’s context for self, that is, their desired and idealised self. As such, it is only through a process of engagement and sociality that a context for self can be created. As these contextual elements change, so does an individual’s context for self. Individuals harness the mutability of these contexts to establish specific contexts for self from which to locate their identity performance. In front of an audience, the positive aspect of the idea of self and the desired impression are highlighted, while the ‘back region’ is considered a hidden or private place where individuals can be ‘themselves’ and get rid of their role or identity in society. It is in the back region that individuals negotiate their contexts for self and therefore they present an idealised self in the front region.

For DNEAs, the use of digital social technologies to undertake identity performances is a normative experience. DNEAs make use of the functions of digital social technologies in relatively normative ways, challenging the perception within digital native scholarship that they have greater insight and proficiencies about the use of social network platforms than other populations. While being networked is a given for DNEAs, the identity performances seen in digital contexts are not mediated copies of ‘offline’ identities. It is simplistic to interpret online identity performances as a straightforward process of translation. As boyd (2008) explains, ‘the offline is not simply the “back stage” to the mediated “front stage”’ (p. 53).

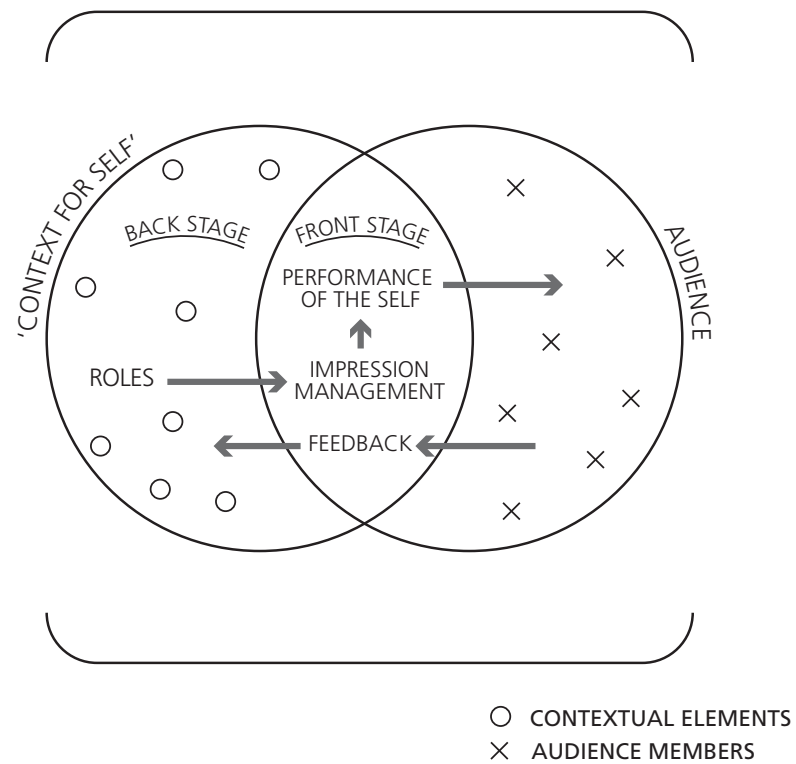


Figure 3.1: Identity performance within networked publics.

Networked publics provide DNEAs with contextually diverse platforms through which DNEAs can undertake identity performances. As noted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, the changing typologies of digital social technologies promote routine forms of communication that are not homogenous across users and, as such, DNEAs are subjectively purposeful in the way they use them. They make reasonable decisions and choices about their own use of digital social technologies. As explored in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, the skills and proficiencies that DNEAs gain through using digital social technologies are not universal—not all individuals use platforms in the same way and they have ‘differing levels of investment’ (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 129) towards participation.

DNEAs undertake identity performances through digital social technologies by the creation of a user profile as a representation of themselves. A user profile is a visual display of personal data, demographic descriptors such as age, sex, location, ‘interests’ and ‘about me’ sections, multimedia content and the addition of applications or plug-ins—created in a process where an individual can literally ‘type oneself into being’ (Sundén, 2003, p. 3). Through their social network profile, individuals undertake identity performances by sharing pictures of themselves and their friends, articulating their friendship links and engaging with others’ profile content through ‘likes’ and comments. As Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) note, these identity performances work simultaneously to promote connection with others and express uniqueness of identity (p. 253).

When DNEAs experiment with identity performances in networked publics, they are ‘recreating or amplifying aspects of their real-space identities’ (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, pp. 34–35). The identity performances made visible within networked publics are not separated from offline processes of identity production, rather DNEAs’ identities cross the temporal-spatial bounds of online and offline spaces. As Palfrey and Gasser (2008, p. 4) note, individuals have a singular identity that is represented across multiple spaces and linked through an array of practices:

... including the amount of time they spend using digital technologies, their tendency to multitask, their tendency to express themselves and relate to one another in ways mediated by digital technologies, and their pattern of using the

technologies to access and use information and create new knowledge and art forms (2008, p. 4).

This proposition crosses spatially bounded notions of identity in suggesting that digital natives try out different aspects of identity in experimental ways, both online and offline (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 22). As boyd and Ellison (2013) note, social media users are both consumers and creators of publicly accessible information. Though this is not exclusive to digital native populations, as Palfrey and Gasser (2008) note, DNEAs undertake ‘intentional digital contributions to identity’ conducted within the public forum of networked publics (p. 23). Palfrey and Gasser propose that DNEAs may exhibit different usage behaviours from those seen in previous generations due to differing values and ideals around privacy, publicity and sociality that are supported by the changing typologies of digital social technologies. As opposed to the emerging adult populations that have come before, DNEAs undertake more experimentation and reinvention of identities, simultaneously and multi-modally (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, pp. 20–21) as made possible through the flows of networked publics. As boyd and Ellison (2013, p. 154) highlight:

Over time, the profile has shifted from a self-presentational message created by the individual to a portrait of an individual as an expression of action, a node in a series of groups, and a repository of self- and other-provided data.

Within a digitally-mediated world, an identity is perceived to be contained within information, and that the body of information that individuals share through digital social technologies works towards building a cohesive identity that crosses temporal and spatial bounds. When individuals undertake identity performances through digital social technologies, such as online profile creation activities, they are actively placing themselves ‘inside a vast web of information in a manner that is not readily available in casual face-to-face interaction’ (Walker, 2000, p. 104).

When Goffman (1959) uses the term *performance*, he is referring to ‘all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (p. 15). In the context of networked publics, this expresses the ways in which

individual members can contribute to the overall cohesiveness of the public. The acceptable identity performance behaviours belonging to a networked public are collectively constructed by the members of the networked public and are determined through the values and norms that are shared across populations and smaller groups. As explored in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, Section 5.7, DNEAs operating within networked publics work together to present a unified group identity to represent the networked public, through producing visual typologies, phraseologies and other modes of cohesion across the networked publics they are part of.

As described throughout this research, identity performances are always a social process and context collapse is a significant factor in the ways in which DNEAs produce their identity performances through digital social technologies. Because DNEAs can belong to a variety of networked publics at any one time, each of them housing a range of diverse audiences, individuals must negotiate their context for self through the use of complex arrays of public and private actions. While digital social technology platforms are spaces in which DNEAs can build their networked connections, the platforms themselves do not determine how emerging networks are constructed; rather, emerging adults establish and maintain their emerging and existing networks in response to their own social purposes. As boyd (2014) astutely identifies in her research, context collapse is not accidental: contexts ‘collapse because individuals have a different sense of where the boundaries exist and how their decisions affect others’ (p. 49).

Scholarship has highlighted that individuals, aware of the blurring boundaries between audiences, target their performances through *crafted identity statements* when engaging in online environments (Walker, 2000, p. 99). Moreover, they may create multiple online profiles to cater to a range of audiences. As Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) point out, this is ‘not unlike how we present different versions of ourselves in face-to-face contexts’ (p. 252). However, networked publics take this process one step further because they make possible further sophistication of these crafted identity statements.

As noted previously, when DNEAs engage in networked publics, they negotiate context collapse where they engage with multiple diverse audiences concurrently. The functions of digital social technologies provide DNEAs with the tools to create synchronous identity

performances that target multiple audiences at one time. Zhao et al. (2008) highlight the social network platform Facebook, which contains multiple audiences that individuals need to cater to, has the functional capabilities in its privacy settings to enable users to 'partition' their Facebook profile pages into many different back and front regions, 'staging different identity shows for different audiences' (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1832).

This notion directly challenges understandings about the interplay between the front stage and back stage regions of the self, and the ways in which individuals move between the two. The multitudinous partitioning of front and back regions suggests that as networked publics develop, the front and back regions are more tightly woven than ever. As Papacharissi (2011) proposes, digital social technology platforms 'expand the *expressive equipment* at hand', which potentially enables individuals greater control between the two, and subsequently, what is presented and what is reserved by individuals (p. 307). This notion is supported by Horst and Hjorth (2013) who put forward the idea that, in our epochal culture of networked publics, the boundaries between an individual's public and private presentations of self are increasingly blurred (p. 93).

As noted in Section 3.3, Zhao et al. (2008) present the notion of 'hoped-for possible selves' and 'socially desirable selves' (p. 1832) that individuals present to others. The authors suggest that the identities that individuals present through online mediums may not be fully established offline or 'norm-confirming', but they emphasise identities are performative in the sense they are intentional acts to convince audiences what to think of us. Zhao et al. (2008) propose that 'it matters not whether that happens online or offline', nor whether the acts are 'anti-normative or socially desirable' (p. 1832). For DNEAs this flexibility is crucial because it allows individuals to undertake experimental identity performances.

One of the aspects explored in this research is the tension that occurs between perception and reality of context and the implications this has for ethnographic insights. But there are limitations to this approach. The research findings of Zhao et al. (2008) challenge a theoretical distinction between 'real selves' and 'virtual selves', or 'true selves' and 'false selves', noting the often-dichotomous perspective of 'virtual selves' as online entities and 'real selves' as offline selves that imply greater authenticity. However, as Zhao et al. (2008) propose, the identities that

individuals create on Facebook are ‘clearly real in the sense that they have real consequences for the lives of the individuals who constructed them’ (p. 1832). This is significant because images, Instagram content in particular, are increasingly recognised as significant visual representations of reality, while some (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012) argue that Instagram images and other visual content shared and viewed through digital social technologies are a distorted version of reality.

The ‘distorted’ or filtered images that arise in networked contexts offer insights into individual identity performances and should therefore be considered ‘reality’; while images need to be interpreted, images are ‘always someone’s authentic version of reality’ (Warfield, 2014, 11:08) because they are always authored by someone. As a visual platform, Instagram content can portray an individual’s reality very persuasively. In her presentation, Warfield suggests that this persuasiveness exists because we can understand and interpret images because they look much like the reality we see, and ‘it plays in the realms in the representations of reality and therefore what we deem to be truth’ (Warfield, 2014, 6:56).

As Rettberg (2014, p. 13) notes, when we encounter others through social network sites, we see both content and *texts*: ‘from our perspective their self-expression is self-representation’. Furthermore, when we share content through digital social technologies, ‘we primarily see the social communication we are engaging in, rather than the text of their and our own self-representations’ (Rettberg, 2014, p. 13). In other words, our inherent interpretation of others is of writers of texts of online self-expression, such as selfies, which in turn illustrate self-representations, or as Warfield (2014) interprets:

words also play in the realm of the representation of reality [...] words quite obviously are stand-ins for reality. They are these curvy symbols that represent something out there, but words look like nothing like the reality that is out there. The letters C-A-T bear no physical resemblance to this four legged fluffy thing that exists out there in the world. Words by their very nature remind us of the subjectivity of copies (Warfield, 2014, 7:01).

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) highlight two paradoxes that arise in this context. The first paradox is that while individuals may have the ability to adjust their social identity with ease, they have far less ability to control how others perceive their identity. As Walker (2000) discusses in her investigation of presentations of self on internet home pages, while individuals who had built a home page doubted that their page could fully represent their identity, 'the very existence of a homepage implied an identity statement' (p. 109), suggesting that they believed audiences 'could and would form impressions, no matter what (the creator's) intent' (p. 109).

The second paradox, as Palfrey and Gasser point out, is that individuals can 'create multiple identities online with ease' (2011, p. 34), DNEAs are 'more bound to a single identity than ever before' (p. 34) because of the impact of context collapse and other contributing factors from networked publics, such as *persistence*, *visibility*, *spreadability* and *searchability* (boyd, 2014, p. 11). This research proposes that DNEAs combat these paradoxes through demonstrating their proficiencies in negotiating collapsed contexts and creating contexts for self to present a cohesive identity that crosses temporal and spatial bounds. This research embraces the mutability and malleability of networked publics and the impact that these may have on the context creation practice of DNEAs.

3.5 Digital Native Emerging Adults and Networked Publics

The term *digital native emerging adult* is used in a precise manner throughout this research. As such, there are two issues at stake that are investigated in this section. The first is the constitution of 'emerging adult' as a specific developmental period; the second is the interpretation of generational delineations, particularly in the way in which this research applies the term 'digital native' to the participants involved in the research.

For young people, the period post-adolescence is a key period of identity formation characterised by its 'high degree of demographic diversity and instability' (Arnett, 2000, p. 471) and is emphasised by its transience and flexibility in trajectories for identity. Arnett (2000) proposes that the heterogeneity of this developmental period makes emerging adulthood a particularly 'rich, complex, dynamic period of life to study' (p. 477). Historically, there has been tendency to prioritise this period as purely transitory, in which young people

are working towards full adulthood by way of various markers of transition, suggesting that this experience is a prescriptive process that is homogenous across all young people. Wyn and Woodman (2006) critique the established transition concept that the Baby Boomer generation has become the 'implicit norm' in which the 'transitions of this generation (from school to work, leaving home, establishing nuclear families) has become the standard timeline against which subsequent generations are judged' (p. 498). However, as Wyn and Woodman (2006) note, 'changes in labour markets, in the relationship between education and employment and in workplace relations, and in the actions of the state, have altered the significance of the traditional "markers" of adult status in industrialised countries' (p. 500).

In 2000, human development psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett proposed a theory of *emerging adulthood*. Defined as the space between adolescence and young adulthood, delineating the period of development from the late teens through to the early twenties (with a focus on ages 18 to 25), emerging adulthood can be seen as a heterogeneous period of life with few normative constraints. For young people moving through period, they are at a stage of life that calls for the exploration of identity through trying out life possibilities and 'moving toward making enduring decisions' about their livelihoods (Arnett, 2000, p. 473). It is during this period as teenagers move towards adulthood they experience great shifts in their worldview, socially and culturally. These shifts are amalgamated with increased autonomy in social roles and the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, encouraging emerging adults to 'explore a variety of possible directions in love, work, and world views' (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

Enduring life decisions could include (but are not limited to) marriage, co-habitation with a partner and parenthood. While the birth of a child and marriage are clear examples of what Arnett (2000) would refer to as 'enduring decisions' (p. 473), they do not account for the subjectivity of the transition experience, nor can age delineations accurately account for this transition. For emerging adults, rather than defining this period by demographic transitions, their subjective sense of attaining adulthood is marked by individualistic qualities of character (Arnett, 1998, p. 296). Arnett emphasises accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions and becoming financially independent as being the most predominant markers of adulthood (Arnett, 2000, p. 473). However, these are characteristics that can only

be measured subjectively, as emerging adulthood identity explorations take place at varying paces and to different degrees (Arnett, 2000, p. 477).

Recent scholarship has responded to these changing conditions by reshaping the way transitions and youth cultures are conceptualised. Now, the ambiguity of the period between adolescence and adulthood has been embraced by scholars as both empirically and theoretically distinct from that of other developmental periods. Furlong et al. (2011) propose a 'social generation' approach that moves beyond a standardised conception of life course (p. 361), in which individuals move into adulthood through a linear progression of developmental stages, from immaturity to maturity, through a set of standardised and homogenous 'markers' of adulthood (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Furlong et al. (2011) suggest that groups of people who group up at a particular point in time may share a set of formative experiences and develop a unique consciousness, through common modes of behaviour, feeling and thought (2011, p. 361)—a generational understanding.

Emerging adults 'tend to have a wider scope of possible activities than persons in other age periods because they are less likely to be constrained by role requirements, and this makes their demographic status unpredictable' (Arnett, 2000, p. 471). These enduring decisions are influenced by the relationships an emerging adult has and their professional trajectory, such as participating in higher education, which are both contexts that foster differing forms of identity exploration. This is due in part to the wide scope of individual volition that exists due to increased freedoms and activities available to emerging adults compared to individuals in other age periods—say for example, in middle age—because emerging adults are less likely to be constrained by the role requirements and adult responsibilities (Arnett, 2000, p. 471). As Arnett suggests in his research, emerging adulthood is becoming an increasingly prolonged period of exploration and freedom for young adults (2000, p. 479) and is worth further examination and analysis, particularly in response to the shifting generational conditions experienced by individuals born after 1990.

Australian youth studies scholars Johanna Wyn and Daniel Woodman (2006) take into account the need to more carefully examine the subjectivities of individuals during this phase of life. Wyn and Woodman (2006) advocate that 'the meaning of generation needs to

be distinguished from a definition of generation as simply a succession of birth cohorts' (p. 501), expressing that the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that populations experience have a far greater significance than demographic factors such as age (p. 499). For Wyn and Woodman (2006), the experience of age is directly shaped by the social conditions that individuals are immersed within, and vice versa, they also contribute to its meaning (p. 497). Furlong et al. (2011) also note that taking into account 'the longer-term expressions of cultures in the context of social conditions offers the possibility of gaining a rich understanding of social change' (p. 366). For this research, this means examining the social conditions and circumstances particular to the individuals involved in the Designer Explorer project.

The young Australians of today are growing up in a world significantly different to the generations that have come before. As Wyn and Woodman (2006) note, 'the social milieu of contemporary Australia requires young people to put more and more resources both into building a (future) life and also put time and resources into engaging in experiential and embodied experience in the present' (p. 510). Wyn and Woodman explore the ways in which young Australians make sense of their lives through what they describe as the 'new adulthood' experience, and identify three salient aspects that embrace this: 'responsibility and choice, personal relationships, and finding a balance in life' (2006, p. 507). For young Australians working towards the autonomy of adulthood, balancing the temporalities of being and becoming are a highly valued part of emerging adult wellbeing (Woodman, 2004, p. 86).

As described in more detail in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, Section 5.2, the lack of normative demographic constraints (Rindfuss, 1991; Wallace, 1995 in Arnett, 2000, p. 471) and the increased pervasiveness of mobile internet access (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2015) together with changed social, cultural and political contexts for young Australians make researching this area worthwhile because it challenges scholars to investigate this critical life period from alternative perspectives. As Furlong et al. (2011) note in their scholarship 'the experiences of young people have become individualized, young lives are being lived out in contexts that are more mixed and demand new forms of reflexive engagement with the social world' (p. 357). The question now is, who are *digital native* emerging adults?

Gen-Y and Gen-Z are often used interchangeably to describe ‘digital natives’, ‘millennials’ and ‘the net generation’. While there is no clear definition for the explicit year delineation between Gen-Y and Gen-Z, or the emergence of digital natives, scholars usually arrive at somewhere between 1980 and the late 1990s. This research classifies Gen-Z occupants as those born after 1990. As discussed in the following paragraphs, this research involves individuals born during the mid-1990s, though other references refer to digital natives as those ‘born after 1980’ (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011) or Generation-Y (Gen-Y).

Gen-Z occupants are considered distinct from other generations as the pervasiveness of digital technologies throughout their lives means they are the first generation *not* to experience a ‘clear difference between offline and online’ (Floridi, 2007, p. 62). Early scholarship around these individuals, also referred to as ‘millennials’ or the ‘net generation’ (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Tapscott, 1998), suggests that their life-long exposure to digital technologies has led to a ‘singularity’ in which technological ubiquity led to a shift in brain structure, enabling these young people to ‘think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors’ (Prensky, 2001a).

Prensky (2001a) suggests that this shift enables individuals in this generation, or ‘digital natives’, as he refers to them, to have both higher aptitudes of technological capability, and motivations for use. In his widely-cited 2001 essay ‘Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants’ (Prensky, 2001a, reprinted as Prensky, 2012 which is used for citing direct quotations), Prensky suggested that the ‘students of today are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet’ (2012, p. 69). Prensky (2001b) even goes as far as to suggest that neuroplasticity and psychological malleability have given rise to a generation of individuals who are more adept than other generations in their use of digital technologies.

While this is a well-justified argument by Prensky (2001b), particularly if interpreted within educational contexts, these ideas are both concerning and problematic in the way they assume that young adults are tethered to their devices. It suggests both the technologies themselves, and their users, are homogenised, creating generalised and universal groups of users with the same capabilities and skills, attitudes and common practices. While it is clear that some, though not all, young people are using digital technologies in ways that are changing how

they both learn and relate to each other, it cannot be assumed that their brain structure is adapting in response to digital technologies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self, the convergence of social realms that result from networked publics promotes a variety of different identity performances within activities of practice.

While Prensky's digital native proposal was contemporary for 2001, it was heavily critiqued by later scholars (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Hargittai, 2010; Ito et al., 2010). Prensky's proposal does have some merit; in particular the ways in which it works towards establishing a more nuanced delineation of who digital natives were, as distinct from those who were not (i.e. 'millennials' or 'digital immigrants' (Prensky, 2001a). However, since Prensky's seminal essay, scholars have worked to deconstruct the term digital native, suggesting that this perspective does not account for the nuances in skill that emerge across a spectrum of socio-economic, education, cultural and subjective circumstances.

Palfrey and Gasser (2011) cite the global digital divide and access to digital technologies as problem-factors in the ways in which digital technologies are often generalised about, particularly on the effects on young people who use digital technologies. An idea that is reinforced by Hargittai and Hinnant (2008), Hargittai (2010) and Bennett et al. (2008, p. 779) when they suggest that there may be as much variation within the generation as between generations. For Hargittai and Hinnant, the conversation shifts to one of participation practices and how, for young people, digital literacy cannot be assumed as a given simply because they have access to digital technologies and the Internet.

Hargittai's (2010) empirical investigation into the 'differentiated Internet uses' among a group of 'highly wired young adults' (p. 93) demonstrated that digital inequalities exist even among individuals who could be perceived as being demographically similar. Hargittai's research was based on a population of young adults of a similar age, with equal levels of education in their first year of college at an urban American university (2010, p. 97). Findings suggest that for youth, their online skills are impacted greatly by the nature and quality of use of the Web, as well as a variety of social conditions—more time online enables individuals to familiarise

themselves with an increasing number of features of the medium. However, as Hargittai and Hinnant (2008) highlight, 'access and ability are two disparate issues within the digital divide' (p. 605).

In response to scholarly discourse, rather than withdraw from defining youth so firmly, Palfrey and Gasser (2011) propose the term 'digital native' can be a worthy classifier if used in a less reductionist and technologically deterministic way as they clarify that they mean it to describe a '*subset* of young people exhibiting certain *practices* that are potentially very sophisticated, rather than arguing for a *generation* all acting and thinking identically' (2011, p. 188). Furthermore, they make the salient point that defining digital natives as anyone born after 1980 is arbitrary and that digital natives should be understood as a *population* rather than a *generation* (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 14), which this research embraces.

Palfrey and Gasser (2011) identify that to be considered as part of this population digital natives should meet three criteria: first, they 'were born after the advent of digitally mediated social technologies [...] and that they did not know a world in which these types of online social media did not exist'; second, they have access to digital technologies; and third, 'digital natives are those with the skills to use these digital technologies in relatively sophisticated ways' (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011, pp. 188–189). This is a broad definition that Palfrey and Gasser provide, and does not accurately account for the participants involved this research. Therefore, it is worthwhile to more comprehensively explain the context in which this research and its participants are situated.

Online and social network use is high and increasing. As of June 2015, 82 per cent of Australian teens aged 14–17 years regularly go online and 54 per cent use social network sites online. Moreover, 90 per cent of 18–24 year olds go online three or more times daily (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2015). Trends suggest that Australians are increasingly mobile-only in their Internet use (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2014). Although using a fixed broadband connection is the most common mode of accessing the Internet, 65 per cent of Australian teens use smartphones to access the Internet (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2015). Teenage Internet users also demonstrate tendencies to accessing the Internet across multiple devices, such as smartphone,

tablet or desktop computer. This proliferation of mobility and flexibility across multiple devices (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2015) provides young Australians with prodigious autonomy within networked contexts, and subsequently, increased freedoms for identity exploration.

The DNEAs that this research investigates is a population of emerging adults living in Sydney, Australia. All of the participants involved in the research project were born during the mid-1990s and were entering their emerging adulthood in 2012 and 2013, aged 18–20 years old during the data collection phase of the project. For these individuals, both their adolescence and emerging adulthood have been infused with the emerging forms of networked sociality facilitated by the specific technological contexts they have been situated within throughout their lives, and frame the particular digitally networked practices that emerge.

It is important to note this research investigates a small *population* of DNEAs and consequently there are particular digital privileges and biases that arise from these circumstances. Though access to digital social technologies and mobile smartphones is high for young adults in Australia, not all young Australians have access to mobile smartphones, or flexible Internet access. Prescriptive generational patterns may work to exclude and marginalise some members of a generation. Just as the digital native paradigm has been deconstructed, Woodman (2011) notes for individuals, a shared generational location for some, may be different for others, depending on the social positioning from which it is experienced (p. 34). This research is limited in its ability to account for a broader spectrum of Australian DNEAs by nature of the ethnography conducted.

3.6 Research Context: Designer Explorer

The genesis of this research's primary research inquiry sits within the researcher's experience as a design tutor of first year interdisciplinary design students at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). During one of the core first year subjects, Design Thinking, students participate in a design camp at Cockatoo Island in Sydney. During this camp, students spend three days exploring the island working on a series of design tasks. The Designer Explorer project was established as a pilot study during 2012, and developed as a primary case study in 2013. The

UTS Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research in 2011 under UTS HREC REF NO. #2011-220A.

Tracing the shifts across the two studies that took place throughout the project, this section describes the first phase of the research by outlining how the Designer Explorer project was established, including contextualising the DNEA participants involved in this research within the Australian first year tertiary transition context, highlighting the unique experience of the UTS first year design camp at Cockatoo Island, its participants and expanding what this context offers to examine the context creation practice of DNEAs. This is followed by a close examination of the formation and use of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, exploring the way hashtags function as an apparatus of social network platforms and act as useful devices for conducting digital ethnographic research. The section then describes the approaches used for primary data collection and data interpretation, and which leads to the second phase of the research project which included interviews and other developed research methods.

The first year of university education plays an important role in the ways in which emerging adults formulate identities, and provides an excellent context for conducting research. The contexts of Australian emerging adults are changing in response to the trend towards young adults entering tertiary education after high school and leaving marriage and parenthood until their late twenties and early thirties (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a, 2014b). These trends are influenced by a range of factors including the desire to pursue higher education and the associated delay in emerging adults entering the labour force, increased social acceptance of cohabitation before marriage, and children moving out of the family home later in adulthood, as well as a range of financial concerns (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Successive governments have also introduced policies to broaden access to university education (Gale & Parker, 2013), with entry procedures enabling a more inclusive approach to university entrance (Dawkins & Krause, 2015). As a result, commencing cohorts of students at Australian universities are increasingly diverse, creating fertile ground for examining DNEAs in this context.

As DNEAs enter their first year experience of university, they undergo a phase of transition as they adjust to the new environment of university. This is faced by all students as they begin

their first year, regardless of their subjectivity and circumstances (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 739). Higher education researchers Trevor Gale and Steven Parker define transition as ‘the capability to navigate change’ (2014, p. 737). They distil their theorisation even further through their description of transition as *induction*, *development* or *becoming*:

Student transition is conceptualised in higher education research, policy and practice: (1) as *induction*: sequentially defined periods of adjustment involving pathways of inculcation, from one institutional and/or disciplinary context to another; (2) as *development*: qualitatively distinct stages of maturation involving trajectories of transformation, from one student and/or career identity to another; or (3) as *becoming*: a perpetual series of fragmented movements involving whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experience, from birth to death (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737).

This framework is helpful in disseminating some of the meanings and motivations behind the identity performance activities that DNEAs undertake during this period. Gale and Parker’s framework suggests that the experience of transition situates itself much more pervasively within the lives of emerging adults. As Gale and Parker (2014) highlight in their typology of transition, existing scholarship examining transition extends beyond a time-based interpretation to perceiving transition as an action that is undertaken as a ‘multi-dimensional process, extending over a period of time’ (Bonassi & Wolter, 2002, p. 199).

Gale and Parker’s transition scholarship provides a helpful framework through which to analyse the experiences that DNEAs may have throughout their first year of university education in a more specified way. Similar to practice theory, transition provides individuals with resources which they make use of as they negotiate change. The meanings and competences that extend from previous experiences enable individuals to engage with their transition experience in an ongoing process. In much the same way that practices are able to *travel* through the cultivation of skill and conscious attention towards understanding and knowledge, through the *decoding* and *recontextualisation* of both activities and elements, DNEAs negotiate the transition through their first year experience through an active and ongoing process of formation, re-formation and de-formation.

Importantly, for some DNEAs, university is the first time they have the opportunity to negotiate their own autonomy. Leaving the context of high school often means a change in the daily doings of young people, featuring a mix of both curricular and co-curricular concerns as they transition into the university context (Scanlon et al., 2007). This may include (but not be limited to) changes in their social networks through losing existing, and adding new, social contacts, acquainting themselves with new and unfamiliar places, forming goals, and adjusting to the demands of tertiary study, student activities and new forms of knowledge production. All of these provide fertile ground for identity performance; as DNEAs change contexts it necessitates the 'crafting of a new situated identity' (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 228).

The university context provides a foundation for examining the elements and activities of a DNEA context creation practice because there are high levels of identity exploration taking place by individuals as they transition through their first year of university. Wilson et al. (2015, p. 12) highlight Wortham (2004) who says that learning moves beyond an epistemological approach to 'gaining new knowledge' to also seeing learning as an ontological process in which individuals take on 'new ways of being' (p. 716).

As DNEAs develop their autonomy, often for the first time in their lives, they are actively positioning themselves within the context of university. This means, as they interact with new people and engage with new learning disciplines and ways of constructing knowledge, they are simultaneously working out how to position themselves within the new communities and contexts they are part of (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 12). It is an active and ongoing process that is socially bound and the institutional cues given by the first year experience provide contextual elements that are used by individuals as they negotiate their contexts for self. The new contextual elements mean that DNEAs are given the opportunity to undertake novel identity performances and experiment with these 'new ways of being' (Wortham, 2004, p. 716).

A key factor that may affect DNEAs as they negotiate their first year of tertiary education is an individual's knowledge of and skill in the rules, expectations and social codes of the university context. As DNEAs negotiate these new contexts, they are contending with forces that they

may have little prior knowledge of and subsequently lack ‘full control’ over their experience. However, as established in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.4.2, as individuals take up new practices, they develop new competences. The first year of university provides DNEAs with an excellent foundation for acquiring new knowledge, skills and understandings as they move through their emerging adulthood. During their first year of university, an individual’s notion of their own autonomy is challenged as they are exposed to different and emerging social contexts.

Transition scholarship sits in agreement with identity scholarship in its acknowledgement of the temporal-spatial nature of the contexts that DNEAs engage within throughout their emerging adulthood. The notion of *becoming* sets out to develop a ‘more dynamic account of student transition’ and aims to extend existing transition discourse to be inclusive of the wider experiences of an individual’s higher education experience (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 744). The ‘diversity of student lives’ and heterogeneity of experience the individuals undergo publicly and privately recur on a daily basis (p. 745). As individuals negotiate their identity as they move through the *becoming* experience, they ‘actively choose, alter and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in that context’ (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996, p. 405 in Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 227), suggesting that the identity performances that take place are in response to the specific situation. In their first year of university, DNEAs are confronted with a plethora of opportunities to experiment with different aspects of identity as they negotiate their contexts for self.

For DNEAs who attend university, the experiences they have throughout their first year cannot be detached from their general lived experience and the impact on their contexts for self, which suggests that the first year experience is a valuable site for analysis and can be encompassed holistically into an account of the DNEA context creation practice. It is through examining this context in greater detail that a more comprehensive understanding emerges of the practices that develop from the identity performances during this *transition* experience. Given this context, this research focuses on the first year of university and what role practices that involve digital social technologies play in an emerging adult’s experience during that first year and, more specifically, how DNEAs integrate networked publics into the university experience. The contemporary contexts that DNEAs belong to create circumstances where

they can explore their contexts for self through a range of activities of practice situated within networked publics.

3.7 Conclusion

DNEAs derive, experiment and express a range of social identities throughout their emerging adulthood. It is through intentional practice-based actions that their personal identity evolves. This research examines the ways in which emerging adults use the functions of digital social technologies to help fulfil their purposes, goals and aspirations of their desired self through identity performances.

This research takes the theories of Goffman, Harré and Weinreich and applies them in mediated contexts, addressing identity as a concern of the digital realm. This is supported through existing scholarship that examines digital social technologies more closely, in particular boyd's (2014) examination of teenage use of social network sites and Palfrey and Gasser's (2008) investigation of digital natives. These concepts are reinforced by this research's reframing of these ideas within the context of the particular population that is digital native emerging adults (DNEAs). As noted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, networked publics directly facilitate the freedoms, mobility and autonomy fundamental to the period of emerging adulthood.

Mainstream discourse around digital social technologies often serves to discredit the capabilities of youth and undervalues the underlying practices of sociality and identity. Indeed, existing scholarship about digital native users of digital technologies is based on the idea that they are somehow inhibited from being 'rational actors' who are cognisant, engaged and knowledgeable about the practices they undertake with digital technology. However, as Palfrey and Gasser emphasise, young people disclose information both to build trust and to extend the link between their online and offline lives (2008, p. 25). This research examines these underlying practices more closely by identifying the particular knowledge, understandings and skills that DNEAs possess when it comes to undertaking identity performances within networked publics. As DNEAs learn and adapt to a digitally mediated world at varying rates,

they are adept at enhancing their social capital, mobility and their contexts for self through the use of digital social technologies.

By adapting Goffman's theoretical approach to contemporary contexts, we can interrogate the types of activities of practices that DNEAs use as they display identity performances using digital social technologies in negotiation of their contexts for self. Goffman's performance framework has been reinterpreted by many scholars and offers much towards understanding the interactions that individuals undergo as they engage with digital social technologies; it also helps interpret the dynamism between individuals and the contextual ecologies they are engaging with.

DNEAs actively shift and change their identity performances depending on what their discrete purposes are. They make use of the functions of digital social technologies to suit these purposes—harnessing their competences and skills of practice to direct their identity performances across a range of social network platforms. As explored in the following chapter, rather than homogenise these as generalised proficiencies of use, this research understands the use of digital social technologies in this way as motivated through purpose and context. As such, they are integrated into networked publics in ways that facilitate a context creation practice. This next chapter examines the concept of practice theory as a theoretical lens through which to examine DNEAs' engagement with networked publics and contextual ecologies.

Chapter Four

Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance

4.1 Introduction

This thesis proposes that DNEAs are engaged in discernible context creation practice when they undertake their identity performances. As established in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, the unprecedented trajectory of socio-technological development over recent decades has implications for both the social and individual contexts for DNEAs. Practices, as entities, are intentional actions undertaken by individuals as part of the complex constellation of practices that make up the daily habits, routines and doings of this population.

Using Shove et al.'s (2012) practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity framework, this research charts how *activities* come together through the enactment of diverse elements, that is, *materials*, *competences* and *meanings* (practice-as-performance), to produce a context creation practice (practice-as-entity) that becomes visible through the identity performances of DNEAs that take place through the networked publics they are part of.

The emergence of digital social technologies in DNEAs' lives and the willingness of DNEAs to adopt these technologies as part of their daily habits and routines allows the research participants to use contextual elements available to them to undertake specific activities in their identity performances. In the context of this research elements of practice are understood as *contextual elements*. As identified in Chapter One: Introduction, contexts of DNEAs are distinguished into four categories: the locational, material, situational and social. Each of these categories contains contextual elements that traverse online and offline contexts, and are incorporated into Shove et al.'s practice-as-performance elemental categorisation.

As established in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, DNEAs are inculcated into practices by taking part in activities of practice that are bound by their social relations. DNEAs co-construct networked publics based on shared goals and purposes, that is knowledge

and understanding about DNEA context creation practice are coordinated between groups of individuals. This chapter describes how individual DNEAs harness material elements, competences and meanings—as contextual elements of practice—as they negotiate their contexts for self. It then describes how these contextual elements come together as contextual ecologies within networked publics.

4.2 Practice Theory

Practice theory provides a useful lens through which to observe and analyse the activities of DNEAs. Practice theory has its roots in the philosophical thought of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens (Ortner, 1984), though this research draws on contemporary scholarship around practice theory.

This research draws primarily on the scholarship of Elizabeth Shove and colleagues (2007, 2012) who distil practices to elemental level and whose theoretical framework provides a tool for analysing the composition of practices and how ecologies of contextual elements are formulated as DNEAs create contexts for self.

The work of Theodore Schatzki (2000, 2012) and Andreas Reckwitz (2002) plays a significant role in the way this research understands the production, reproduction and organisation of practices. Fundamentally for both Schatzki and Reckwitz, it is the social relations between activities of practice that drive the momentum of practices. Schatzki (2012) understands a practice to be ‘an open-ended, spatially-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’ (p. 14), in which individuals undertake ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of activities’ that are centralised around ‘shared practical understanding’ (2000, p. 11). Reckwitz (2002) describes a practice as ‘a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other’ (p. 249), and when elements come together, they produce patterns that enable the reproduction of practice. The patterns include ‘forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249).

Shove et al. (2012) examine practice through a simplified and inclusive conceptual framework that interprets the *elements* that make up practices, and tracks the changing configurations of these elements over time (p. 22). In their practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity framework, Shove et al. (2012) begin by distilling elements of practice into three categories:

materials—including things, technologies, tangible physical entities and the stuff of which objects are made; *competences*—which encompass skill, know-how and technique; and *meanings*—in which we include symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations (p. 14).

Activities of practice consist of a recognisable conjunction of the elements that can be spoken about and drawn upon as a workable set of resources to be used in the undertaking of a practice (Shove et al., 2012, p. 7). As described in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, DNEAs engage with dynamic context ecologies that constantly shift and change as the ‘contextual elements’ taken from the locational, material, situational and social contexts become more, or less, important to their identity performance at any given point in time. Practices are similarly malleable, rather than acting as passive processes. They are ‘*active* integrations of elements’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 126) drawn from these three categories, meaning that practices are constantly shifting as elements change. However, constituting all the potential element configurations into one comprehensive ‘map of practice’, in which all elements are bound to each other and configured into a practice, does not accurately articulate how practices become stabilised entities. In their research approach, Shove et al. distribute the elemental categories across three separate layers: one ‘depicting the distribution of requisite competence’, the second ‘showing access to necessary materials’ and the third layer plotting the prevalence of things as a ‘meaningful part of practice’ (2012, p. 45). When practitioners combine *elements* in the undertaking of an *activity*, it is through the ‘loose-knit’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 81) assemblage of these activities that a practice becomes visible. It is only when all three layers are overlapped that a practice is stabilised as a recognisable entity.

As practitioners and ‘carriers of a practice’, individuals engage in an active and intentional process in which these elements combine to formulate practices. Shove et al. (2012) argue that ‘practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when the *connections* between elements

of these three types are made, sustained or broken' (p. 14). This dynamism means that it is inherently challenging to describe a DNEA context creation practice as a stable entity. It is through the recognition of common elements and local variation that specific practices can be identified as recognisable entities. Just as it is crucial to understand the specific contextual influences that DNEAs draw on in their identity performances, it is crucial to identify the key elements of practice significant to the DNEA context creation practice. As Shove et al. (2012) note, identifying the commonalities and local variations in a practice establishes a language for talking about practice and the ways that elements of specific practices circulate and are integrated together (p. 25). As described in Section 4.4, the contextual elements of the DNEA context creation practice are purposefully integrated into practice. This research maps the ways in which DNEAs integrate digital social technologies into activities of their identity creation practice. As part of this practice, DNEAs continuously produce and reproduce their contexts for self in public contexts.

4.3 Practices and Networked Publics

It is impossible for every individual to undertake every possible practice available to them (Shove et al., 2012, p. 65). Individuals are inclined to take up practices that best serve their own goals and purposes. Therefore, explanation is needed as to why some practices are 'stickier' (p. 17) than others and why some practices engender more faithful practitioner cohorts than others. As explored in Section 4.4.3, practices persist if they are *meaningful*. Shove et al. (2012) suggest that participation in a practice is increased if social and symbolic significance for the practitioner is higher (p. 65). For DNEAs, emerging adulthood provides a platform in which identity experimentation is high as they test out idealised selves and develop their autonomy. Networked publics provide the ideal environment through which to explore the activities of practice DNEAs undertake when they gather in networked publics.

The consistent use of digital technologies and the development of emerging digital social technologies throughout the lives of digital natives have allowed proficiencies of use to develop among this population. As discussed further in the following sections, the nature of these emerging technologies means DNEAs are inculcating themselves in a context creation practice that is distinct, embodied and socially bound.

Individuals and their audiences are mutually constitutive in the undertaking of identity performance. Identity performances take place within the co-constructed context of networked publics. This is descriptive of what Wellman (2002) refers to as *network capital*, which describes the ways in which individuals both communicate and obtain resources from each other. As described in Section 2.5.1, networked publics are by nature spaces that are both mutable and malleable, and encourage members to circulate activities of practice as they negotiate their own contexts for self.

These activities are structured by what Schatzki (2000, p. 15) refers to as teleoaffective hierarchies, or fields of practices. He describes teleoaffective hierarchies as a social phenomenon in which practitioners make 'arrangements' of 'arrays of activities'. These arrays are based on shared skills and understandings in which 'the maintenance of practices, and thus the persistence and transformation of social life, rests centrally on the successful inculcation of shared embodied know-how' (Schatzki, 2000, p. 12). For DNEAs, their knowledge and understandings of networked publics facilitate their identity performances. As described in Section 2.5.2, digital social technologies provide functions to both produce and consume identity performances.

Teleoaffective hierarchies work to locate an action as belonging to a specific practice through an expression of *rules* and/or the known *understandings* that individuals have about that practice. Schatzki (2012) develops his theorisation of teleoaffective structures through his description of how practices and arrangements of practices *bundle*. He sees activities as 'indeterminate temporal spatial events, the interwovenness of whose temporal and spatial dimensions is a feature of the practice-arrangement bundles as part of which they occur' (Schatzki, 2012, p. 21). Working in an essential and inseparable reciprocal relationship, practices alter the meanings and use of arrangements, and in turn these arrangements facilitate and coordinate further practice.

Practices exist as spatial and temporal entities that are both produced and changed 'through moments of enactment' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 120) and, indeed, as Shove et al. remark, practices change as 'new elements are introduced or when existing elements are combined in new ways' (2012 p. 120). Parallel to practice-as-entity, practices also exist as *performances*: 'It is through

performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the “pattern” provided by the practice-as-an-entity is filled out and reproduced’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 7). DNEAs look to each other for guidance in their context creation practice. The immediacy of digital social technologies enables their identity performances to be affirmed continuously, allowing the reproduction of specific activities of practice and a subsequent ‘pattern’ to emerge and a practice to stabilise in that moment.

Figure 4.1 describes the way contextual elements circulate within networked publics, that is, the material elements and competences. As described in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5.1, networked publics are structured around contextual ecologies that are co-constructed by members of a networked public. Individual members of networked publics draw in contextual elements from their subjective contexts, both consciously and unconsciously. Contextual ecologies are both mutable and malleable and as such, welcome new contextual elements. However, networked publics do not feature random configurations of contextual elements. As discussed in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public, DNEAs produce meaningful configurations of both elements and activities of practice as they re-form their contexts for self within networked publics.

Shove et al.’s scholarship seeks to understand the arrangements of practice and how individuals organise their lives and, simultaneously, ‘are organised by the practices they carry’ (2012, p. 106). In Shove et al.’s (2012) interpretation of the structure of practice, the human-actor is de-centred and thrust into an assemblage of material and meaningful component parts. The concept is supported by Schatzki (2000), who describes practices as being both embodied and mediated by ‘artifacts, hybrids, and natural objects’ (p. 11). Similarly, Reckwitz (2002) establishes, ‘these conventionalized “mental” activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual’ (p. 250). Situating these ideas in this research, it suggests that within networked publics, contexts for self and visible identity performances themselves act as contextual elements as part of activities of practice.

In the case of this research, DNEAs work collectively to produce and reproduce their identity performances within networked publics by taking part in activities and drawing on elements

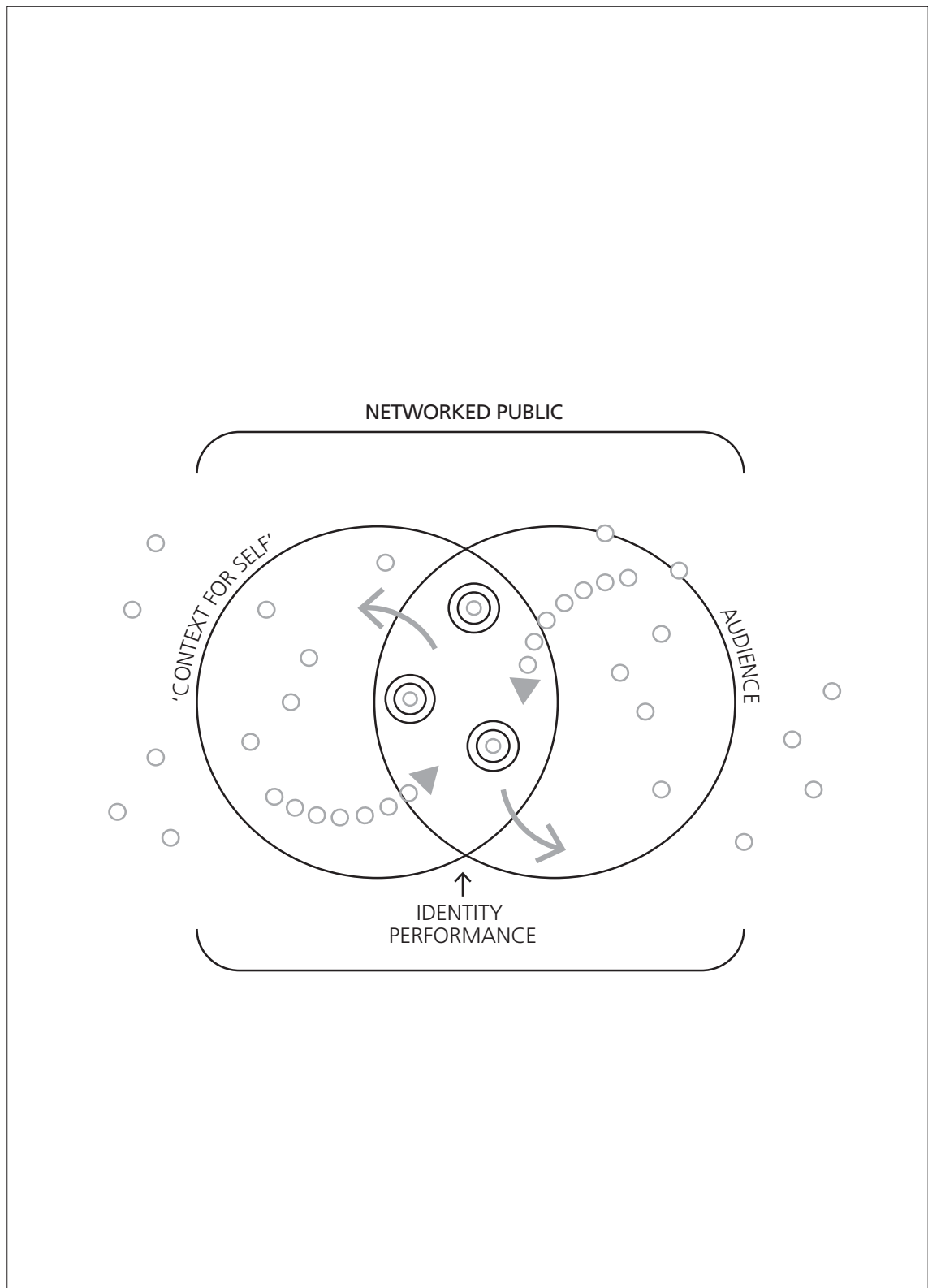


Figure 4.1: The DNEA context creation practice within networked publics.

that are available to them. Crucially, multiple activities of practice take place within networked publics. Because emerging adulthood is a period of high identity experimentation, DNEAs are motivated to reproduce activities of practice, particularly within networked publics. This is because the reproduction of practice enables individuals to take up new contextual elements within activities of practice—DNEAs can alter activities to suit their own needs. Furthermore, the identity performances DNEAs undertake as activities within a practice leave material evidence and visible traces for audience members to respond to, and potentially take up as contextual elements of their own practice. It is these processes of production that occur among cohorts of practitioners that suggest individuals work collectively to respond to and reaffirm each other's context creation practice. DNEAs rely on their audiences for feedback and dialogue about their identity performances as they construct their context of self. The ways in which DNEAs do this are described in Section 4.5.

As described in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, networked publics are spaces which weave the front and back stages of individuals more tightly together. Shove et al. (2012) establish the 'moment of enactment' as linkages in a circuit, in which 'monitoring, recording, calibrating and feedback give a sense of the means by which performances and practices constitute each other' (p. 105). As dynamic spaces, networked publics directly facilitate engagement and sociality between DNEAs that assist in the production and reproduction of practice. The connections between practitioners, elements and practices 'are maintained and reproduced through intersecting circuits of reproduction that have dynamic qualities of their own' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 120). In the context of this research, this suggests that the contextual ecology of a networked public grows as individuals contribute further elemental 'resources' (p. 3) for others to use, in the form of their own identity performances. The dynamism of practices must not be hidden by emphasising their structure and organisation; rather, practices should be understood as temporally and spatially effective at producing and reproducing actions, just as networked publics are mutable and malleable contexts, as are the practices they contain.

4.4 Context Ecologies and Contextual Elements

This research uses Shove et al.'s (2012) practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance framework to interpret the ways in which practices are both constituted and subsequently

organised. Practices are made up of arrangements of activities that come together through the enactment of diverse elements, which are subsequently configured into a practice. Because practices themselves are always in the process of ‘formation, re-formation and de-formation’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 44), elements feature as a comparatively stable part situated at the core of practice that are ‘capable of circulating between places and enduring over time’ (p. 44). As Shove et al. (2012) point out, people are surrounded by the remnants of practices that no longer exist. These remnants may be re-appropriated and re-used in other ways: elements constitute each other and ‘change through processes of integration’ and ‘it is only through their integration in practice that elements are reproduced, eroded or carried from one setting or population to another’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 43–44).

As practices move into new contexts, Shove et al. (2012) argue that the stability of a practice is both emergent and reliant on the reproduction of a practice. This means that the stabilisation of a practice should not be considered as a linear end-point; instead, it is this moment of stability that enables a practice to be reconfigured, acknowledging both the *potential* and *persistence* of practices. For a DNEA context creation practice to persist, DNEAs must make use of elements that are available to them to reproduce and reconfigure the practice and in some cases transfer elements from other settings.

One of the key values of practice theory as an analytical device examining the context creation practice of DNEAs is its perception of the material *availability* and socio-technical potential of whatever elements happen to be in use. It is not the elements themselves that become significant to identifying a practice, but rather the ways in which elements are configured together as co-existing elements *within activities of practice* that are important. It is the material configuration of elements, of which individuals—as practitioners—are a part, that enable a practice to be produced and reproduced.

As described previously, and as seen in Figure 3.1, when DNEAs gather together in networked publics, the identity performances that take place are not conducted on a continuum. Instead, they are made out of the contexts for self created by each individual member of networked publics. These contexts for self are established through circular processes of engagement with networked publics.

Shove et al.'s 'elemental categories' are described more specifically, identifying the overlaps within this research's interpretation of networked publics—that is the use of contextual elements in activities of practice. By discerning each elemental category, it is possible to observe distinct elements and their links and comprehend the circuitry of practice within networked publics at a deeper level.

4.4.1 Materials as Contextual Elements

Material elements of practice are the 'things' that are used by individuals to undertake activities of practice. Building on both Schatzki's (2002) and Reckwitz's (2002) discussion where 'practices are intrinsically connected to and interwoven with objects' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 106), Shove et al. (2012) describe material elements as encompassing objects, tools, hardware, infrastructure and the [human] body (p. 23) or, more specifically, 'things, technologies, tangible physical entities, and the stuff with which objects are made' (p. 14).

This research focuses on the material elements that DNEAs use in their context creation practice, drawn from the material and locational contexts they are part of. As described in Chapter One: Introduction, these material and locational contextual elements are drawn from both online and offline contexts. Material elements are both tangible objects, such as digital devices and physical spaces, as well as intangible digital artefacts that are produced by individuals, such as digital images, and interacted with by individuals, such as digital social technology platforms.

Reckwitz (2002) suggests that material elements have the potential to become 'indispensable resources' (p. 253), in which some practices cannot take place without certain material elements being configured together. DNEAs cannot create contexts for self through networked publics without having a device through which to share content to their audiences, nor can that audience exist without having a networked connection. For example, a DNEA may use the Instagram application on their iPhone to share a group photo they have just taken at a gathering with friends. This networked connection, combined with the functional elements of Instagram, enables individuals from an individual's audiences to view and respond with 'likes' and 'comments'. It is the way that these material elements configure that allows this activity

to take place and subsequently become indispensable resources of the DNEA context creation practice. While material elements of practice are a fundamental part of all practices, as the DNEA context creation practice manifests, it relies on digital social technologies to support the collective construction of its activities of practice.

As described in Chapter One: Introduction, material contextual elements encompass both the physical and digital artefacts that an individual produces and engages with in their daily lives. Material context is significant for incorporating both online and offline materiality.

Considering digital social technologies and networked publics specifically, offline material contextual elements include the physical devices and technological capabilities of any given device. Online material context considers the platform interfaces which individuals engage with and the digital content that is produced and shared via these interfaces, such as images and text content. Digital social technologies and their functions become material elements of practice and can be used by DNEAs as workable 'set[s] of resources' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 7) to further their context creation practice.

However, as highlighted in Section 2.3, for DNEAs the emphasis is not on specific functions or technical aspects of digital social technologies, it is how these functions and inherent features of digital social technologies are translated as material elements into activities, or 'genres of usage' (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 29), where the material cannot be disassociated from its socio-cultural aspects and the production of normative practices of use. DNEAs use social network platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share images and status updates about their lives and the memes and jokes that make sense to them and their audiences. They share content that features threads of population-specific commonalities such as phraseology and digital 'language' belonging to the DNEA context.

The online locational context consists of contextual elements that involve social network platforms and other digital interfaces that enable DNEAs to become part of networked publics. This also includes the location an individual occupies within a network, such as where they fit in relation to other members and non-members of networked publics.

Material contextual elements also incorporate elements from an individual's locational contexts. The locational contexts are informed by spatial references that are created both offline and online. The offline locational context encompasses the physical spatial conditions of the locations that individuals are in, including the built environment, weather and other environmental factors.

boyd (2014) reasons that the functional capabilities enabled by social media are not new, and often the very capabilities that are claimed to be new are in fact based on a history of previous practices that have been transferred as 'tools' into digital contexts. The *potential* of these 'tools' and the 'functions' of digital social technologies lie in their ability to step beyond simply enabling an individual to *do*; rather, the potential lies in their ability to amplify social contexts 'by offering technical features that people can use to engage in these well-established practices' (boyd, 2014, p. 13). While an examination of the interaction design and technical development of digital social technologies is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that the technical features of digital social technologies are designed to function in temporal-spatial ways in response to the social desires of individuals. As Csikzentmihalyi (2002, p. 13) highlights in his seminal book *Flow*, 'attention shapes the self, and is in turn shaped by it'.

4.4.2 Competences as Contextual Elements

The competences of practice are the skills, technique, knowledge and know-how that individuals have about the practices they undertake (Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). As individuals are inculcated into a practice, they develop knowledge about the elements and activities that belong to that practice. Knowledge is the capacity of an individual to know that a particular activity of practice belongs to that practice, and the knowledge of what it takes to undertake that activity of practice, recognise proficiencies, make distinctions, know how things come together, their histories and their socio-cultural contexts. Know-how is the tacit understandings an individual has about how to do things within a specific practice to bring about a particular outcome, derived from experiences. It is from this knowledge and know-how and production of practices that individuals develop and accumulate skills and techniques that are used in the production and reproduction of activities of practices. The efficacy of practices relies on

the accumulated knowledge of competences that an individual develops through undertaking specific practices.

At a global scale, the practices that individuals undertake provide them with knowledge and know-how that can be transferred into future activities of practices. Competences produce *understandings* about practices that enable elements to be incorporated in different ways within a practice and furthermore, activities of practice that can be recontextualised within other practices. For example, the tacit understandings individuals have about the agency of material elements, that is, the capacity for a material element to be integrated as part of an activity of practice, allow practices to *travel* (Shove et al., 2012, p. 48).

Schatzki (2012) defines these ‘understandings’ according to two categories: *practical* and *general understandings* (p. 16). A practical understanding gives an individual the ability to carry out a desired action through their knowledge of basic ‘doings and sayings’ that belong to that practice, whereas general understandings are the knowledge of *why* a specific practice should be undertaken. Practices persistently undergo a process of formation, re-formation and de-formation and the capacity of an individual to maintain both local and global cognitive general understandings of how a practice is positioned alongside other practices enables individuals to produce particular practices.

Understandings are supported by *rules*, with Schatzki (2012) defining a rule as an ‘explicitly formulated directive, remonstrance, instruction, or edict’ (p. 16). Rules can be seen as semi-stable elements of practice that direct and alter the ways individuals undertake their activities of practice. As Schatzki notes, ‘rules are ubiquitous in human life: humans are always formulating or producing them’ (2012, p. 16), suggesting that just as both practical and general understandings guide individuals in their activities of practice, rules also play a part in directing the competences that individuals produce.

Competences function in a circular fashion: the repetitive action of a practice creates knowledge and know-how. Individuals, through their dedication to reproducing a practice

and accumulating knowledge, are provided with the resources (in the form of knowledge, know-how and skills) with which to learn and reproduce further practice.

DNEAs work together to produce a practice. Through shared understandings about the competences of practice, it is possible for new elements and activities to be integrated into practices. As Schatzki (2000) elucidates, 'skills are not just omnipresent in human activity, but the capacity of formulations to guide what people do rests on abilities to use and understand them' (p. 18). Shove et al. remarks:

Specific competences are transferable because they are *common*, or at least common enough to a number of different practices. The potential for know-how to accumulate, circulate and travel sideways in this manner consequently depends on the degree to which diverse practices correspond (2012, p. 51).

Furthermore, the cultivation of skill and conscious attention towards understanding and knowledge enable individuals to *decode* and *recontextualise* both activities and elements. The process of re-contextualisation itself is reliant on 'highly localized practice-based expertise' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 49); in other words, the practitioners of a practice need to have the know-how to decode in order for competences (and material elements) to be established in new practices.

The knowledge and know-how that DNEAs retain informs the ongoing production of a practice. As DNEAs reproduce practices and they become 'routinized' (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249), they draw on 'blocks' (p. 250) of accrued competence to inform their context creation practice. These 'blocks' offer DNEAs background knowledge about a practice in the form of 'understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (p. 249). A block requires the 'existence and specific inter-connectedness' of elements, and crucially, cannot be reduced to any one single element (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250). DNEAs use the competences they have gathered from previous activities of practice as a driving element in the future production of contexts for self, for example sharing images to their audiences.

As stated previously, the use of digital social technologies has become normative to the daily lives of DNEAs. As they interact with social network interfaces, DNEAs accumulate knowledge about the material elements of practice that are coordinated as they engage with various social network platforms. As new platforms are developed and functions of the previous interfaces are carried forward onto new digital social technologies, DNEAs retain knowledge about what functions can be used to suit their own purposes. Subsequently, DNEAs apply their accumulated knowledge and understandings of how to use digital social technologies when they take up using new platforms, as seen in Figure 4.2.

Context creation is a conscious and ongoing process in which individuals have a vested interest. The normative daily doings and sayings of DNEAs are interwoven with emerging contexts provided by digital social technologies and it is the functions of these technologies—persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability—that provide DNEAs with different material elements to use as they undertake activities that create contexts for self. DNEAs develop competences for these activities, a task that Shove et al. (2012) note occurs in a variety of ways,

in everyday life, learning through doing goes on all the time and often without noticing. While some skills can be picked up in this way others require much more deliberate effort, sometimes involving hours of dedicated training (p. 48).

Practical knowledge about what constitutes a DNEA context creation practice is shared through both tacit and explicit acts of knowledge transfer, that is, embodied situated learning, ‘going beyond the realm of explicit instruction and the inculcation of attitudes and values’ (Shove et al., 2012, p. 70). For example, DNEAs are not given instruction manuals for using digital social technologies; rather, as with all social network platform users, they are given ‘terms and conditions’ which construct the conditions of engagement with the particular platform and they develop their practice from there.

To become a competent practitioner, individuals must acquire the knowledge and skills to undertake a practice. Those that have been inducted into a practice act as carriers of

routinised ways of knowing that are both culturally and historically specific. Novice recruits to the DNEA context creation practice gain confidence in their practice-as-a-performance; they become 'enmeshed in existing communities of practice' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 70) with practices becoming more established and stable as individuals develop competence. DNEAs produce identity performances that make visible their context creation practice, enacting their know-how. This knowing is passed on to new practitioners through interactions within the performance of the practice.

As noted earlier, DNEAs develop skills about the functions of social network platforms and apply these competences to new platforms when they emerge. DNEAs engage in a reflexive process of interaction, making use of the elements of practice available to them such as hashtags or sharing photos of themselves, and use knowledge understandings of the functions of digital social technologies to guide their engagement in the practice.

4.4.3 Meanings as Contextual Elements

A third elemental characteristic of practice is *meanings*, comprised of symbolic meanings, ideas, aspirations, mental activities, emotion and motivational knowledge that can be identified from a practice. Meanings, fundamentally, enable a practice to travel through their contribution to the significance, connotations and trajectories (historical, social and otherwise) of a practice (Reckwitz, 2002, in Shove et al., 2012, p. 7).

As elements, meanings are temporal and formed through associations with other practices, and are 'unavoidably relative, situated and emergent' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 53). This suggests that, not unlike the overarching elemental structure, a practice can only make sense when considered in relation to other practices. As Shove et al. (2012) note, it is the meanings that stem from a practice that situate a practice among others (p. 53). The DNEA context creation practice is significant because it enables individuals to formulate their emerging adult identities and allows DNEAs to situate themselves in their social contexts, providing individuals with a sense of stability.

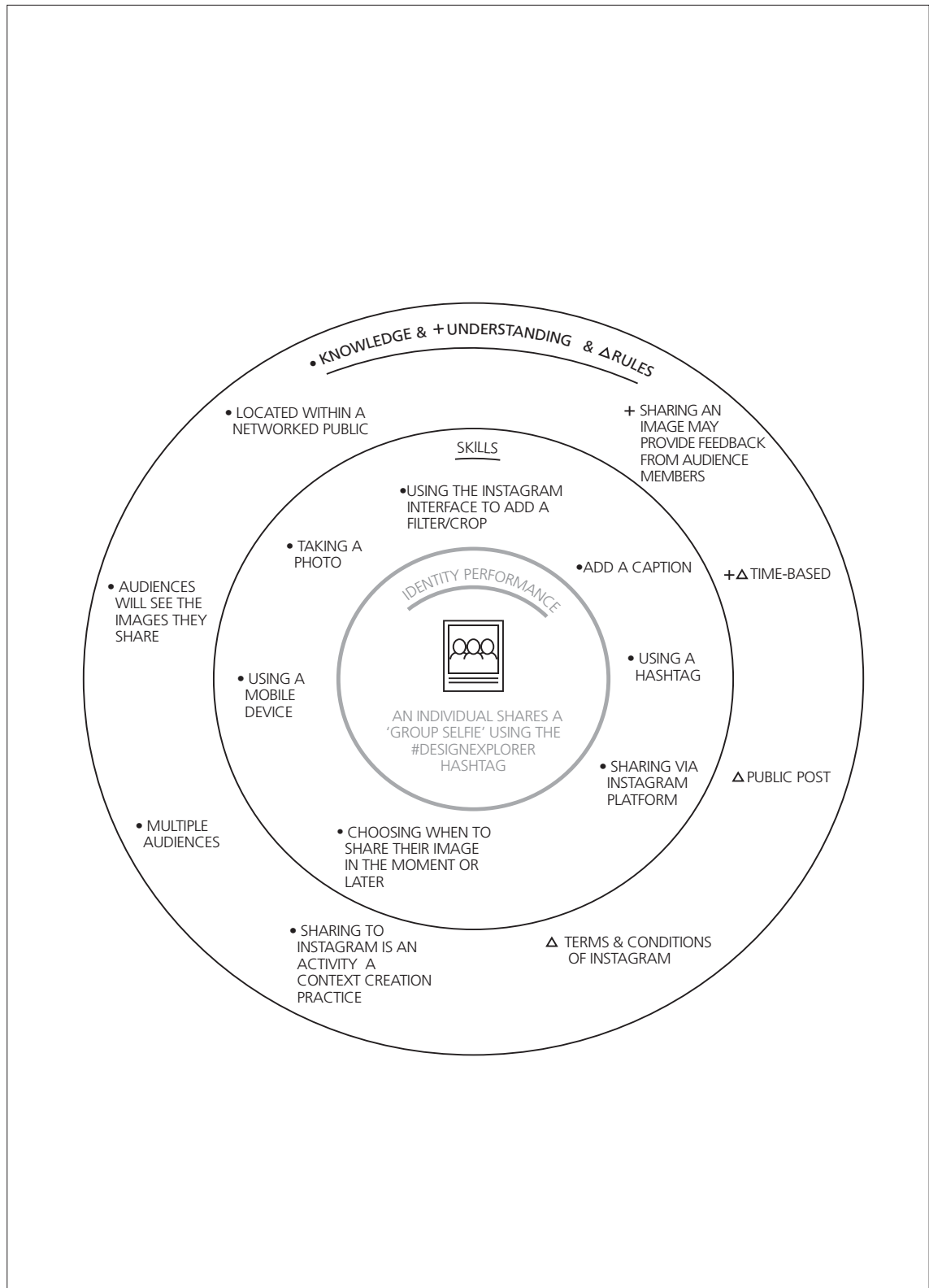


Figure 4.2: DNEA competences of digital social technologies and networked publics

Meanings as contextual elements of a practice are significant because they enable a practice to become identifiable. Schatzki identifies the ‘moment of performance’ as the point at which meanings supplement and support competences and the material aspects of practice through a combination of ‘perception, propositional knowledge, reasons, and goals’ linking all three elemental characteristics together into a practice as a recognisable entity (2000, p. 17).

Meanings in practices are more challenging to access and theorise upon than material elements or competences because they are highly mutable. Shove et al. (2012) note ‘meanings move, mutate and take other’s place but are never preserved intact’ (p. 61). This becomes particularly evident in examining an emergent practice such as the DNEA context creation practice where the context of the practice itself—a networked public—is highly temporal and spatial.

As digital social technologies, networked publics and their associated practices are highly mutable and malleable, defining and classifying an emergent practice is difficult, as its meaning shifts as a practice shifts. Schatzki’s analysis of practices provides a helpful approach for comprehending meanings as elements in practice. His ‘teleoaffective’ structures perceive meanings as providing a framework for organising practices; teleoaffective structures include ‘embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods’ (Schatzki, 1996, p. 89, in Shove et al., 2012, pp. 23–24). As discussed in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self, the meanings that are identifiable in a practice provide greater insight into the significance of specific practices. For this research, meanings need to be considered relative to the contexts of self of DNEAs and the context creation that takes place within networked publics.

4.5 Practice and DNEA Identity Performance

Across contemporary practice theory scholarship there is consensus that there is a strong correlation between practices and the social, as described by Shove et al. (2012) and Schatzki (2000). Practices rely not just on individual practitioners, but also collectives of dedicated practitioners who work together to produce and reproduce a practice. By grounding a philosophical framework in the social, practice theory emphasises:

tacit and unconscious forms of knowledge and experience through which shared ways of understanding and being in the world are established, through which purposes emerge as desirable, and norms as legitimate (Shove et al., 2007, p. 12).

Furthermore, practice theories offer a framework through which to analyse the ‘integration and reproduction of the diverse elements of social existence’ (Shove et al., 2007, p. 13). As explored in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, this research specifically addresses this framework through an ethnographic study examining the ways in which a group of DNEAs translate their contexts of self against their social contexts within networked publics as part of a context creation practice.

Bargh et al. (2002) suggest that individuals are highly motivated to make ‘aspects of identity a “social reality”’ (p. 36), and it is the acknowledgement of these expressions from others, in networked contexts, that authenticate the identity performances individuals undertake as they explore their contexts for self. As discussed in earlier sections, digital social technologies contain functions that enable both ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’ identity markers, which in turn enable ‘combinations of introverted and extroverted behaviours, acknowledging various types of sociability’ (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317).

As in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public, DNEAs have population-specific identity performances activities that they undertake as part of their normative daily use of digital social technologies. For example, they take selfies, develop their own phraseology and forms of digital language, create memes and shared jokes, maintain context-specific aesthetic sensibilities and task-switch across overlapping social network platforms as they service multiple audiences, all of which become part of a collective identity performance that perpetuates through networked publics as activities are produced and reproduced.

The fluidity of both networked publics and practices allows for all kinds of participation and sociality to take place. As such, the activities of practice that take place, in the form of visible identity performances, are flexible and shift in response to the subjective concerns of each member. An individual can adjust their identity performances to suit their own purposes and goals, while still maintaining cohesive membership within a networked public.

As described in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5.1, the flow of networked publics relies on DNEAs engaging in activities of practice that affirm both their own identity and the identities of others. These flows contribute to the development of shared values and accepted norms of behaviour that should occur within a networked public. As discussed further in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public, these shared values and accepted behaviours that are formulated by a collective of networked public members help drive the identity performance activities that members undertake.

For example, in the context of this research, images shared to Instagram act as resources that guide individuals as to what kinds of images or types of content should be shared within a networked public. When DNEAs share images to Instagram, they rely on feedback and affirmation of their imagery from other practitioners to support continued image sharing. Audiences reward this image content shared by friends with 'likes', comments and the re-distribution of content. Likewise, if an individual fails to receive tangible affirmation from their audiences, an individual either ceases to share further images, or adjusts the content they are sharing to better suit the accepted norms established through the networked public collective.

Shove et al. (2012) refer to bundles of 'loose-knit patterns based on co-location and coexistence, and *complexes*, representing stickier and more integrated arrangements including co-dependent forms of sequence and synchronization' (p. 17). To illustrate this point, when DNEAs communicate with each other through networked publics, they collectively create and use context-specific phraseology. As DNEAs undertake their identity performances, this phraseology acts as an element of practice that can be reconfigured, developed and made appropriate to new contexts. This process of reproduction has the potential to make this phraseology more complex and more meaningful for practitioners, illustrating the potential for *stickier* arrangements. For example, a DNEA understands that sharing content is likely to elicit feedback from audience members. Regardless of what platform they are engaging with, the ability to gather feedback from others plays a crucial role in the ways in which they create contexts for themselves.

As established previously in Section 4.3, practices and their related activities circulate. This 'circuitry' suggests that co-located and co-existing practices shape each other 'in the moment of performance and over the longer run' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 105). Consistent and recurrently linked elements of practices are shaped by, and indeed limited by, the intended and unintended consequences of previous and coexisting configurations of elements and activities. As DNEAs disclose digitally networked personal information and share content with their audiences, they are conducting identity performances that are a direct response to their own contexts for self. As other members of networked publics respond to these identity performances through emulation and mimicry, the circuitry of a practice is formed. It is through this circuitry of practice that DNEAs are collectively influencing and shaping the performances of other DNEAs and subsequently building a DNEA context creation practice.

The boundaries between online and offline contexts are increasingly blurred, as contextual elements can be taken from offline settings and transferred to online contexts, and vice versa. For example, DNEAs may use particular phraseology on social network platforms, which may bleed into conversations in offline contexts and vice versa. Furthermore, this bleed has the potential to expose wider cohorts of (potential) practitioners to these contextual elements, prompting recruitment into practice.

As discussed previously, activities of practice act as resources for DNEAs to make use of in their context creation practice. DNEAs understand that activities of practice can travel into other contexts and practice and, indeed, may appropriate activities from prior contexts into others, or the newly created, networked publics they belong to. As established in Section 4.3, DNEAs work collectively to produce and reproduce activities of practices; in doing so they are manipulating and integrating elements of practices in ways that suit their purposes and goals. This process enables practitioners with the competency to do so to adapt existing identity performance activities within networked publics. As explored in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self, DNEAs are particularly adept at bringing together contextual elements, whether online or offline, within networked publics. DNEA identity performances are situated around their competences.

4.6 Conclusion

Digital social technologies offer a unique space in which to examine practice when they are considered in the context of Shove et al.'s (2012) practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance framework, returning to the core ideas of practice theory, namely, the ways in which *activities* come together through the enactment of diverse elements, including *materials*, *competences* and *meanings* to produce a practice.

As established in this chapter, digital social technologies are deeply embedded in the daily practices of DNEAs and should be probed for the implication on practitioners' lives. For DNEAs this period of life is concurrent with the emergence of networked publics, key spaces for digitally supported sociality. These nascent contexts provide new frames for the aspirations, goals and ambitions of these individuals. This research frames the engagements that young adults have with technologies and seeks to understand, with some nuance, the significance of those engagements during a highly experimental and significant time for any emerging adult's identity construction.

Practice structures are not reliant solely on the existence of particular types of elements; rather it is through the dynamism of elements co-existing and relating to each other and the conjunction of the *materials*, *competences* and *meanings* elements that a practice emerges. In this sense, it can be challenging to define categorically firstly, what specific elements exist in a practice, and secondly, how these elements converge. This makes it somewhat challenging to identify a practice as a recognisable entity. With this in mind, and following Shove et al.'s work mapping the 'layers of practice', this research embraces the mutability and malleability of the contexts that DNEAs are situated in.

The functions of digital social technologies and the unique context ecologies they are situated in provide DNEAs with elements of practices that enable particular identity performance activities to take place. Practice theory offers a lens through which to examine the identity performances of DNEAs. By looking at specific material elements and the competences used and produced through these activities of practice, the significance and meanings of the DNEA context creation practice can be identified.

As described in Chapter One: Introduction, the primary focus of this research is a close examination of the role that context plays in the identity practices of DNEAs. The following chapters introduce and examine the Designer Explorer project: an ethnographic case study exploring the context creation practice of a group of first year university students at a design school in Sydney, Australia. This group of individuals has a unique set of contextual elements that they harness as they negotiate their individual contexts for self. The activities of these DNEAs are examined through a practice theory framework and the identity performances undertaken are used as evidence of the DNEA context creation practice to produce insight into the primary focus of this research.

Chapter Five

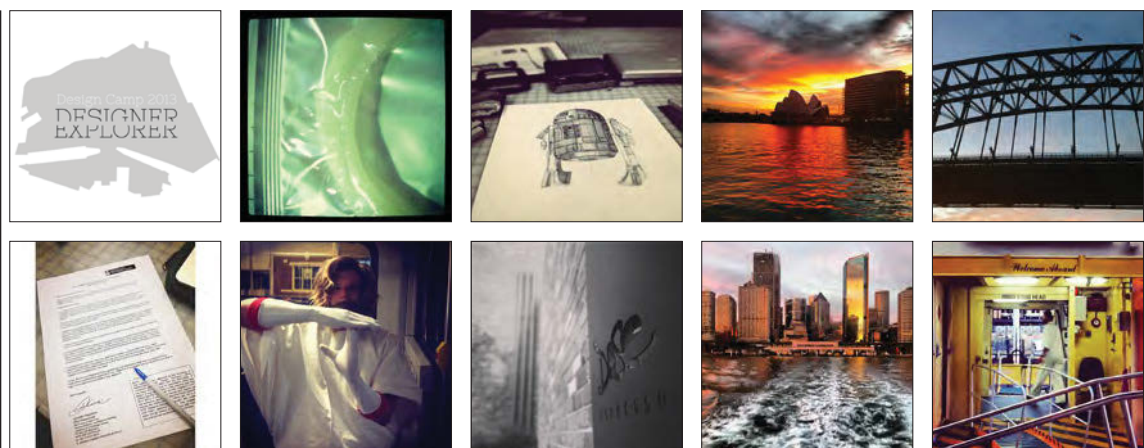
Designer Explorer: The Project

5.1 Introduction

The Designer Explorer project, comprised of two ethnographic case studies undertaken in 2012 and 2013, investigated the context creation behaviours of a group of DNEAs made visible through identity performances within the Designer Explorer networked public. As established earlier, DNEAs are a population of contemporary emerging adults whose transition experience is impacted by the changing social and technological contexts in which they are situated. The complex arrangements of the DNEA social world and the changing freedoms and possibilities for the *enduring life decisions* they can make are being driven by the emergence of digital social technologies and networked publics they are part of. Furthermore, the emphasis on visual content production through these technologies provides researchers with an opportunity to undertake a reflexive approach to their digital ethnography (Ardévol, 2012; Hine, 2000; Pink, 2007, 2012). What follows is an account of the Designer Explorer project.

5.2 The Designer Explorer Participants

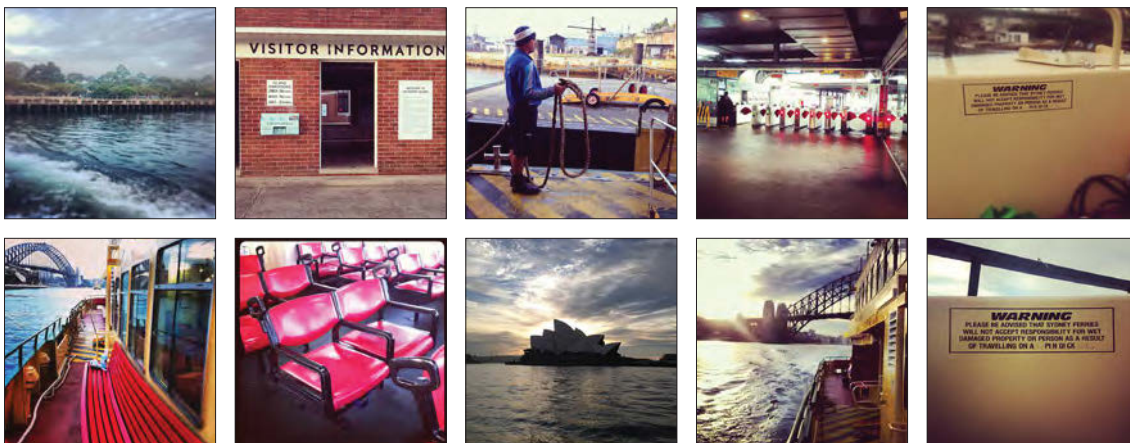
The DNEAs who participated in the Designer Explorer project were Sydney-based young adults who were enrolled in the first semester of a design degree at the University of Technology



Sydney (UTS) and taking part in the core interdisciplinary subject titled Design Thinking. UTS is located in the centre of metropolitan Sydney, Australia. As a tertiary institution, it emphasises its experienced-based approach to teaching and learning and promotes its access to industry networks, engagement with real-life scenarios and internship opportunities (Universities Admissions Centre, 2015, p. 373). It offers degrees across a range of faculties including Design, Architecture and Building, Communication, Education, International Studies, Business, Engineering and Information Technology, Health, Law and Science.

To provide insight into the demographic characteristics of students in the Design Thinking cohort, pathways-to-university data for UTS students for 2011 to 2014 was analysed with the assistance of Dr Kathy Egea from UTS's Institute of Media and Learning (see Appendix 1). The data was supplemented with data from comparable first year subjects offered at UTS in journalism and architecture. Conclusions about the circumstances of the 2012 and 2013 Designer Explorer participants, highlighted below, are based on this data and conversations with Dr Kathy Egea, supplemented with conversations with Pak Liu, Manager of Admissions and Timetabling at UTS.

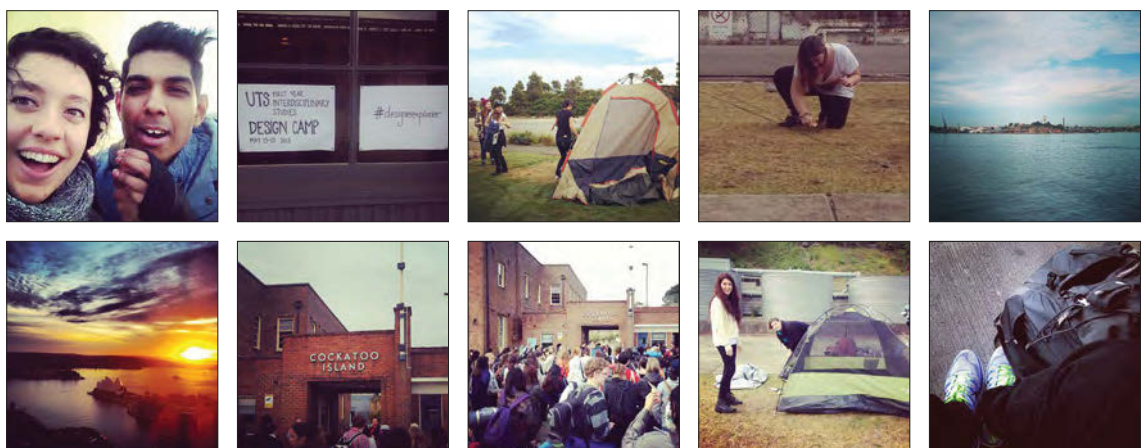
The majority of students who participated in the Designer Explorer project were undertaking a tertiary degree for the first time. The students were enrolled in one of five design degrees offered at UTS: Animation Design, Fashion and Textiles Design, Integrated Product Design, Interior and Spatial Design, and Visual Communication Design. UTS requires its design degree admissions to have completed an Australian Year 12 or equivalent with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) of at least 69.00 (excluding bonus points). However, many courses



require a much higher ATAR score for enrolment. For example, Visual Communication Design requires an ATAR of at least 93.20 (Universities Admissions Centre, 2015, p. 383). Given the ATAR entrance score required for design at UTS, many of the students enrolled in design degrees come from highly educated backgrounds.

The Designer Explorer project participants for the two case studies were drawn from two cohorts of first year students enrolled in the core subject Design Thinking: 303 students in 2012 and 383 students in 2013. While the 359 first year students who attended the design camp were aware of the project and were required to complete a consent form, as set out in the UTS Human Research Ethics approval (UTS HREC REF NO. #2011-220A), not all students actively participated in the Designer Explorer project. It should be noted, that if any student actively declined to participate in the project and stated so on their consent form, the researcher took steps during data analysis to redact images that included that student. All images in the thesis have been redacted to protect the privacy of participants. The DNEAs who did actively engage in the Designer Explorer project were a diverse group of individuals. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 22 years across both 2012 and 2013, meaning they were born between 1990 and 1996 and placing these individuals squarely in the realm of digital native emerging adulthood.

The pathways to university varied across the group, and participants had varying motives for tertiary study and varied potential career trajectories, though these can be challenging to discern from the data. As identified through the UTS pathways-to-university data (see



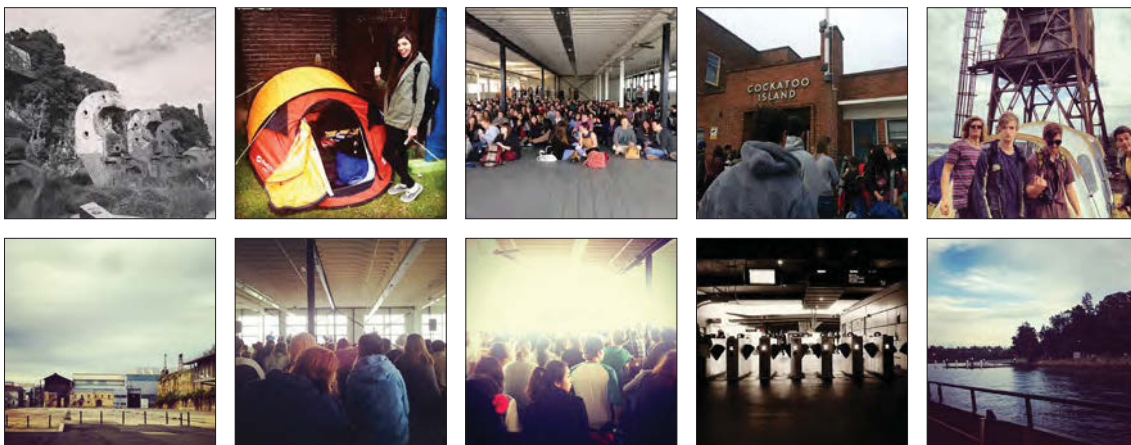
Appendix 1), students entering first year design at UTS in 2012 and 2013 came from a variety of social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

Many of the participants had recently graduated from high school and either still lived at, or had just moved from, home. As characteristic of emerging adulthood, prior to university, they were unlikely to have had many social connections beyond the group that they engaged with at high school or other direct situational and locational contexts that they were part of.

As examined in later sections of this chapter, the diversity of these participants is evident throughout the Designer Explorer data. This diversity was apparent through the identity performances taking place throughout the Designer Explorer project. The unique context of the first year design camp at Cockatoo Island meant that individuals participating in the project could draw on contextual elements provided through the locational, material, situational and social contexts available to them as they undertook digitally networked practices.

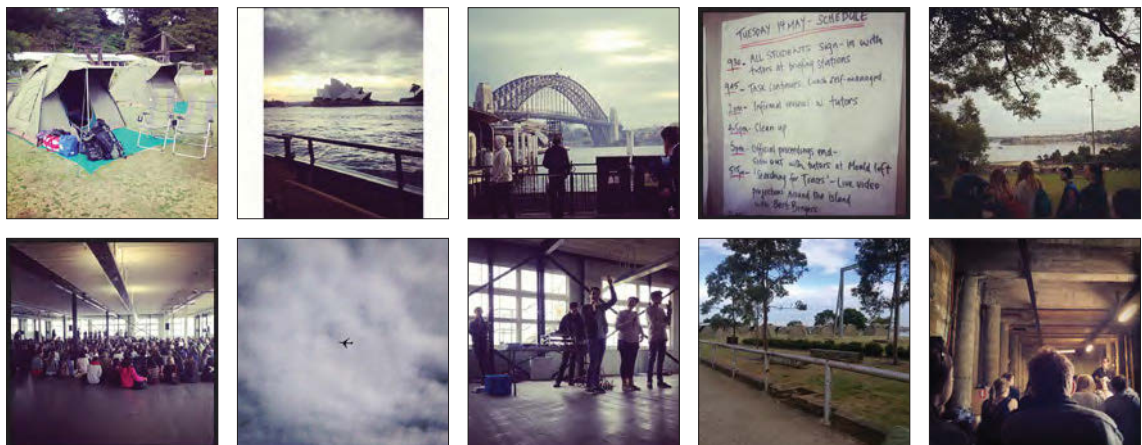
5.3 Designer Explorer at Design Camp

As part of their first semester course, Design Thinking, all UTS design students attend an annual three-day design camp at Cockatoo Island, an urban island in the middle of Sydney Harbour. The design camp is a unique experience that facilitates a rich engagement between the students and the Cockatoo Island environment and it plays a crucial role in their formative first year at university.



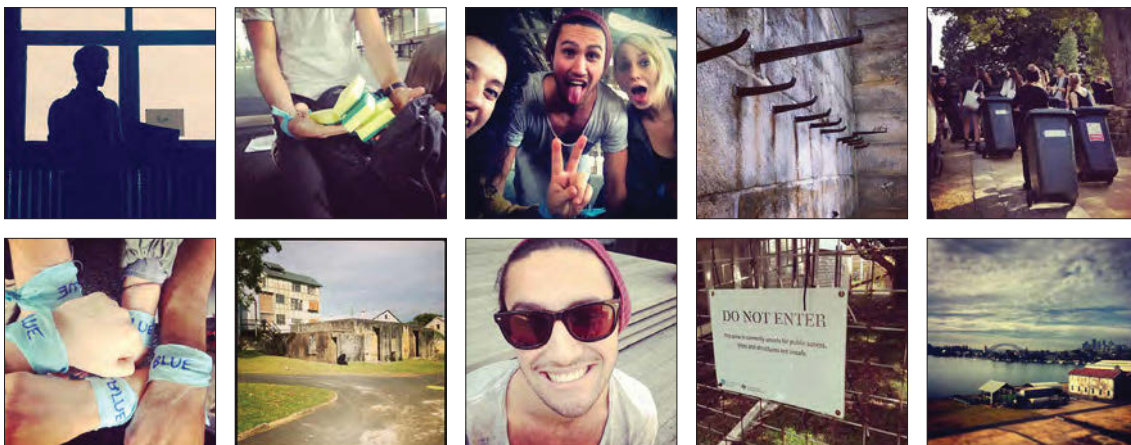
The Design Thinking course considers many themes during the semester. When the Designer Explorer project was undertaken in 2013, a major theme was ‘Designer as Explorer’, drawing on themes from Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities* (1974) as a narrative framework for ‘designerly exploration’ during the Cockatoo Island camp. In the novel, explorer Marco Polo describes 55 different cities to the Chinese ruler Kublai Khan. In the telling of the story, Polo uses objects from each city to conjure up visions of these magical cities. However, through the telling it gradually becomes clear that he is actually describing one city—Venice—but in many different guises. The Design Thinking course used sections from the novel as a starting point from which students could situate themselves on Cockatoo Island and begin to interpret their experiences of the island in the context of the design camp. During their time on the island students were encouraged to explore the island, take note of their observations of their surroundings and challenge themselves to embrace all their senses to ‘view’ the island from different perspectives. The students designed and made contextual maps and habitation interventions. In much the same way that Marco Polo describes Venice in multiple ways in *Invisible Cities*, the students used design practice to present varied readings of the Cockatoo Island context.

During their three days on Cockatoo Island, students worked intensively in small groups to develop two projects around the themes of observation, exploration, mapping and inhabitation. Cockatoo Island is a UNESCO World Heritage-listed island in the middle of Sydney Harbour. Between 1839 and 1869 Cockatoo Island operated as a convict penal establishment and a reform school for orphaned and neglected children. Between 1857 and 1991, it was also the site of one of Australia’s largest shipyards. After the shipyards closed in the early 1990s and



with several buildings demolished, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust assumed control of the island in 2001. The trust has retained Cockatoo Island's historical resonance through extensive restoration and remediation works and the island is now a key destination on Sydney Harbour, hosting cultural and creative events and public visitors daily after reopening to the public in 2007 (Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, n.d.). Given the aesthetic and material qualities of the location, prompted by its rich and diverse history, and the underlying narrative of exploration and seeing things from different perspectives, the overall scenario prompted students to produce rich visual and textual material. Students were encouraged to share with others the visual and textual material they were producing as a means in which to create and engage with ongoing dialogue about their experiences with their classmates and tutors during the camp. They were also prompted to develop an archive of images and ideas that could be used as part of their reflective design practice, both during and after the camp.

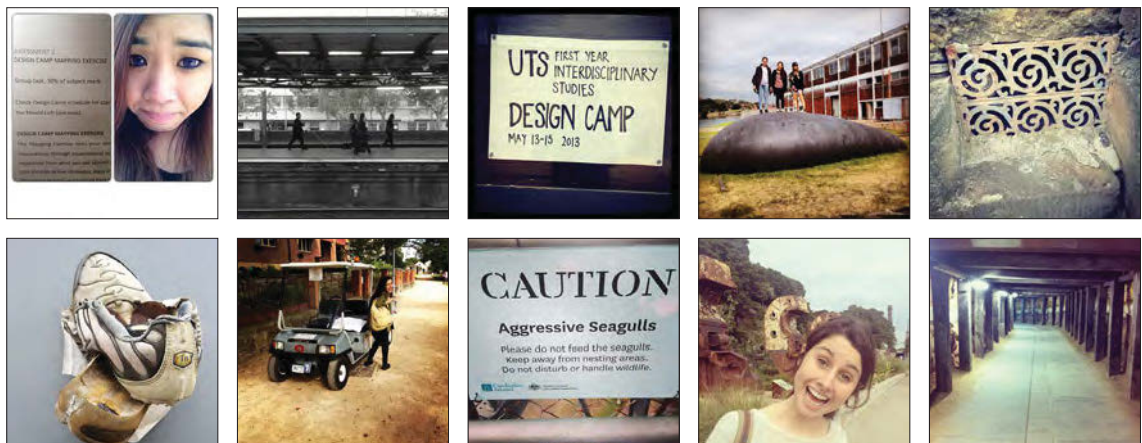
As a tutor in the Design Thinking course in 2012, the researcher helped coordinate a social media presence for students during the design camp to facilitate dialogue and sharing between the students which provided an opportunity to develop a research investigation to examine a 'captive' and willing group of DNEA participants. This unique environment was an opportunity to draw out a significant amount of rich and context-specific visual and textual data through which to investigate the behaviours of these individuals. The first phase of the Designer Explorer project was developed as a small pilot study in 2012 where students were invited to use a hashtag via Instagram and Twitter to share content during their time on Cockatoo Island.



5.4 The #designerexplorer Hashtag

During the research design of the Designer Explorer project, one of the core requirements was to create a digital space that would allow individuals to participate in ways that were faithful to their normative use of digital social technologies and record as accurate of a representation of their context creation practice as possible. Given the predilection DNEAs already had for the use of mobile social media in their daily lives, it was important to select social network platforms that were commonly used by participants on their digital devices as part of their normative engagement. As such, Twitter and Instagram were selected as applications that would be the most appropriate for the case study—Twitter for its long-standing reputation as a public platform and preference for textual content, and Instagram for its image-sharing capabilities. Both platforms provided a range of qualitative data that could be examined for theoretical insight, including images, text content and social responses such as ‘likes’ and comments. Additionally, there were other types of metadata that could be collected through the use of a hashtag (primarily Twitter content), including user ID, status URL, date and time stamp and geo-coordinates.

Hashtags function as contextual elements that both produce digital data and also facilitate the collection of digital data. As discussed in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5.2, hashtags make any content they are attached to accessible to anyone with access to that tag and thus help to coordinate and produce networked publics. In the context of this research, hashtags function as material elements in the context ecologies created within networked publics. For DNEAs, the use of hashtags is typical of their everyday use of some digital social

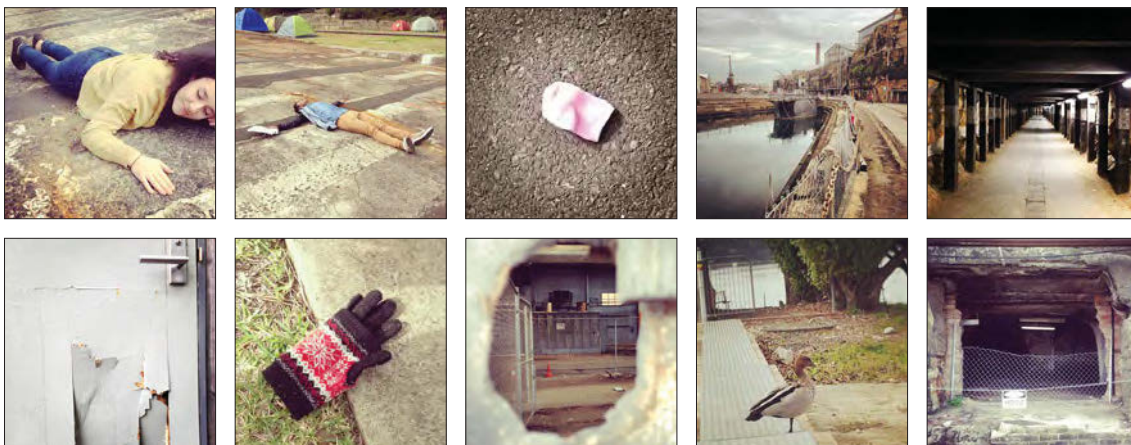


technologies. Using a hashtag to collect data during the Designer Explorer project was deemed to be the most appropriate method because of its accessibility to the competences of DNEAs.

Throughout the Designer Explorer project participants used the hashtag *#designerexplorer* which was specifically engineered to elicit from individuals typical, authentic and rich content in response to the immediate environment on Cockatoo Island. Students were encouraged to share with others and establish archives of the visual and textual material they were producing. Relating to the site, students were asked to document their time on the island, sharing their observations and experiences as ‘designer explorers’ through Twitter and Instagram using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag.

The phrase ‘designer explorer’ is borrowed from Keri Smith’s book *How to be an Explorer of the World* (2008), which sets readers various experimental design tasks to undertake alternative designerly methods for exploring, experiencing and documenting the material world. In the lead up to the design camp, students were introduced to Smith’s work and encouraged to include aspects of her methodologies in their design practice. Creating the *#designerexplorer* hashtag was motivated by a desire to give participants a sense that they had their own exclusive space in which to share and engage with other like-minded individuals. The neologism *#designerexplorer* was devised from Smith’s work in the hope that it would evoke some of these same methodological approaches among participants.

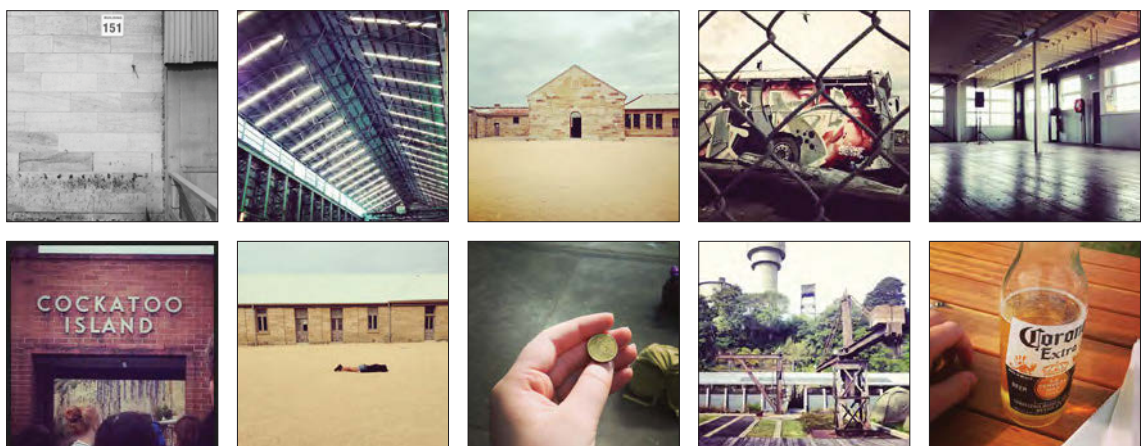
It was decided that the participants needed a hashtag that was both universal and thematically identifiable with the design camp, temporally and spatially. It was important that participants



understood the hashtag as being related to the design practice they would be undertaking on Cockatoo Island, while at the same time understanding the context of the island as distinct from its specific geo-location, and that the island was temporally and spatially a malleable context in which to be ‘designed’ and ‘explored’ from multiple perspectives. While the nature of hashtags is that they are accessible publicly, the hashtag offered participants a sense of ownership and privacy through its uniqueness. Unless those external to the project had been informed about the hashtag, it would not have necessarily been of interest to external audiences. It allowed data for collection to be restricted to a specific set of users, while at the same time the hashtag maintained its openness and publicness through its neutrality across diverse audiences, with access through shared competences and its potential longevity. The *#designerexplorer* hashtag was nominated for use during the case studies held in 2012 and in 2013. While formal data collection ceased at the end of the 2013 design camp, the hashtag continued to be used during the 2014 and 2015 design camps.

5.5 Designer Explorer: Overview of Methods

The key research enquiries for this thesis emerged as a direct result of initial interpretations of the image and text content shared via the hashtag during the data collection and interviews with participants from the pilot study that took place in 2012. Several issues had been considered in establishing data collection approaches during this first phase of the Designer Explorer project. The original research enquiries of this first phase intended to examine these individuals as ‘students’ and the ways in which they used digital social technologies in the educational context of the first year design camp. However, as the research participants

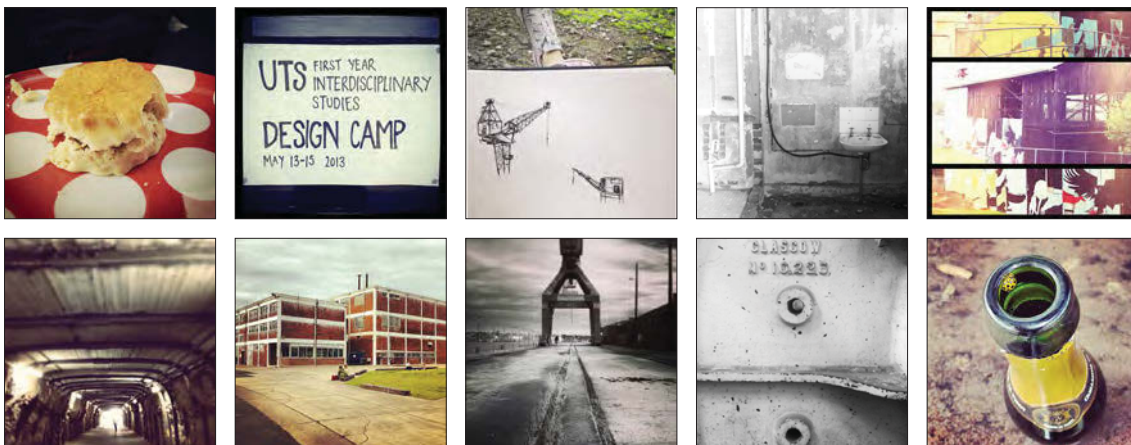


began to share content with the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, it became clear very early on in the research that the research participants were acting outside of the pedagogy of the Design Thinking subject. Instead, they were using the hashtag to engage with their student colleagues in ways that were much more sociable than expected, and the visual content being shared seemed to be coordinating thematically.

Following interpretation of data from the pilot study, a few key ideas started to emerge. Firstly, participants were using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag to create and engage with a *networked public*, that is, the newly formed Designer Explorer public—bounded by the location of Cockatoo Island, the context of the first year design camp and the audience of their fellow first year design students. Secondly, the DNEAs involved in the research were highly conscious of how they appeared publicly and produced identity performances in response to this.

In response to this shift, these themes were used as the impetus to develop further research questions to investigate how these young adults used digital social technologies to shape their own contexts for self as they positioned themselves in their emerging adulthood. This refinement of the research enquiry enabled a more focused approach to data collection and a deeper engagement with the analysis during the primary case study of the Designer Explorer project, undertaken in 2013.

The following sections present the data collection processes that took place throughout the primary Designer Explorer case study, and the methodological approaches to data interpretation and analysis used at various stages of the research. While the pilot case study

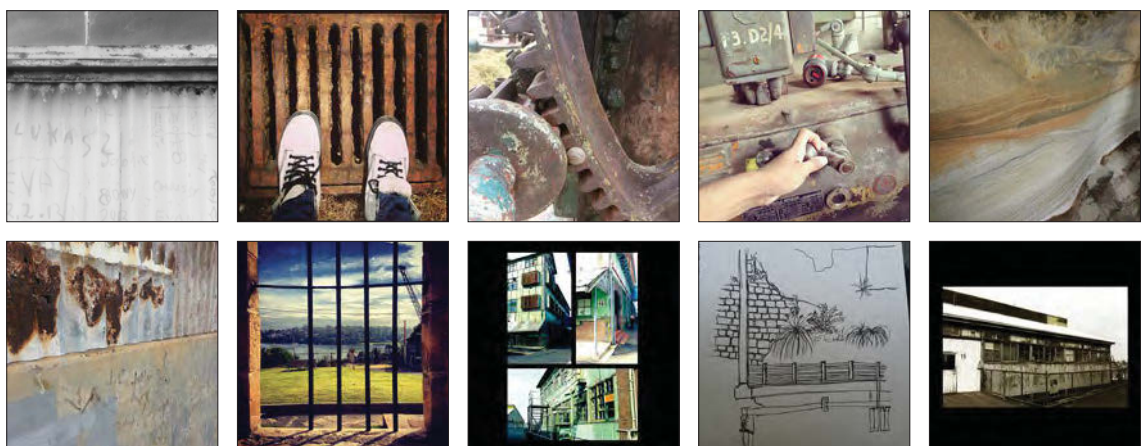


was crucial to the development of refined research enquiries, the emphasis of the next section, and the research, is in the exploration of the data collected during the primary case study of the Designer Explorer project. Points of interest from the pilot case study are dispersed throughout the text in the following section where relevant to the justification of particular methodological choices.

5.5.1 Data Collection

Throughout the Designer Explorer project, there was a twofold approach to the primary data collection. The first set of data was content collected from Instagram and Twitter through the *#designerexplorer* hashtag. The second set of data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Designer Explorer participants. As the project developed between 2012 and 2013, a decision was made to focus the data collection and analysis on the digital ethnographic aspects of the case study, rather than the quantitative data being collected.

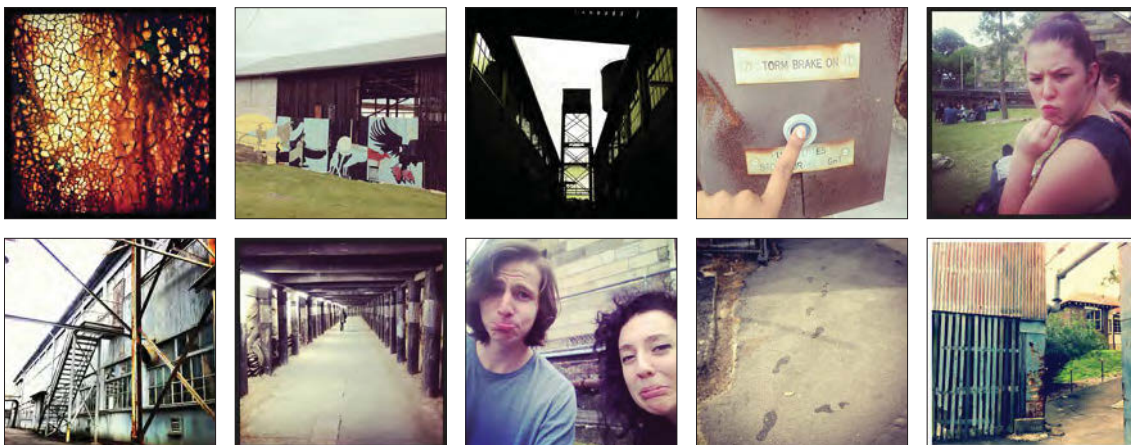
Empirical themes for discussion in the 2012 pilot Designer Explorer case study were developed from ideas in the literature and personal experiences as a tutor. In contrast, the ethnographic yearnings for the 2013 Designer Explorer case study emerged from discursive reflection on the data collected during the pilot study of the project. Fondly referred to as Designer Explorer 2.0, the 2013 primary case study streamlined elements of the pilot case study to incorporate developments in both the Design Thinking subject and in digital social technologies.



In September 2012, Facebook officially acquired Instagram, and the Instagram platform was then integrated into the Facebook platform, increasing the popularity, uptake and use of Instagram. This may have had an impact on the number of participants in the 2013 case study, as there was a significant increase in the number of unique users sharing content via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag during the primary case study compared to the pilot case study in 2012.

Participant recruitment for the Designer Explorer project was undertaken in two parts. The first mode of recruitment was to more extensively integrate the project into the design camp itself. As part of the project's development from 2012 to 2013, the Designer Explorer project was integrated into the design camp more comprehensively through its inclusion in the student assessment brief—the pilot case study had not done this. As part of the assessment task being undertaken on the island, students were asked to reflect on their experiences during the camp and it was suggested that participants could use Instagram as tool for creating a 'case history' of their experiences, which could then be used to assist in their reflection process after the camp. This suggestion was included in the camp booklet as a way that students could catalogue their experiences at the design camp. See Appendix 2 for the student brief for the 2013 design camp.

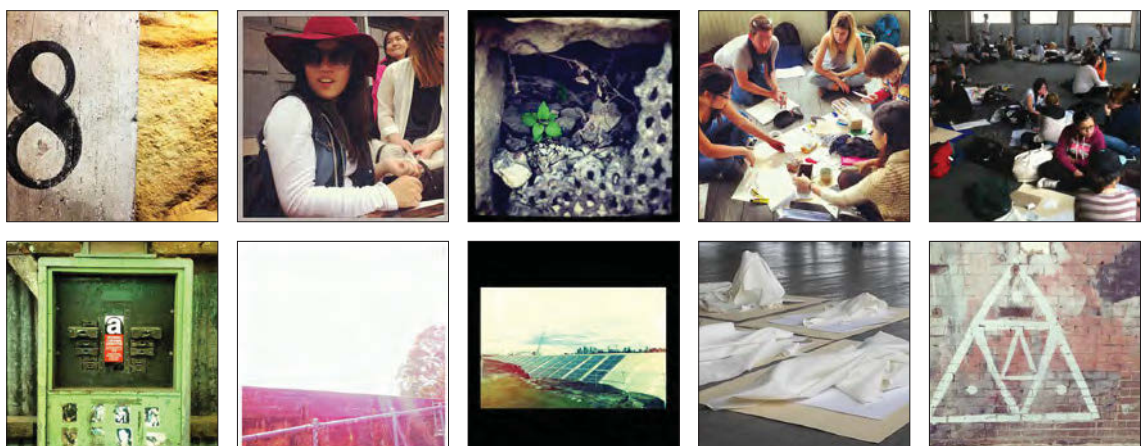
The second mode of recruitment involved explicitly requesting consent to participate in the research project well in advance of the camp. Unlike the 2012 case study where students were not informed about the project until they arrived at camp, students taking part in the 2013 design camp were given information about the research project two weeks before they arrived at Cockatoo Island. They were given an outline of the ways they could participate, including



requesting each student group who would be working together on their assignments while on the island to nominate a group member to be an ‘online representative’ during the camp. This request for participation also asked students to express interest in further participation in the project after the camp ended. This was facilitated through a request that students who were interested in taking part in an interview post-camp include their contact details on the UTS Human Research Ethics consent form. See Appendix 3 for Designer Explorer project participant consent form.

The research was presented to the Design Thinking students as being interested in looking at their typical use of digital social technologies. As such participants should feel that their engagement was typical of their normative daily use, rather than feeling like they were engaging in a ‘unique’ way. From this perspective, the participants were encouraged to themselves direct the types of content that would be shared via Instagram and Twitter during the design camp. There were several ways in which this was achieved: 1) through an appropriate choice of social network platforms being used, relevant to the group of participants taking part in the project, 2) through the use of a hashtag to centralise content and collect data, rather than developing a complicated standalone app that would require participants to ‘learn’ a method of interaction, and 3) by withholding clear directives for the modes of participation until the very start of the camp.

Prior to day one of the camp, a few ‘teaser’ images were posted to the *#designerexplorer* hashtag via the username @inhabitcockatoo. Because students had been informed about the project prior to the camp, they could guess that this content was posted by the researcher. The images



featured snapshots of the camp preparations, as well as images of physical materials that the students would be using in their design tasks at Cockatoo Island. Students had not been informed about the Design Thinking assessment tasks they would be undertaking during the camp, so the images uploaded to Instagram were deliberately ambiguous about what the images contained—image captions did not include any explicit details explaining what the content was, so as not to reveal to the students what they would be working on during the camp. The overall intention of the teaser images was to populate the profile and encourage participation with the hashtag. It was hoped that individuals would be more likely to engage if they saw other content had started to be shared. It was hoped that the lack of clarity around the images would allow the hashtag to be adopted by participants to establish their own understanding of how the hashtag should be used. As established earlier, individuals adopt and adapt elements of practices to suit their own purposes and goals.

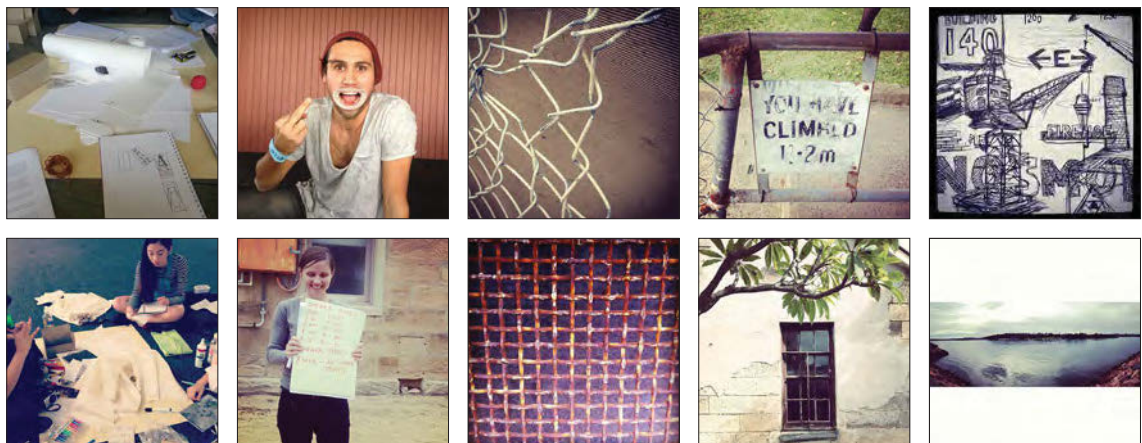
The primary case study began on the first day of camp on 13 May 2013. During the camp orientation, students and staff were given a briefing by the researcher about the Designer Explorer project and its intended research outcomes. Individuals who were interested in participating in the project were again requested to use the hashtag *#designerexplorer* (and where possible to geo-tag and caption) on any public posts they were sharing on Instagram and Twitter over the three days of the design camp. During the briefing, limited prompts were offered for the types of content that should be uploaded; rather, participants were asked that they refrain from censoring themselves and share images and text as they would typically in their daily practices.



Over the course of the three days of the design camp, and in the days directly following, a total of 608 images were shared to Instagram using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag. At the conclusion of the data collection phase, the images were collected using the website <http://www.gramfeed.com> (now operating as <https://www.picodash.com>), which allows individuals to search for all the publicly available images attached to a hashtag. The flexibility of using a web-browser to view the images means that images can be viewed at a larger scale, and makes visible additional data such as the image caption, 'likes,' comments, geo-location and filters applied to the image. Gramfeed also organises the images chronologically according to the time-stamp of when they were shared. Every image shared via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag was enlarged and manually screen-captured by the researcher and stored digitally according to time-stamp.

The first step of data interpretation of the Instagram content involved extracting the data from the screen-captures into a spreadsheet. Participants were listed according to username, the total number of posts they shared throughout the project, the total number of likes they received, and any alternative hashtags they used. An anonymised presentation of this data is illustrated in Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2, Table 5.1, Table 5.2 and Table 5.3.

Twitter data was collected using an open source Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) data archiving spreadsheet called TAGS v5 (Hawksey, 2013). This spreadsheet pulls in publicly available data from a hashtag including the TweetID, username, the contents of the tweet, geo-location and the time-stamp of the tweet. Only 62 tweets were captured over the project, a vastly smaller number than the 608 Instagram images. It is speculated that this

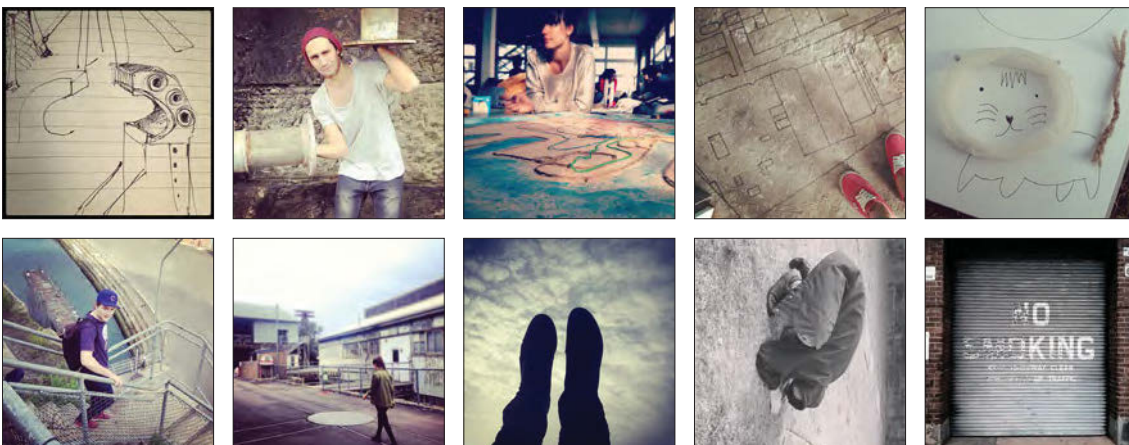


reflects the popularity of Instagram over Twitter among this particular group of individuals. Due to the low response rate on Twitter, this data became secondary to the Instagram data in the interpretation and analysis of the project and was only referred to occasionally. It was primarily used to correlate data shared on Instagram and as a probe with interview participants if they had used Twitter during the project.

The data revealed that participants were collectively constructing a shared identity within the context of Cockatoo Island. At the same time, individuals participating in the project were engaging with their own process of *impression management* as they undertook identity performances within this newly formed Designer Explorer networked public. As students participated in the project, it became evident that they were contributing in ways that suited their own purposes and goals. The participants were not operating in a vacuum while they were at design camp, but were pulling together elements from their existing daily digital social technology practices and integrating them into the context of the design camp. They were actively using the locational, material, situational and social contextual elements available to them to collectively create a networked public. The following section outlines the approach to the data interpretation phase of the Designer Explorer project and identifies the key themes that are analysed in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public.

5.5.2 Data Interpretation

The *#designerexplorer* hashtag was created as an apparatus through which to interrogate individual participants' identity performances, and concurrently explore the activities of



practice by the wider collective group of Designer Explorer participants. Before the more formal process of analysis, a series of data interpretations were conducted to understand the overall general use of the hashtag and its associated metadata, as well as identifying core themes from the visual Instagram data for further investigation.

The data interpretation phase of the research used a grounded theory approach, though not applied in a strict manner, where data was manually coded through processes of content analysis of the visual data and discourse analysis of interview data. The project's relatively small scale enabled the grouping of images from multiple perspectives and enabled data similarity to appear, allowing a deeper reading of the hashtag content through 'multi-scale readings' (Hochman & Manovich, 2013) of the data. This meant the research could move beyond analysing the data from a primarily spatial perspective analysing the event itself, to seeing and understanding the data as malleable material that shifts thematically depending on the networked engagement taking place.

The following section contains a series of figures showing the sharing habits of the participants across the three days of the Designer Explorer project. It is followed by detailed descriptions and analysis which are background for discussion in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public and Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self.

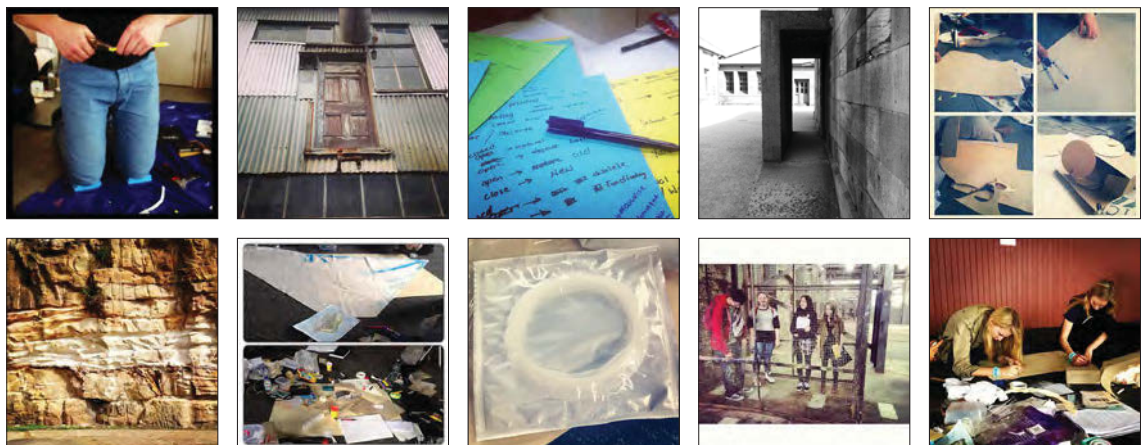


Table 5.1: Total number of posts shared using the #designerexplorer hashtag and total number of unique users per day.

	Total Posts	Unique Users
Day One	260	77
Day Two	176	82
Day Three	135	63
Post-Camp	37	18

Table 5.2: Total number of posts shared using the #designerexplorer hashtag by user count, with accumulated 'likes' across the total shared posts.

Total Posts	Unique Users	Likes
1	36	552
2	14	338
3	16	598
4	14	576
5	7	353
6	2	188
7	6	236
8	2	70
9	3	260
10	3	289
11	1	30
12	1	103
13	1	46
14	2	229
15	1	261
20	1	116
21	1	347
23	1	182
24	1	74
28	1	55
30	1	87
31	1	501

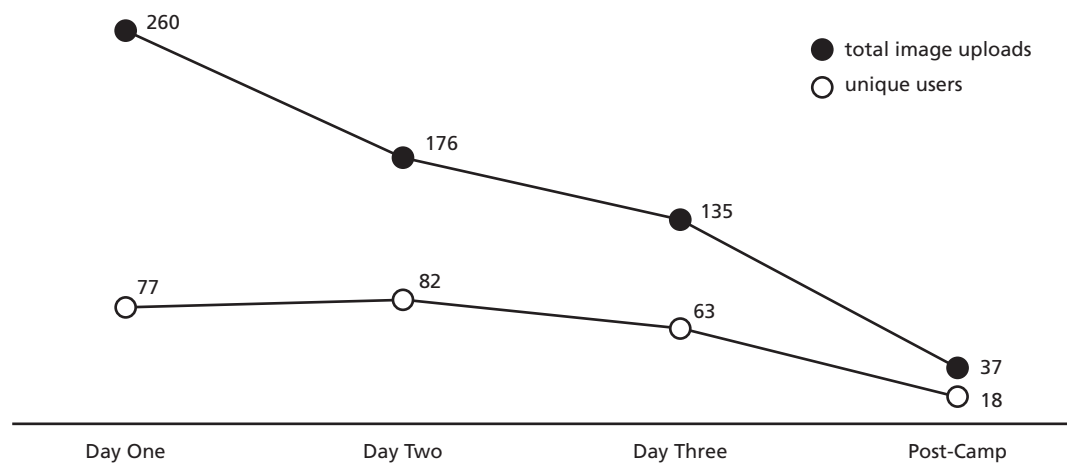


Figure 5.1: Total image uploads to Instagram using the #designerexplorer hashtag, measured against 'unique' users per day.

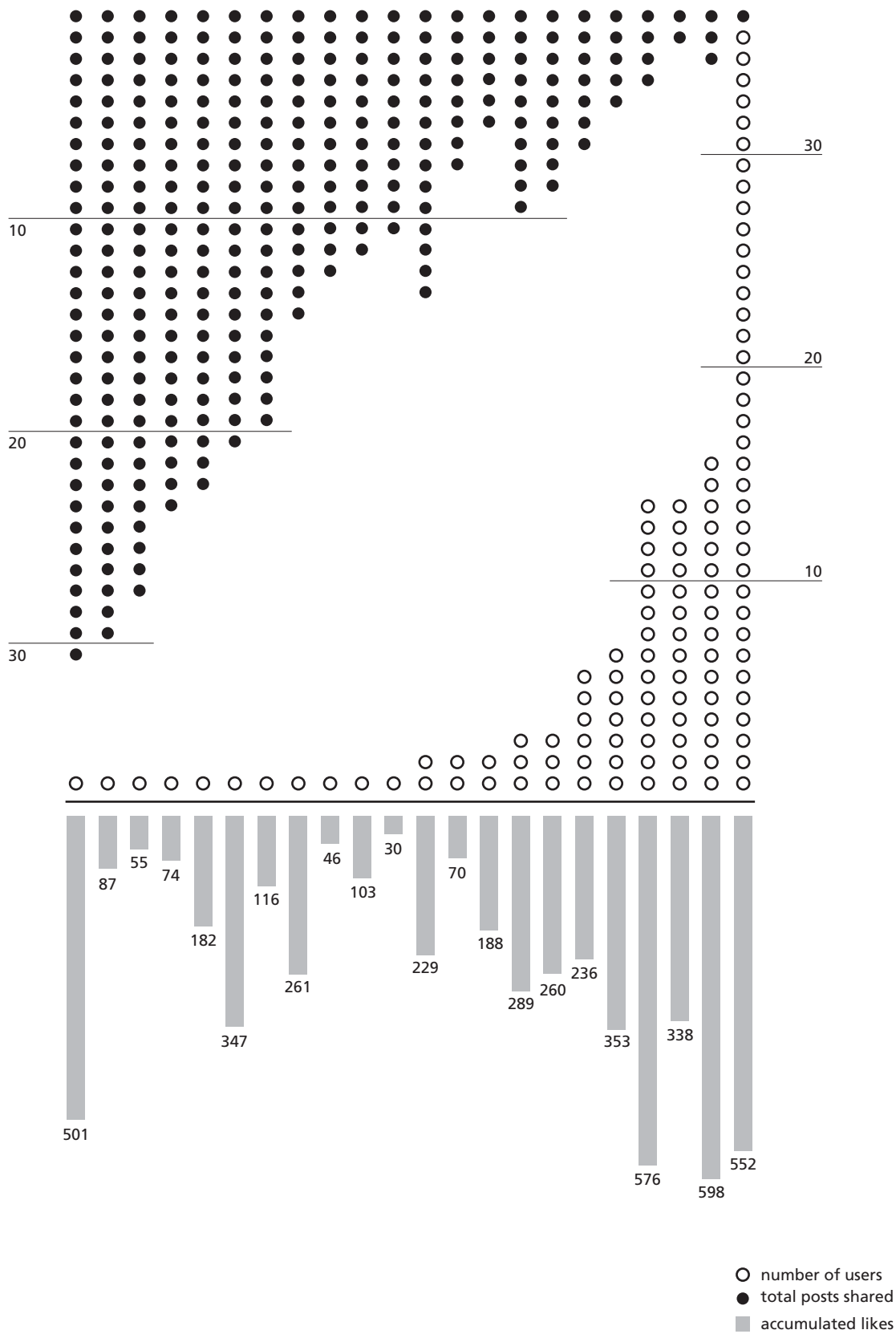


Figure 5.2 : Total posts shared, by users per 'number of posts shared' to Instagram using the designerexplorer hashtag, measured against accumulated 'likes' or 'number of posts shared'.

Figure 5.1. Total uploads to Instagram using the #designerexplorer hashtag, measured against 'unique' users per day

As students set about their assessment task of mapping, they spent time exploring the island and subsequently, the first few hours of the design camp had the greatest number of posts using the #*designerexplorer* hashtag. There were 260 images shared to Instagram on day one which slowly decreased over the next two days of the camp, with 176 images shared on day two and 135 images shared on day three.

Over the three days of the design camp, 116 unique users in total participated in the Designer Explorer project. This number does not account for repeated users across the three days. The 260 images posted on day one meant each user averaged 3.3 posts, decreasing to 2.1 on day two. The decrease in posts was not reflected in the number of unique users on day two, with 5 new users becoming active members of the #*designerexplorer* networked public. There was a decrease in both the number of posts and unique users on day three, however the average number of posts per user remained 2.1.

The #*designerexplorer* hashtag was actively tracked until approximately three months after the camp had ended, where posts were being shared irregularly. After the camp, 37 additional images using #*designerexplorer* had been posted to Instagram. The hashtag continues to be used by participants of UTS first year design camps. The most recent camp was held in May 2016, and images were shared then, though not with the same ferocity as the 2013 design camp.

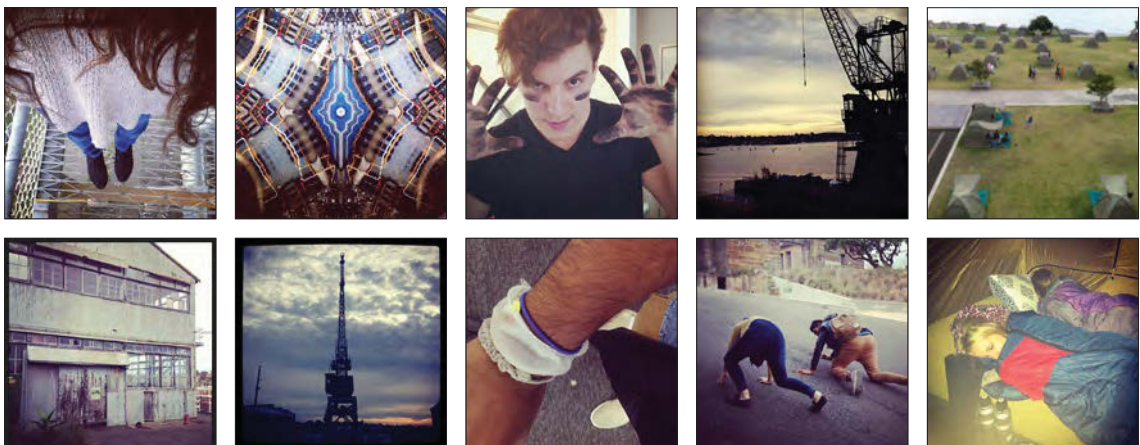


Figure 5.2. Total posts shared, by users per ‘number of posts shared’ to Instagram using the #designerexplorer hashtag, measured against accumulated ‘likes’ per ‘number of posts shared’

Across the three days of the project, 36 participants shared just one image using the #designerexplorer hashtag. The majority of participants shared between two to four images over the three days (calculated as 44 unique usernames). There were 13 participants who shared more than 11 images, with the most frequent sharer sharing a total of 31 images throughout the entire project.

The accumulated ‘likes’ for the total number of images shared varied; 36 users shared a single image throughout the project, these images accumulated 552 ‘likes’ in total across them. The single user who shared 31 images accumulated 501 ‘likes’ in total across their images, and those users who shared three or four images during the three days of the project received the most accumulated ‘likes’ at 598 and 576 respectively.

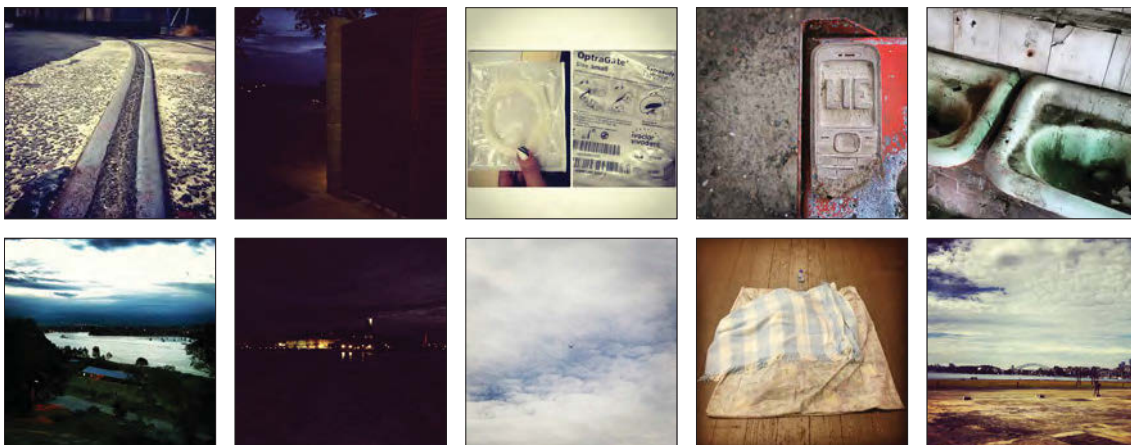


Table 5.3: List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used)

<i>Frequency: ???</i>	#basic
#designerexplorer	#brick
	#cat
<i>Frequency: 49</i>	#circularquay
#cockatooisland	#cockisland
	#collaboration
<i>Frequency: 19</i>	#colour
#sydney	#crane
	#daylaugh
<i>Frequency: 15</i>	#exhausted
#designcamp	#explorerdesigner
	#firstworldproblems
<i>Frequency: 9</i>	#girl
#camp	#harbour
#thisonetimeatdesigncamp	#hotties
	#illustration
<i>Frequency: 7</i>	#isdesign
#design	#island
#industrial	#parramattariver
	#pretty
<i>Frequency: 6</i>	#retro
#uts	#rust
	#scroll
<i>Frequency: 5</i>	#seating
#designthinking	#semicirclesociety
#ferry	#student
#nofilter	#sydneyharbour
	#sydneylocal
<i>Frequency: 4</i>	#texture
#camping	#utsdab
#instadaily	
#instagood	<i>Frequency: 1</i>
#sunset	#3crack
#uni	#academics
	#accidentallywonderful
<i>Frequency: 3</i>	#acetonekilledmyvoice
#cold	#AINTNOBODYGOTTIME
#designcamprules	#AintNobodyGotTime
#mapping	#aintshit
#soundmap	#airstream
	#ali
<i>Frequency: 2</i>	#aligetinst
#architecture	#alldemgains
#australia	#allnatty

Table 5.3: List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used), continued

#almostmyinitials	#concretejungle
#AmlOprahYet	#cracked
#anotheronebitesthedorito	#cracks
#artsy	#cranefest
#assessment	#craneparty
#assignment	#cranepartygalore
#badpaintjob	#creamatorium
#basicbitches	#creativethinking
#bbc	#crematorium
#beastality	#cute
#beastiality	#datcharcoal
#beautiful	#day1
#beautifulcity	#daytwo
#beingfabulous	#death
#berry	#deconstructedtunnell
#bird	#deep
#birthday	#deerintheheadlights
#blonde	#designerexplored
#bonquisha	#designerswag
#breakfastofchampions	#designexplore
#breakfastview	#devo
#breaktime	#df
#brickwall	#dials
#brilliant	#disaster
#bus	#doesthiswhetanyoneelsesappetite
#butterpaper	#doing
#campsite	#doistillhavetodothis
#caravan	#doistillhavetodothislol
#caravanselfies	#dolce
#catatooisland	#done
#chairs	#donkeydom
#chantelleisatroll	#door
#charging	#doyoueven
#checkoutourpaper	#dranks
#cheeky	#drawing
#chocolateben	#drwho
#chunder	#dymaxion
#circles	#emptyvessel
#cityofsydney	#enoughhashtags
#cityscape	#enterrappeddungeon
#cleanliving	#environment
#cliche	#explored
#coffee	#exploring
#concrete	#fabulous

Table 5.3: List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used), continued

#fakewall	#hashtaghashtag
#family	#hashtagoveruse
#ferries	#havecoralskidz
#ferryman	#heisjustfuntodraw
#final	#help
#finallyfinished	#hercules
#firehoe	#heritage
#flatwhite	#hero
#flawless	#heyjacquie
#flower	#highdistinction
#fly	#hiking
#flyknit	#hotchocolate
#foodiewanker	#hottotrot
#frame	#iamnotobsessed
#frangipani	#ididthecondom
#freezing	#ikea
#freezingday	#imdone
#frosta	#imonaboat
#fuckthepopo	#imsogladmygroupwastheoneonetohangourwork
#fuckyoudesigncamp	#inhabitcockatoo
#fuckyoukarl	#instacollage
#fuginanimalsoncockatooisland	#instafamous
#gabbana	#instamood
#getmeoff	#instyle
#getmeoutofhere	#interdisciplinary
#ghetto	#interior
#giantcondom	#ipromise
#girls	#itsagoooddaysforanadventure
#glamping	#jesseisthebest
#glossyred	#jforjesus
#godsaveusall	#jks
#golfbuggy	#justwhy
#goodbyedignity	#keepout
#goon	#kik
#graffiti	#kikme
#grate	#kikmessage
#groupwork	#killme
#grunge	#kimmyjin
#guide	#landscape
#hammering	#lastday
#handintime	#lastminute
#happypeople	#laundry
#harbourbridge	#letsgo
#hashtag	#light

Table 5.3: List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used), continued

#lights	#pathways
#lightweightbuddy	#peelingwall
#localnatives	#picoftheday
#lolbye	#pizza
#lookatdemarms	#powerfromtheceiling
#louisvitton	#powerhouse
#machinery	#progeess
#magic	#QuintupleFilter
#maya	#r2d2
#me	#rats
#methlab	#ratraps
#mindyourhead	#red
#modernism	#redbench
#modernsign	#redseat
#morning	#roofing
#mouldloft	#roomies4lyf
#mouthcondom	#rope
#moviebox	#ropes
#mpyou'reallprettygoodactually	#rusty
#nefkknminn	#sad
#newspapers	#sailormoon
#niceworkteam	#samtheshitmodlemaker
#nike	#sausage
#nocomputers	#schoolcamphellyeah
#nodramas	#scum
#nofuckingaround	#selca
#nomakeup	#selfie
#noodles	#shadows
#nosmo	#shft
#NotBasicBitch	#shoes
#notbasicbitch	#sister
#notyet7am	#sketch
#nova	#sketches
#nutellaoneeverything	#sketching
#observation	#skinnymacklamore
#observeroftheobserving	#skittles
#old	#sleepybabies
#olddoors	#slippers
#onesiefamily	#smashedit
#oops	#sober
#orangepeel	#soorig
#ourassesmentwentoutthawindow	#sorryjackie
#paper	#soundedlikeatranny
#paperhats	#soundwaves

Table 5.3: List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used), continued

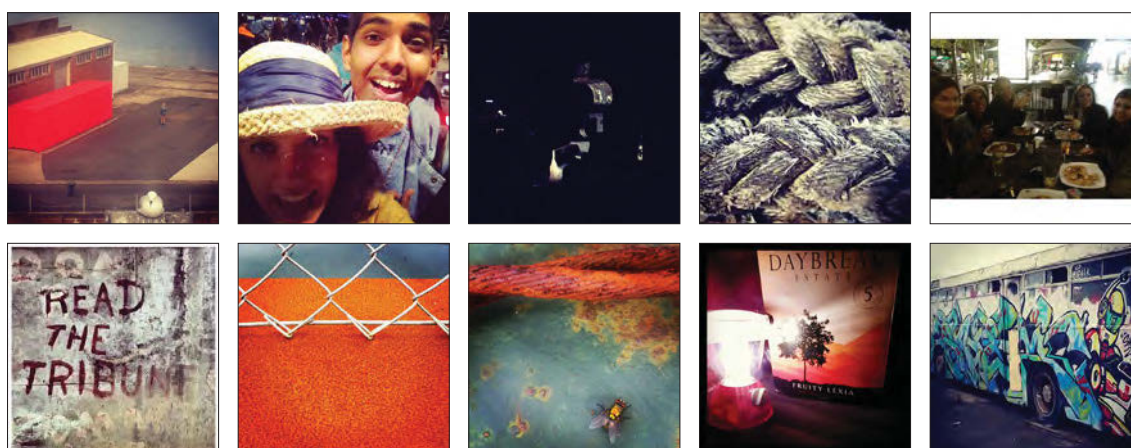
#space	#underpaidoverfed
#spatial	#urbantypography
#spliffs	#utsrepresent
#squareharrypotter	#vajyena
#staff	#vermin
#stankybooboochild	#visiting
#starwars	#wander
#streamlining	#warehouse
#stringinstallation	#water
#suckmecockatooisland	#waved
#sunrise	#weathered
#supersizemotherfucker	#welcome
#swisscheese	#wemadeit
#sydarch	#wesmashedthatshit
#sydneyarchitecture	#wharf
#sydneyferries	#wharfies
#sydneyferry	#whatamidoingwithmylife
#takemehome	#whataview
#teaching	#whathappensatdesigncampstaysatdesigncamp
#teachingstaff	#whatsherritage
#tear	#whatsinthedrank
#tent	#whatsshodoin
#thatdudeontheisland	#whenwillurfav
#TheHashtagLives	#whenwillyourfav
#thestruggle	#whosfootisthis
#thisshitcray	#wildlyf
#timetodie	#willtherealreaperpleasestandup
#toiletblock	#window
#toleratingcameras	#windowashing
#tommie	#windowseat
#toobeautiful	#winetime
#toocool	#womanofstyle
#totallynofilter	#wori
#totallyserious	#work
#tracingpaper	#xooxoxo
#troubles	#yeeeeeah
#tunnel	#yellow
#tunnelvision	#yep
#turbinehall	#yolo
#tutors	#yoloswag
#twelvielife	#yougonhaveacoldfoot
#twerkitgood	#YouGonHaveCold
#twoneckedmoose	#yummy
#uggs	

Table 5.3. List of additional hashtags used with #designerexplorer hashtag (by total times used)

One of the most compelling moments in the Designer Explorer project and an interesting illustration of a key activity of a DNEA context creation practice was the use of 414 additional unique hashtags alongside the #designerexplorer hashtag during the camp. The full list of additional hashtags, delineated by the frequency of use, is shown in Table 1: #cockatooisland was the most commonly used additional hashtag appearing 49 times, followed by #sydney19 times. As discussed in the following chapter, the additional hashtags illustrate several sub-narratives that occurred during the Designer Explorer project.

5.6 Data Interpretation: Visual Data

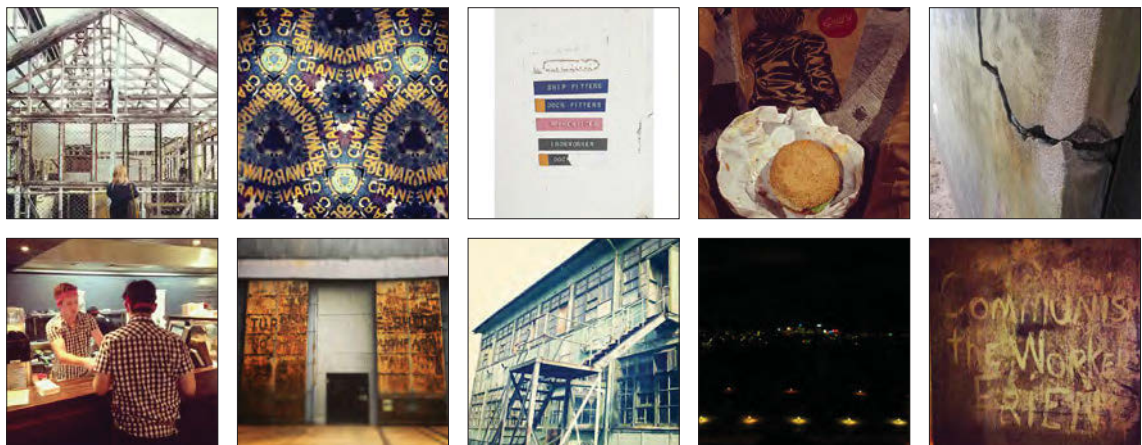
As highlighted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, this research aligns itself with a methodological approach of digital ethnography, combining ‘distant reading’ of patterns with a ‘close reading’ of specific artefacts to make the individual visible through focusing on the content of images, as opposed to only their visual characteristics (Highfield & Leaver, 2014, par. 4). While metadata has value in its ability to construct an analytical case for digital social technology interactions, there are many other elements at play when DNEAs use hashtags. As established previously, hashtags work to coordinate content within networked publics. If Instagram content is analysed as groups of images, it is possible to identify the thematic and recurring activities of practice that make networked publics distinct from one another.



In moving beyond a simple indexical analysis of the tagging process, the semantic qualities of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag are considered for their ethnographic value. There are other modes of data interpretation and analysis, which allow greater qualitative insight.

A crucial part of this data interpretation phase was analysing the different visual themes that emerged from the data. One approach used was to examine the full collection of 608 shared images and assess the dominant themes that were emerging, and identify the trajectory of these over the three days of design camp. As identified earlier in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, and through the work of Hochman and Manovich (2013), a process of scaling down and constraining data through gradation enables an increasingly nuanced qualitative analysis. As Hochman (2014) highlights with his *atomization* approach, rather than relying on semiotic interpretation of the imagery found on social media, grouping image content in meaningful ways reveals ‘connections, relations and patterns with other images in a collection’ (par. 5). This approach, not dissimilar to the strategies employed in grounded theory (Silverman, 2010), enables the content to be mined for similarities and differences in aesthetic themes and sharing behaviours.

The primary goal of this data interpretation process was to provide a descriptive evaluation of the image content as a means of guiding the research, rather than hypothesising on the motivation of the individuals sharing the content. This is illustrated through the presentation of the complete visual data set. All 608 images collected from Instagram throughout the Designer Explorer project have been included as a collection that runs chronologically across the bottom of the pages of Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Including the Instagram images



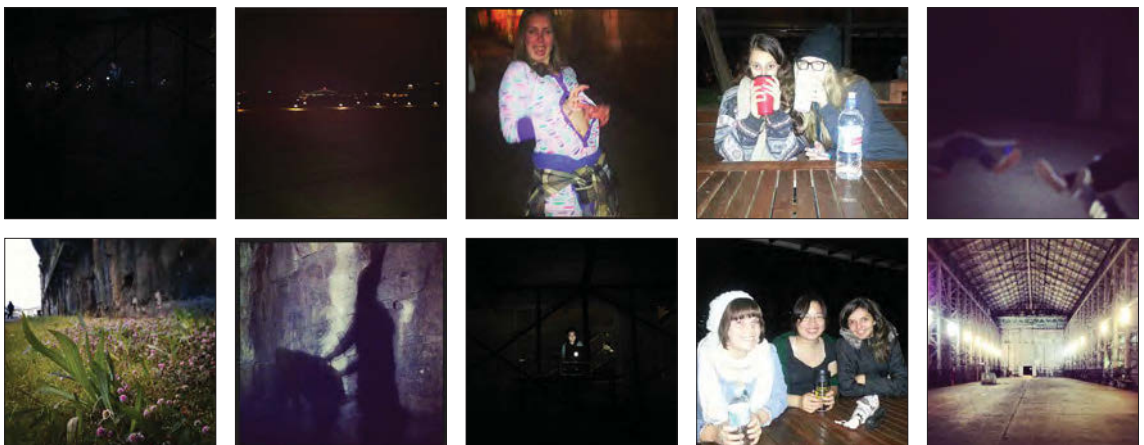
in this way gives access to the complete data set that was communicated via the Designer Explorer networked public. The context the DNEAs are operating in is a significant factor in how they conducted their identity performances throughout the case study. It is important to convey the context and overall cohesiveness of the content produced by Designer Explorer participants within their networked public and how this reveals the complexity of DNEA context creation practice.

As outlined in Section 1.5.2 and Section 2.5, one of the key challenges of this research was extrapolating the researcher from the context of her role as a tutor and mentor to these young adults and the potential conflicts that arise from this in my role as a researcher. In the early stages of establishing the Designer Explorer project, it became apparent that it would be difficult to untangle myself as a participant observer in the research process, as is the challenge of ethnographic research. Explicitly choosing to include the images in this way illustrates the discursive methodological process undertaken as a researcher. By sharing the full assemblage of content produced, others can also engage with the data and understand some of the interpretative decisions made throughout the research process.

The follow section of this chapter is a series of data interpretation that uses content analysis to arrange Instagram images into thematic sets of activities, locations and aesthetic approaches. Grouping the images in this way enabled two core themes to emerge from the data: representations of locational contexts, and representations of social contexts. The following pages contain these interpretive image sets and are followed by brief explanatory notes describing the content, related to each of core themes. These are drawn on throughout the



Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self to show the production of contextual ecologies and the ways in which these shift as contextual elements change in value for individuals.



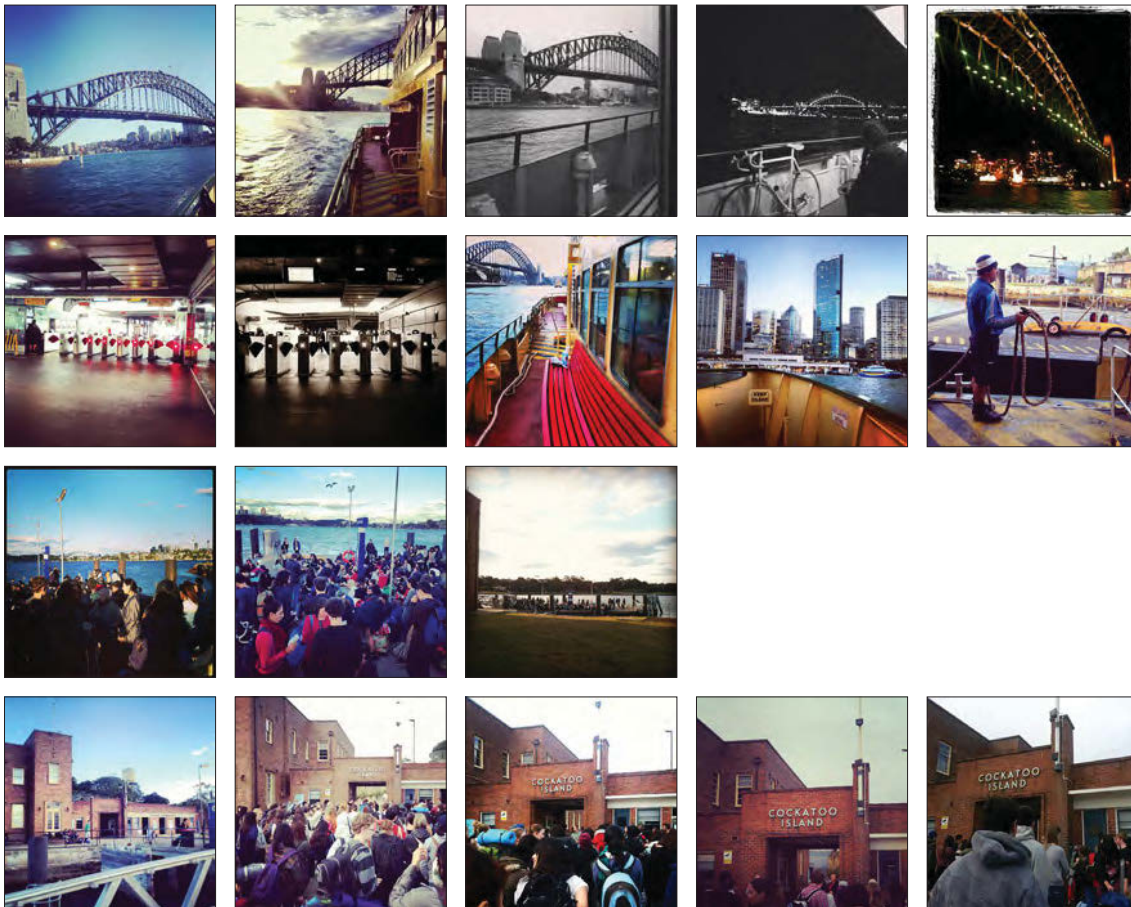


Image 1: Context: Sydney Harbour Bridge, ferry travel, arriving on Cockatoo Island.



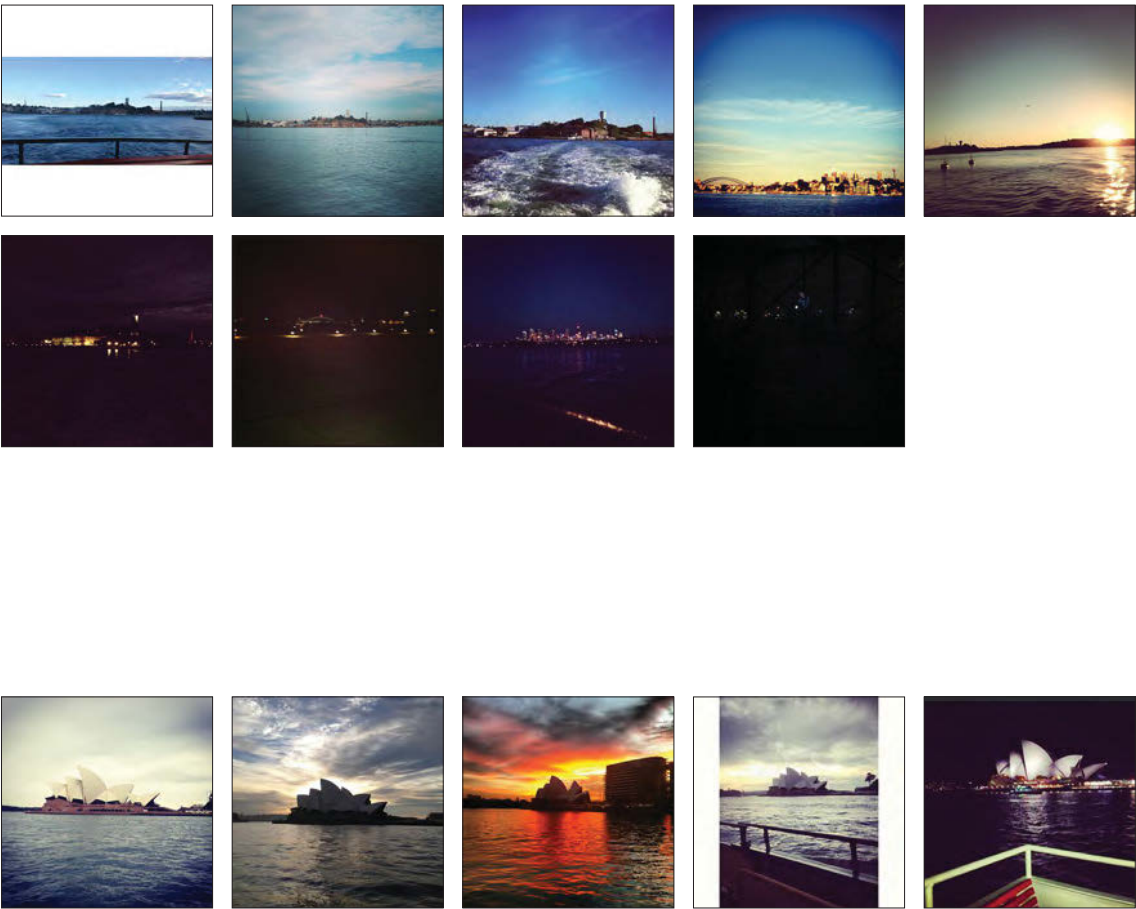


Image 2: Context: Departure from Cockatoo Island, Sydney Opera House



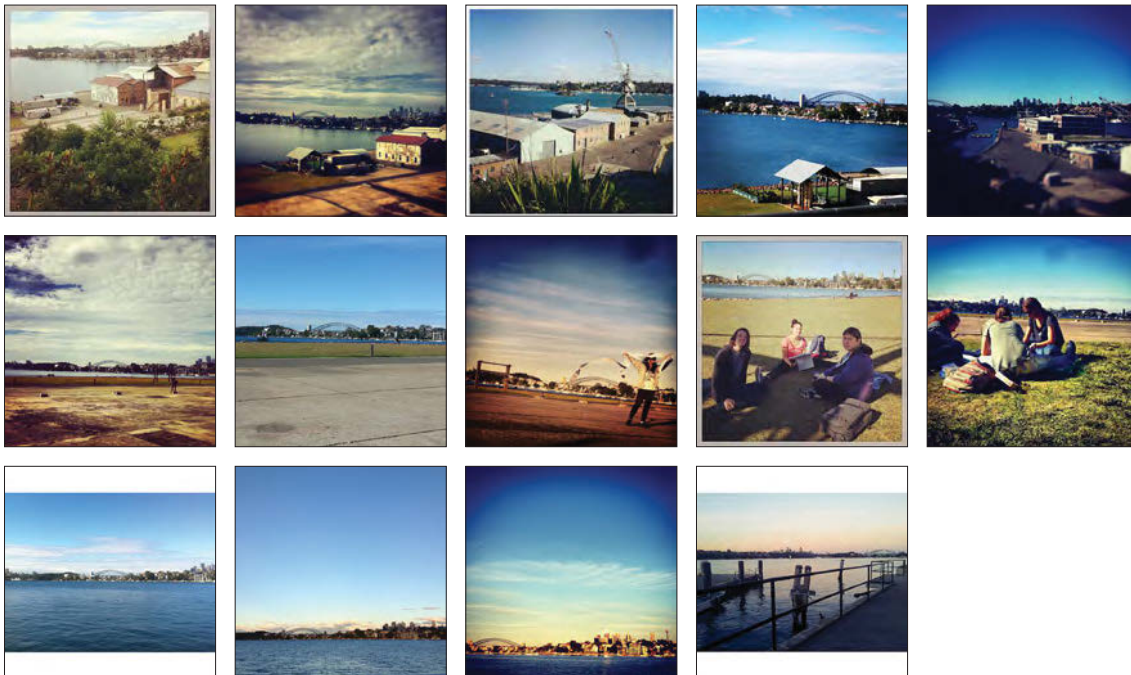


Image 3: Context: The 'North Apron' of Cockatoo Island.



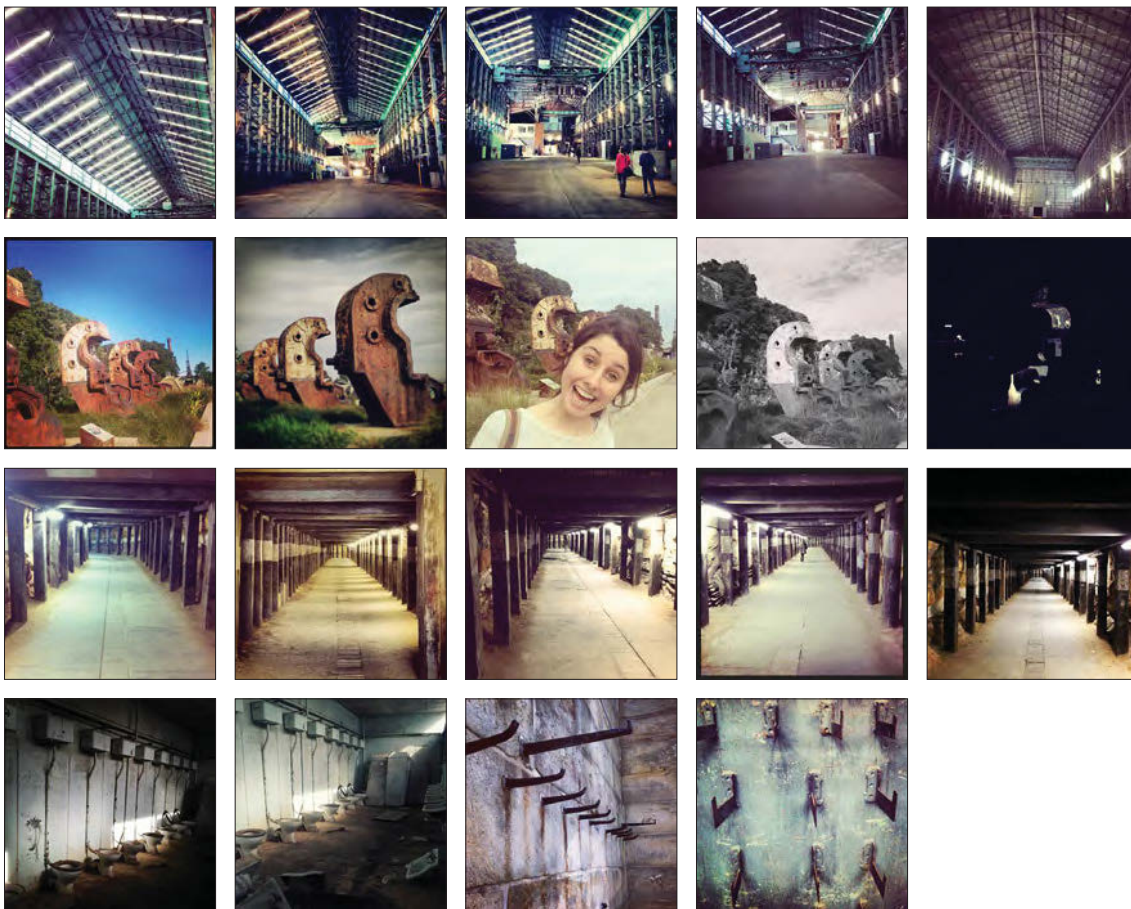


Image 4: Context: The 'Turbine Hall', Crane sculptures, the 'Dog Leg tunnel', industry.



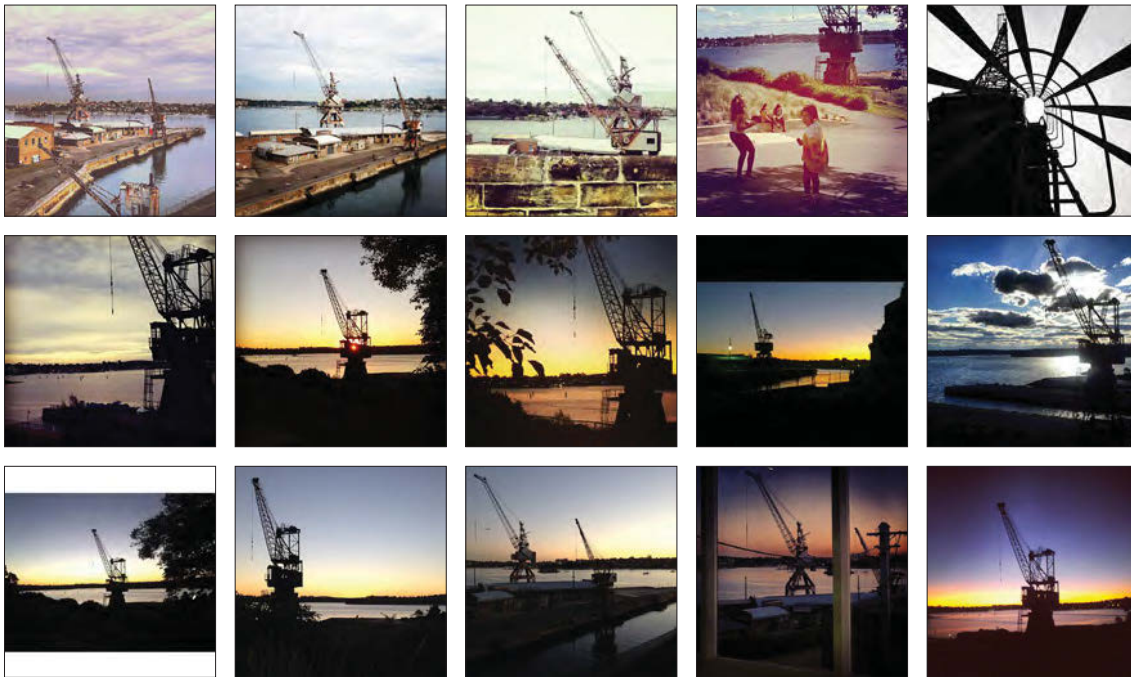
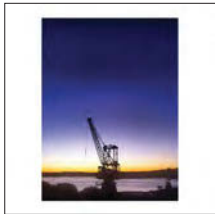
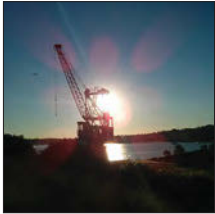


Image 5: Context: Cockatoo Island cranes.



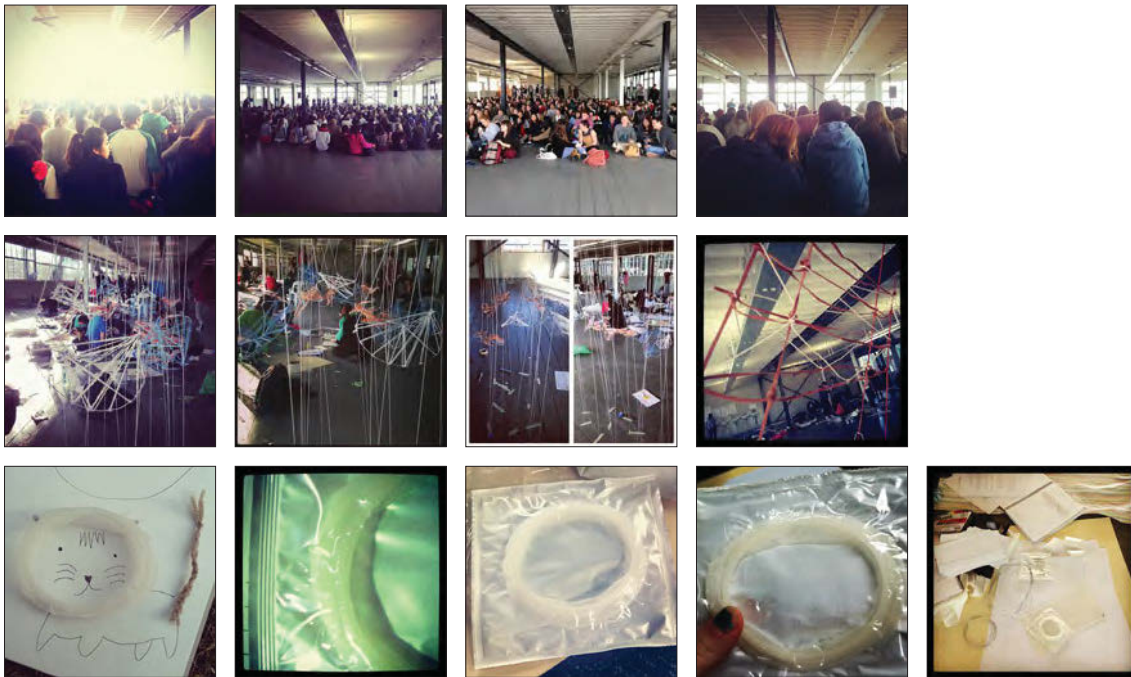


Image 6: Context: Design Camp orientation, mapping

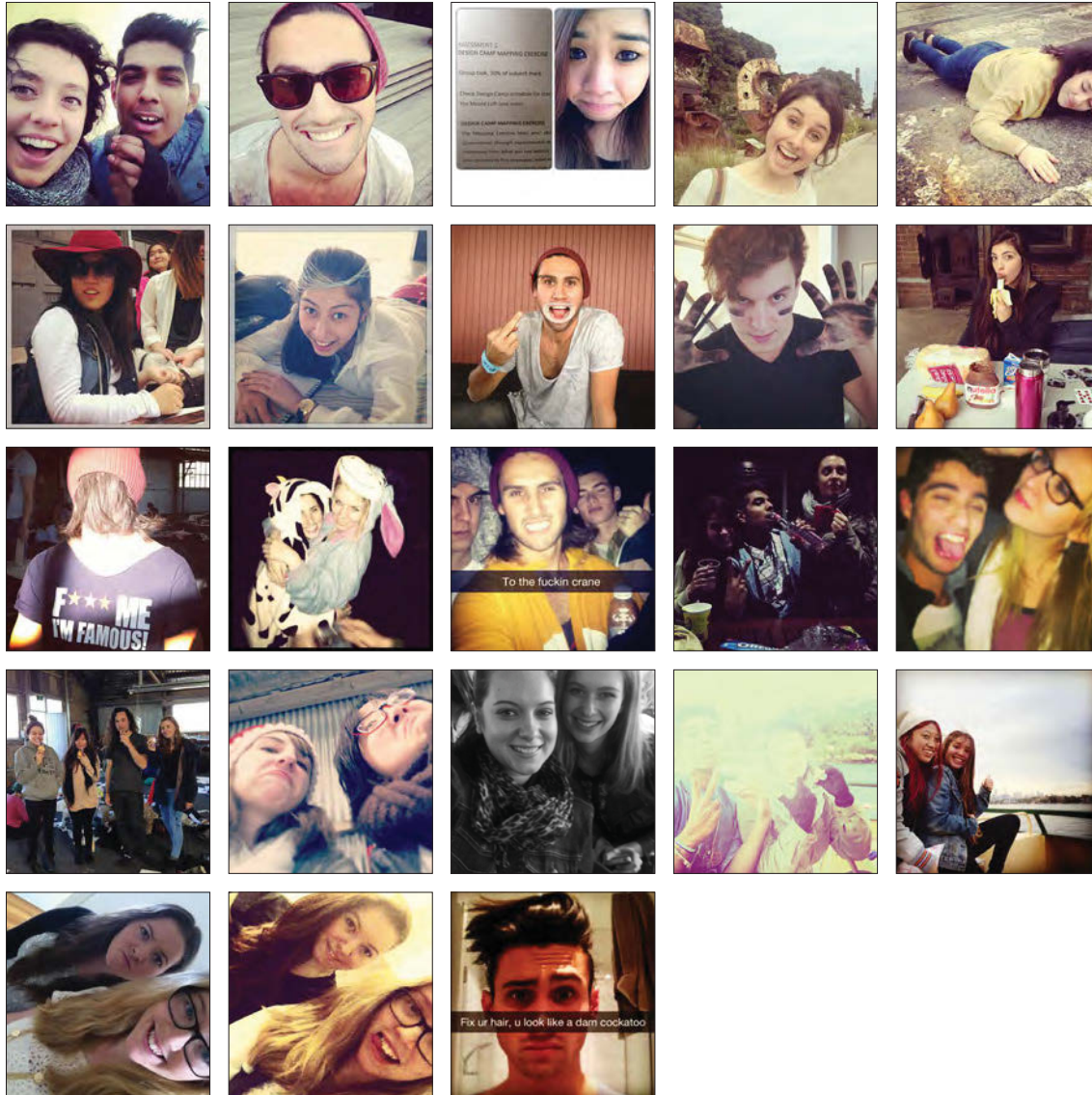
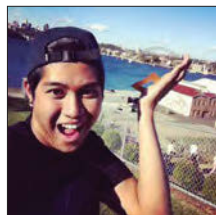
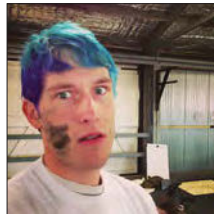
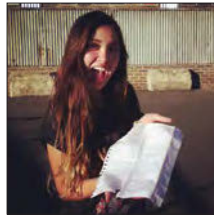
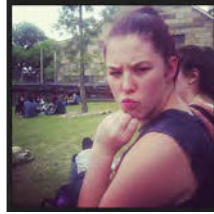


Image 7: Social: Selfies



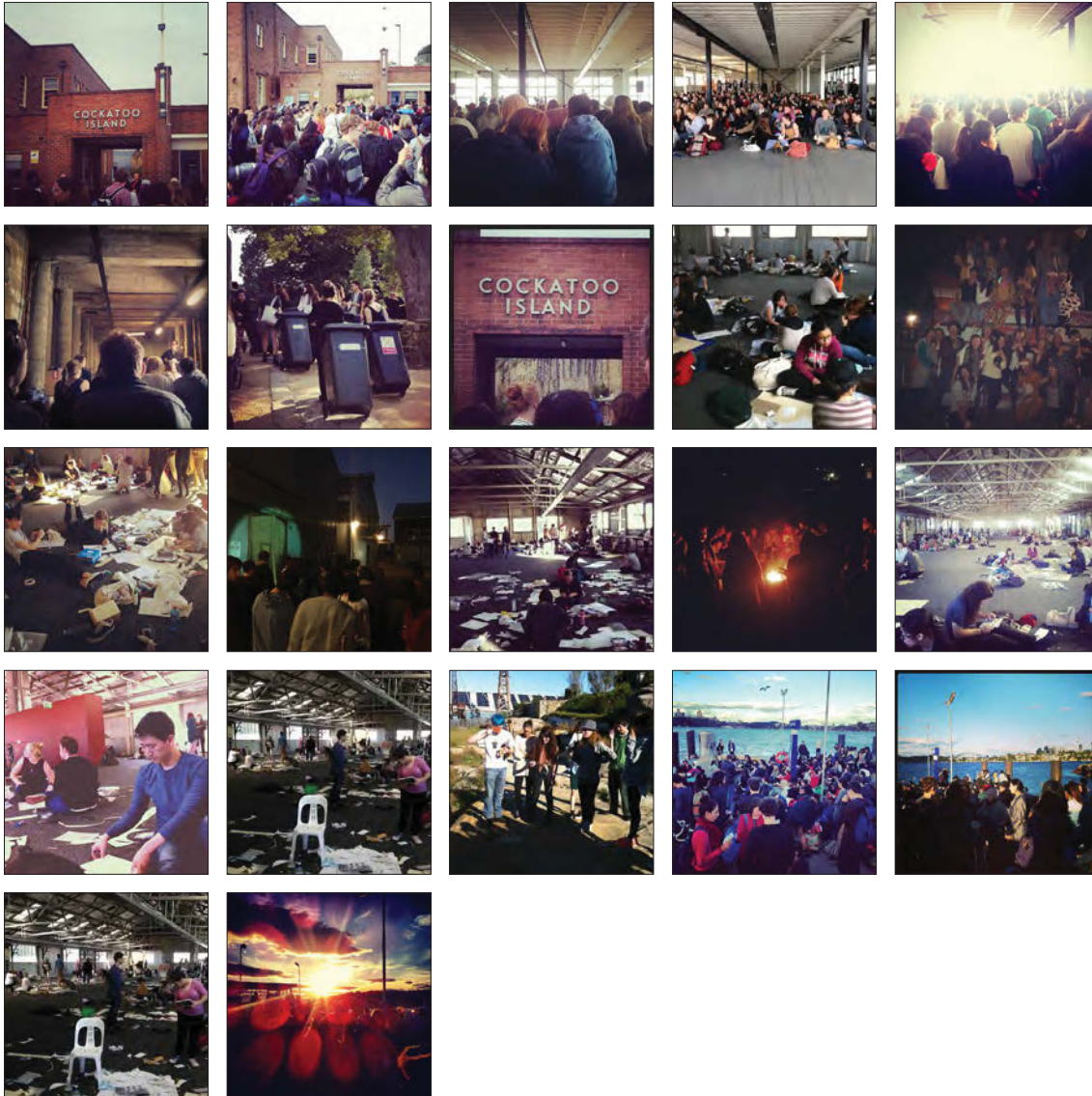


Image 8: Social: Camp groups working together



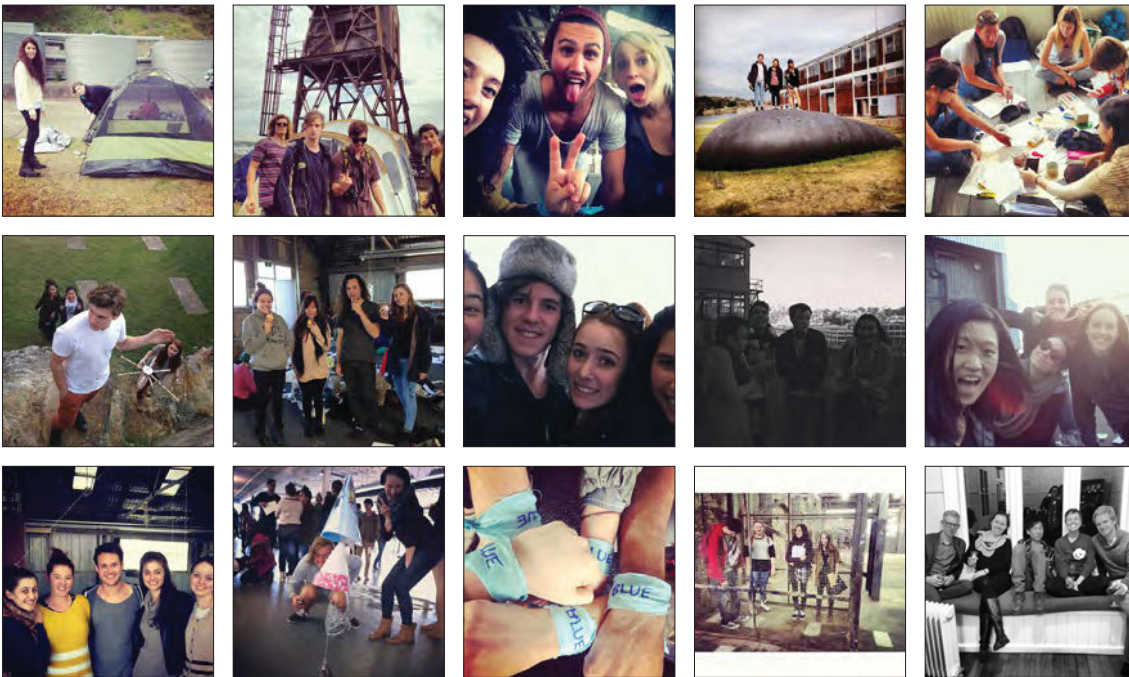


Image 9: Social: Camp groups 'in context' and expressing sociality



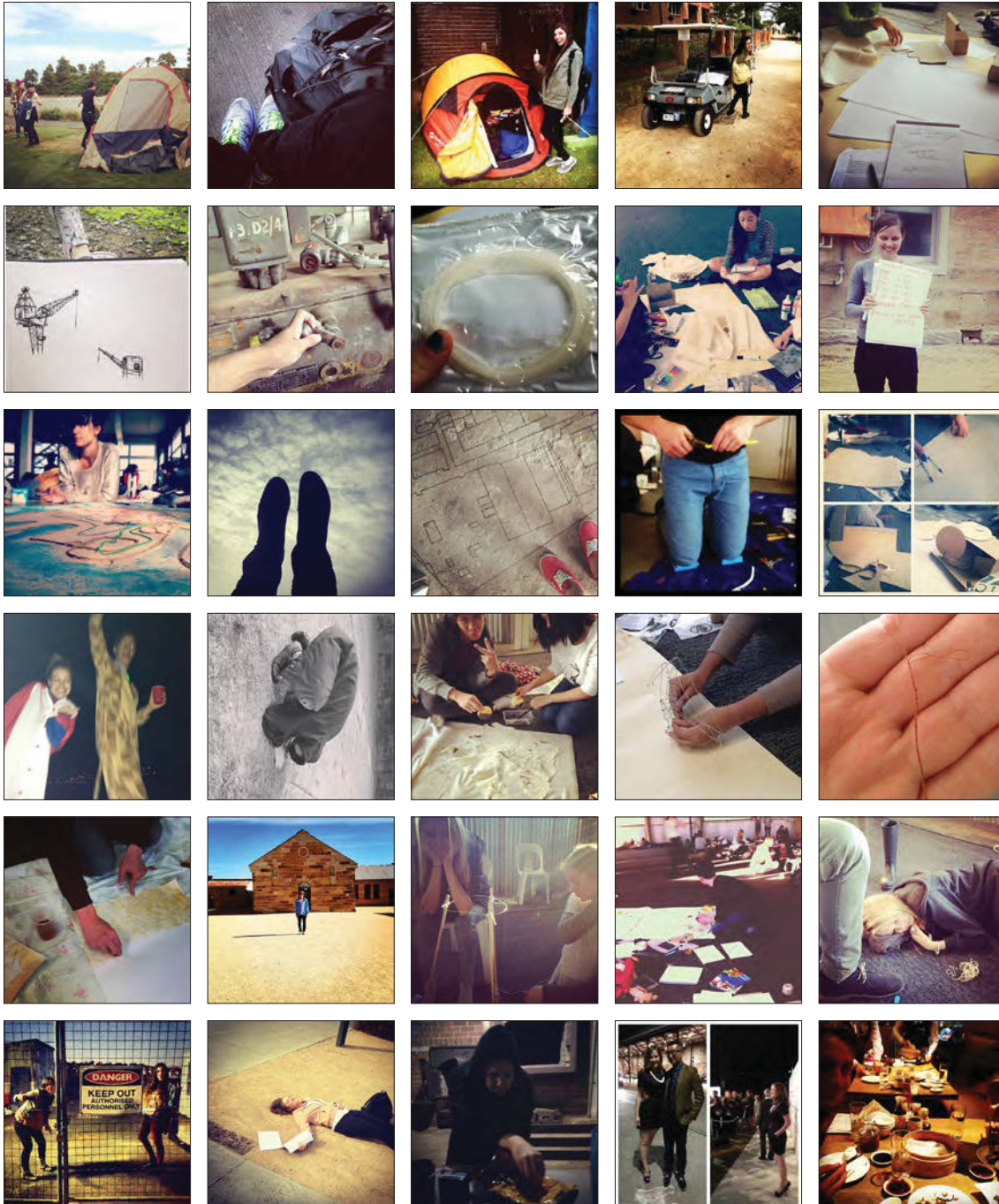
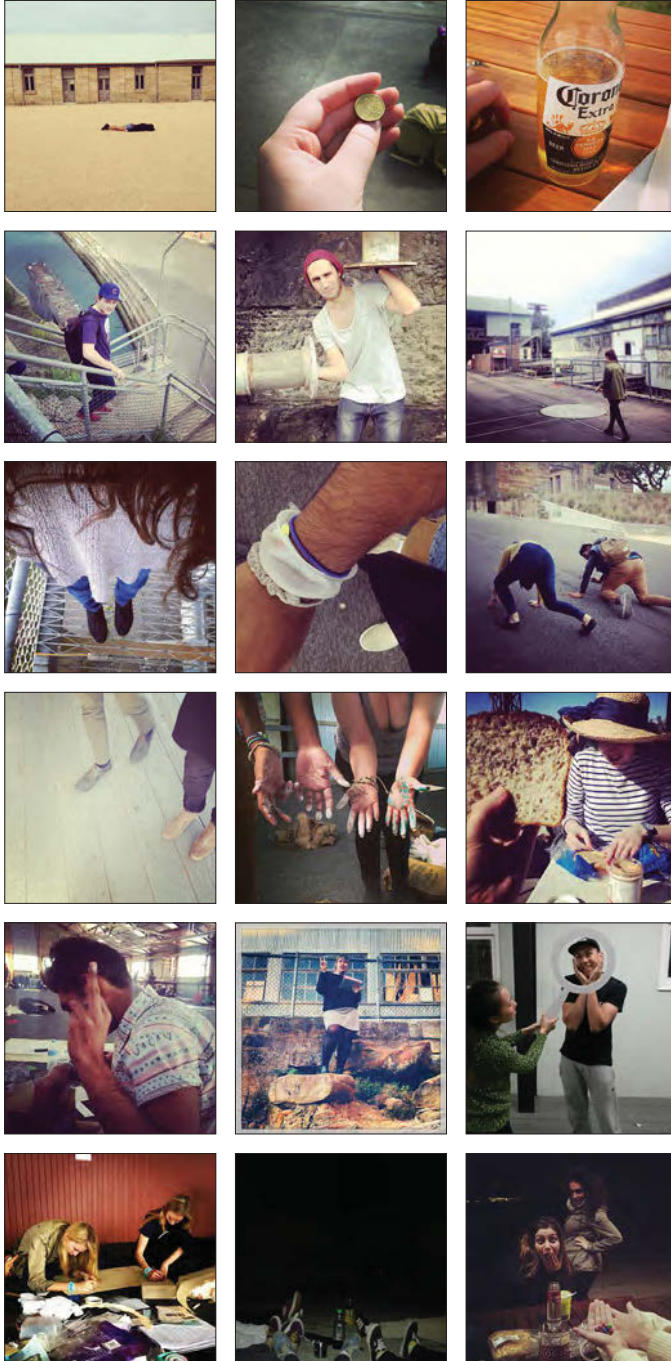


Image 10: Social: Design Camp



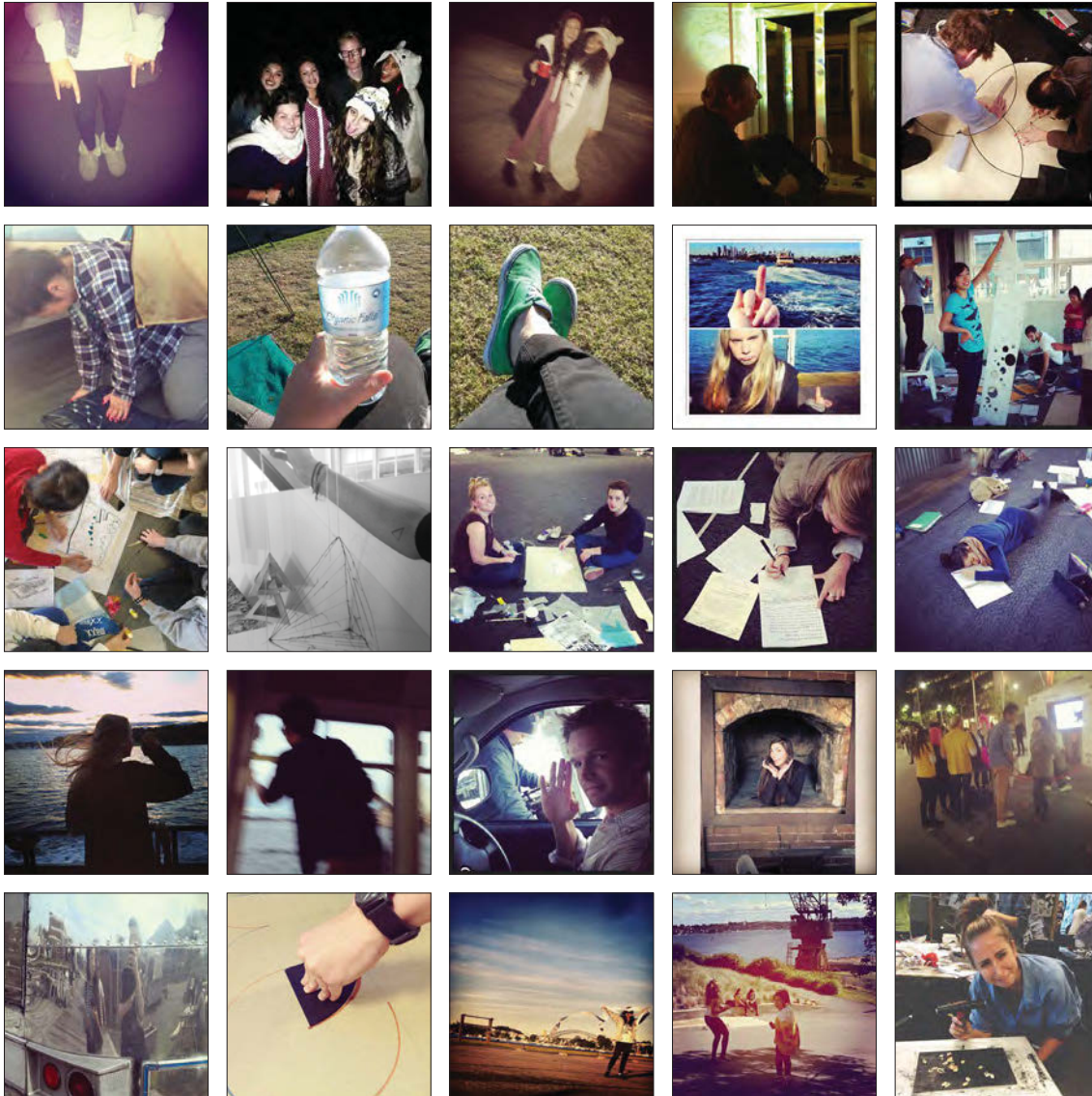


Image 10: Social: Design Camp, continued.

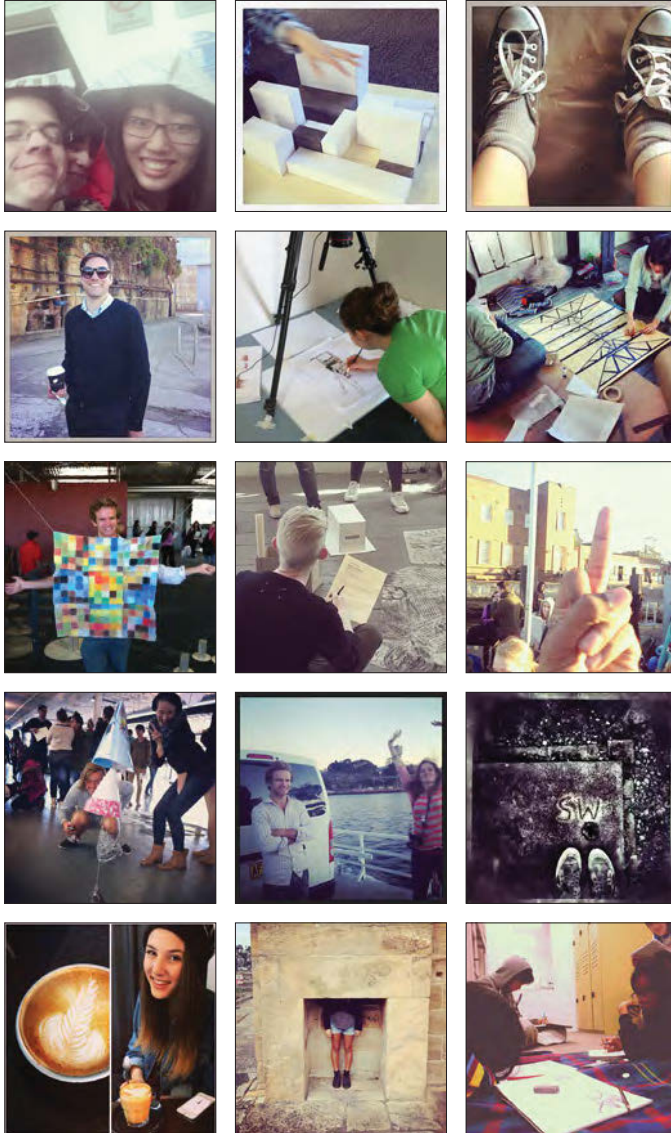


Image 01. Context: Sydney Harbour Bridge, Ferry travel, Arriving on Cockatoo Island (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 02. Context: Departure from Cockatoo Island, Sydney Opera House (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

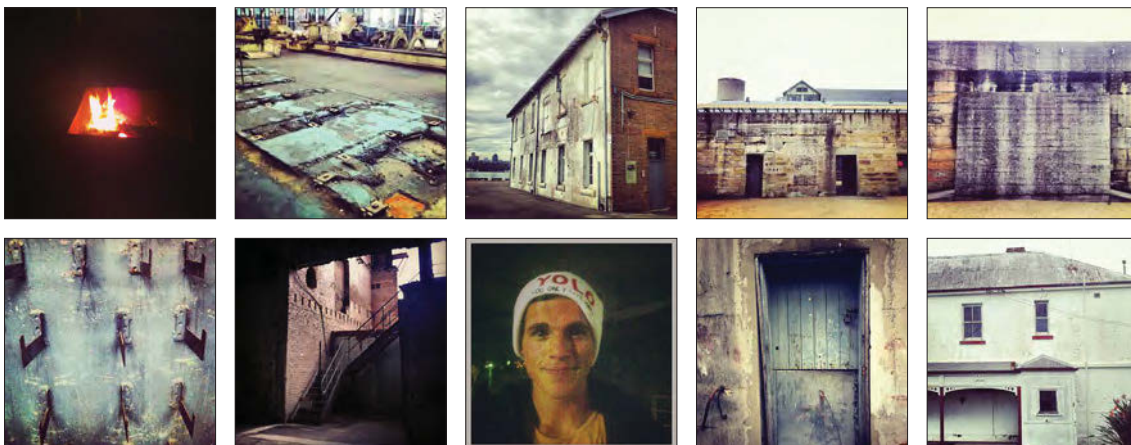
Image 03. Context: The ‘North Apron’ of Cockatoo Island (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 04. Context: The ‘Turbine Hall’, Crane sculptures, ‘Dog Leg tunnel’, Industry (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 05. Context: Cockatoo Island cranes (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 06. Context: Design camp orientation, Mapping (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

A dominant theme that emerged from the Instagram data was a tendency towards descriptive images of the Cockatoo Island context. A significant number of the images showed different aspects of the context, in terms of the physical location itself and also the context of the UTS first year design camp. Given that the participants were prompted to share their images of their ‘explorations’ of the island and experiences of the design camp, this is not surprising. There were several locations on Cockatoo Island that featured in many Instagram posts: the ‘North Apron’ of Cockatoo Island (Image 03), an open plan landscape on the northern side of the island that has vistas back over the city and the northern suburbs of Sydney; the ‘Turbine Hall’, ‘Dog Leg tunnel’ and several images of industrial parts of the island (Image 04); and the industrial cranes on the island (Image 04).



It was evident from these contextualising images how participants were collectively constructing a visual narrative of their time on Cockatoo Island. Images started appearing via the hashtag before students and staff had arrived on Cockatoo Island, with several images illustrating travel to the island on the ferry and arriving at the Cockatoo Island ferry wharf (Image 01) and also departure in the evening (Image 02). The final dominant theme representing the context was images that were descriptive of the design camp experience itself, with images of the initial design camp orientation in the Mould Loft appearing soon after the students arrived on the island, as well as images of map-making (as per their assessment task) and the materials they were allocated to use in their projects. One item in particular, a latex mouth-to-mouth resuscitation mask, featured in several images (Image 06).

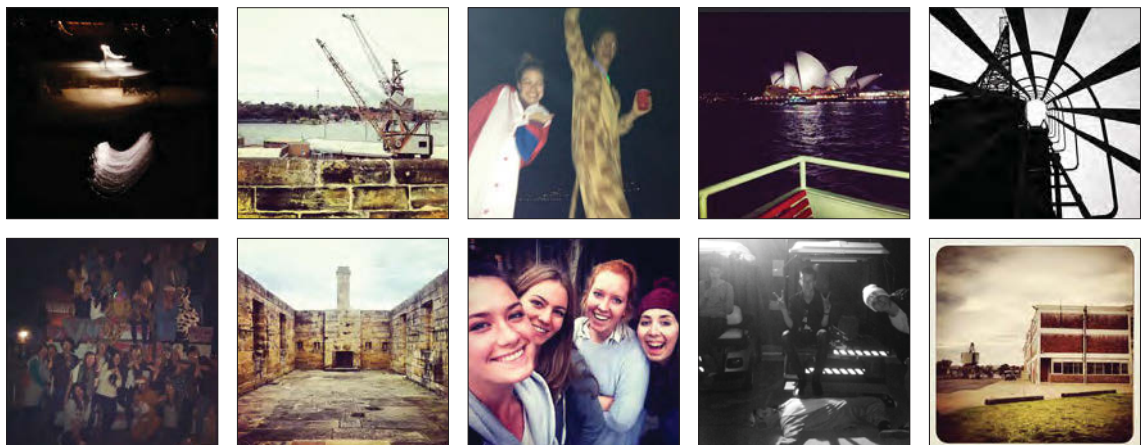
Image 07. Social: Selfies (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 08. Social: Camp groups working together (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 09. Social: Camp groups ‘in context’ and expressing sociality (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

Image 10. Social: Design camp (sourced from #designerexplorer on Instagram, 13–15 May 2013)

While the Cockatoo Island environment is certainly unique with its heritage buildings and industrial decay a prominent part of the island’s make-up, as the participants engaged over the three days of the design camp, the performances taking place via the hashtag began to change. During the later stages of the camp, the frequency of images featuring representations of the

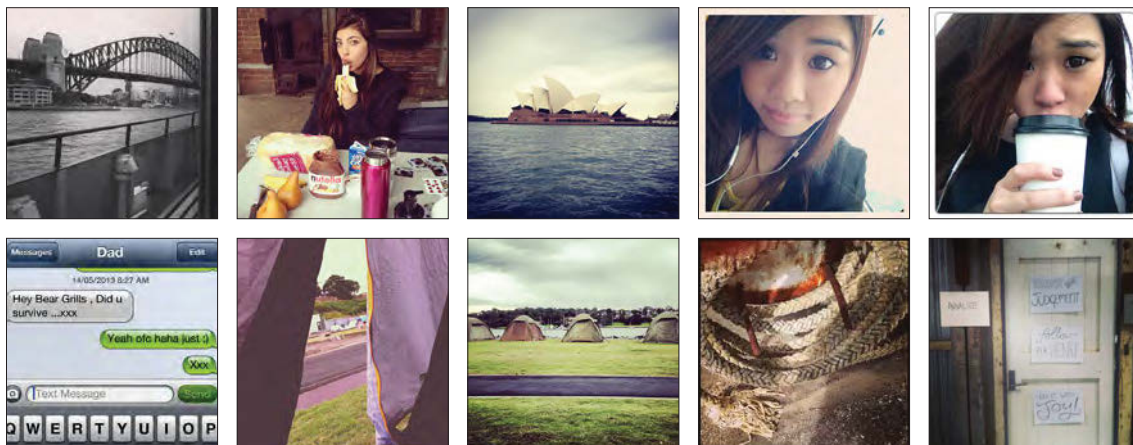


social context established during the camp began to increase. The images, thematically, made up the majority of the content shared during the Designer Explorer project.

In a shift of the thematic focus from the contextual and visual descriptions of Cockatoo Island, imagery that was more focused on the sociality that was taking place at the design camp illustrated the changing interpretation and make-up of the social aspects of design camp experience (Image 10). As students finished up the first stage of exploration around the island and gathered in their groups to work on the assessment task the images being shared using the hashtag started to illustrate the group work experience. There were a significant number of images showing groups working in the Mould Loft (Image 08) and images of groups posing together (Image 09) displaying the varied group experiences that took place during the camp with images of the students denoting feelings of frustration, success and belonging. Finally, and crucial with regards to context creation practice, selfies made an appearance from many individuals throughout the design camp (Image 07).

5.7 Initial Insights: The Emergence of a Networked Public

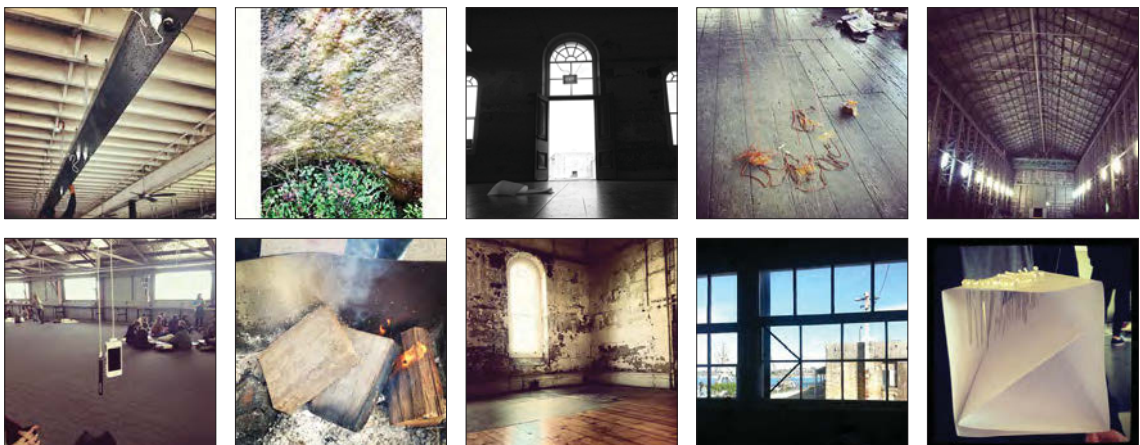
Through this process of data interpretation, it became clear that the data was showing evidence that the participants were engaging in a way that was more than simply responding to a call-to-action to participate. It became clear from the range of different *genres of usage* (see Section 4.4.1) in the data that each participant had their own complex make-up of goals, purposes and motivations for sharing content to the hashtag.



As participants negotiate the context of the UTS first year design camp, context collapse arises from the mix of, and exposure to, a variety of diverse audiences, including the wider cohort of first year design students, the UTS teaching staff, the Cockatoo Island management team, members of the public visiting Cockatoo Island, or anyone belonging to each participant's various networked publics. It was clear that the DNEAs were negotiating their experience at the design camp within a multiplicity of audiences and therefore, producing a range of identity performances. To understand more about the personal motivations for participation and engagement of the DNEAs taking part in the Designer Explorer project, the researcher needed to speak directly to individuals taking part to glean deeper insight into the behaviours taking place.

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, the Designer Explorer project data illustrates the ways in which the Designer Explorer participants approach digital social technologies as malleable contexts that evoke *particular forms of use*, which shift depending on the networked engagement taking place. Individuals have different goals, purposes and motivations for sharing, which, unless explicit, are hard to decipher from simply analysing visual and textual content for overall themes. Therefore, the second approach in data interpretation was to identify key images from the data set that could be scrutinised more closely through a process of content analysis.

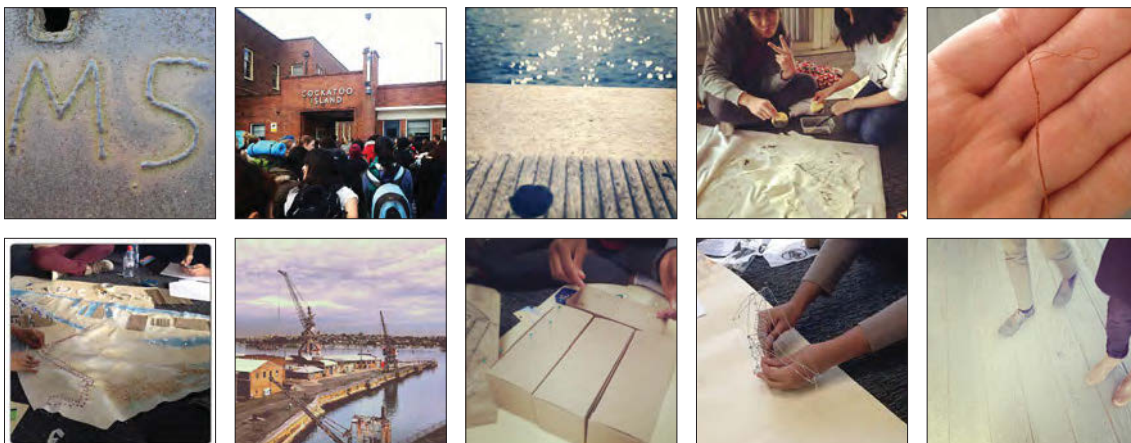
As the Designer Explorer project progressed through the data interpretation stage, there was an increasing need for qualitative methodological approaches and a desire to gain deeper-level personal insight from the participants motivated a widening of the data collection to



include interviews. In April 2012, the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee granted approval (UTS HREC REF NO. #2011-220A) to meet with students and staff of the Designer Explorer pilot study to conduct a series of recorded interviews to discuss their engagement with the #designerexplorer hashtag. This process was repeated again during the 2013 primary case study of the project when a subsequent amendment to the original ethics approval in April 2013 allowed for greater scope in the interview questioning about more general use of social media. The following section expands on this phase of the research project through development of the research approach.

5.8 The Designer Explorer Interviews

Throughout the two phases of the Designer Explorer project across 2012 and 2013, in-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with 13 of the most active Designer Explorer participants including interviews with eight participants of the 2012 design camp, and interviews with five participants of the 2013 design camp. The interviews that took place during the 2012 pilot study proved helpful at both elucidating and expanding the interpretations of the data collected during the first phase of the project. The aim of these pilot interviews was to more directly engage with the participants of the project to understand: *What kinds of activities do they use to display identity? What kinds of narratives do they construct for their audience? Does the context of the urban form encode specific meanings into place and therefore alter the ways in which identities are created? How does the dialectic between virtual space and physical space change the ways in which identities are created?*

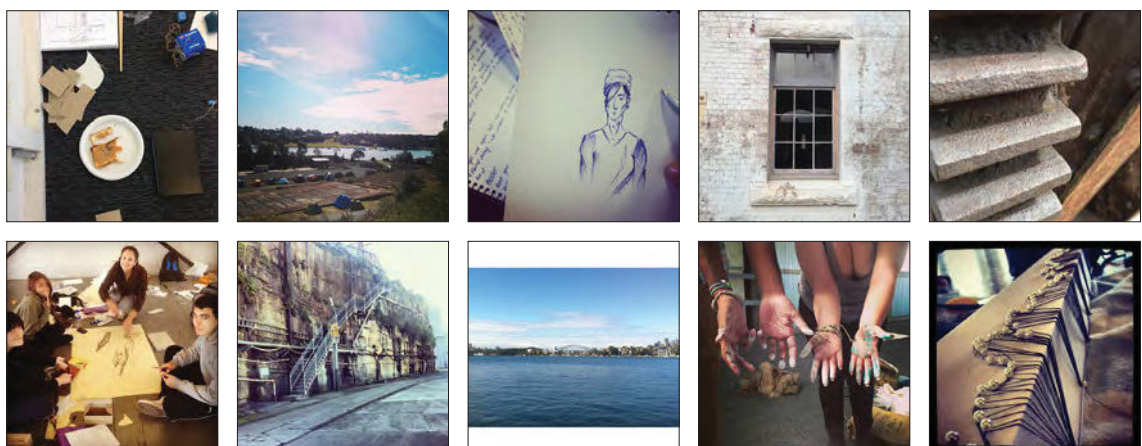


As described earlier, the discursive approach taken in the analysis of these initial interviews led to a shift in the main research of this thesis; that is, primarily, the interest in context creation practices involving digital social technologies. During the 2012 interviews, self-identity appeared to be a main concern for many of the participants; how did DNEAs appear to others? And how did they *want* to appear to others?

The interpretation from the first phase of the project led to more focused research enquiries. As such, the interviews conducted in 2013 were more directly focused on these refined research questions, particularly the identity performance activities of the Designer Explorer DNEAs. The interviews conducted in 2013 were more fruitful in their insights, and, as such, the 2012 interviews have been set aside and the 2013 interviews used for the following interpretation and analysis.

5.8.1 Establishing Interviews

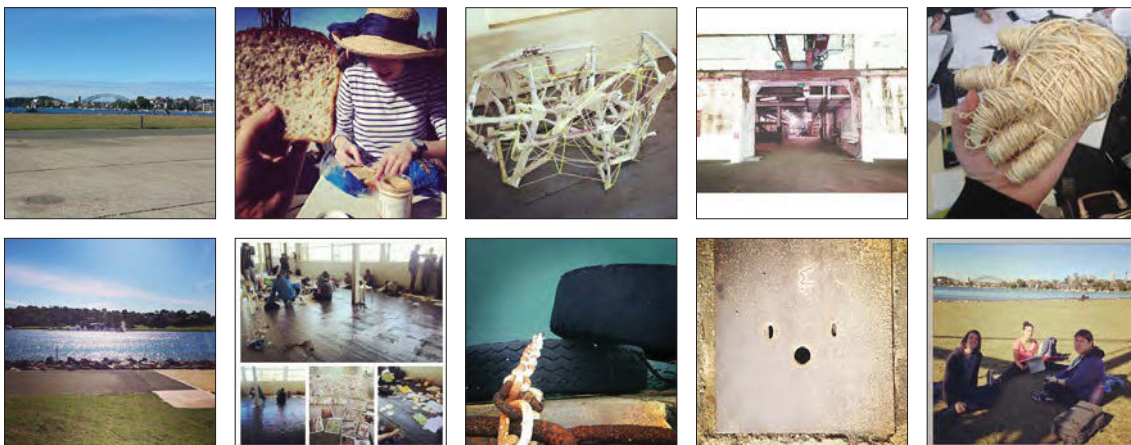
The selection process for interview participants occurred after the primary data collection phase at Cockatoo Island. After collating the primary data and conducting brief data interpretation of the social network data examining participation habits, a list of potential interview participants was collated. The research had always maintained an interest in individuals who had a predilection towards using digital social technologies, rather than those who did not. The rationale for this was that individuals who were motivated to participate would be likely to have personal and distinct modes of use that may offer insight into the behaviours of individuals from this group. As such, the Instagram images were mined for participants who



shared using the hashtag most frequently and showed high levels of engagement with other participants as evidenced through 'likes' and 'comments' to select users whose content was distinct, either thematically or aesthetically, from that of the other participants. Concurrently, commonalities in use of the hashtag indicating activities of practice which could be analysed further and used as talking points in the interviews were examined.

Selecting participants to take part in the Designer Explorer interviews had two steps. Prior to the camp, individuals had self-nominated to participate in follow-up interviews. Any individuals who self-nominated to take part in an interview and appeared on the collated list were approached first. Sixteen participants were contacted, seven of whom agreed to participate in an interview. A secondary list of interview candidates based on lesser but still interesting participation habits had also been collated to provide a wider spectrum of potential interviewees and they were also approached. In total, seven interviews were arranged with three participants from the primary list and four from the secondary list. Only five interviews in total were conducted due to participants rescinding their interest in participating before the interviews took place.

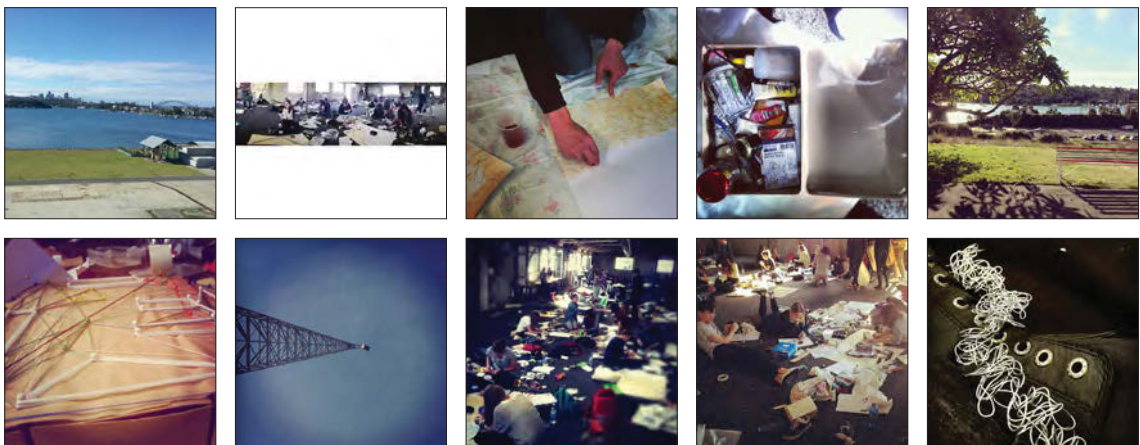
Designer Explorer interviews took place in August 2013. They were semi-structured, ranged from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours long and included questions covering the participants' everyday interactions with digital social technologies, as well as asking participants to reflect on their motivations, provocations and perceptions of the Designer Explorer project. See Appendix 4 for a full list of the question prompts used.



The interview context offers a good opportunity to investigate the ways in which individuals make sense of their own identities, not only in the way in which they talk about their own identity, but also that the act of an interview is an identity performance. As Nikander (2008) highlights, people ‘make sense of their own identities in the context of an interview’ (p. 415) and will actively work on their impression management in this context. Interviews also allow insight into how participants subjectively position themselves in relation to others. In her analysis of constructionist approaches to discourse analysis, Nikander asks, ‘how are collectives and groups—various types of “us” and “them”—discursively formed and maintained through text and talk?’ (2008, p. 415).

The semi-structured nature of the Designer Explorer interviews enabled a conversational flow to emerge during each of the interviews, while maintaining a general framework of key themes that could be consulted periodically throughout the interview. This was intended to make sure participants were being asked to consider multiple aspects of their experiences and maintain common themes across all the interviews taking place.

During each interview, time was also spent examining each participant’s experiences of the Designer Explorer project more directly. These questions moved from discussing personal experiences and use of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, to a more focused probing of their perceptions of the collective experience of engaging with others via the hashtag. These questions were aimed at interrogating the complexity of the self and social contexts. Participants were also asked to consider their experiences with the Designer Explorer project against their normative use of digital social technologies. Some of these questions included:



What were participants' perceptions of the project? How did they use the #designerexplorer hashtag over the three days of design camp? What kind of engagement did they experience with other participants? What was their overall interpretation of identity, social interaction and the experience of the design camp in general?

During an interview an individual's identity cannot be disconnected from the interaction taking place during an interview. As Nikander (2008) notes, identities should not be considered 'as abstract structures or as being separate from the interactions, conversations, and textually mediated practices that are an intrinsic part of their makeup' (p. 415). Just as the Designer Explorer participants were managing their presentation of self in the context of the design camp, they were also doing so during the interview. It could be expected that participants came into the interview with a preconception of what they think is going to be discussed. The interview participants were aware the researcher interviewer was a doctoral candidate at the UTS School of Design, however they primarily knew the interviewer in the capacity as one of their tutors, which had the potential to affect each participant's impression management if they were worried about how they might be perceived. It is important to note that the interviews were held after the assessment of the subject was finalised.

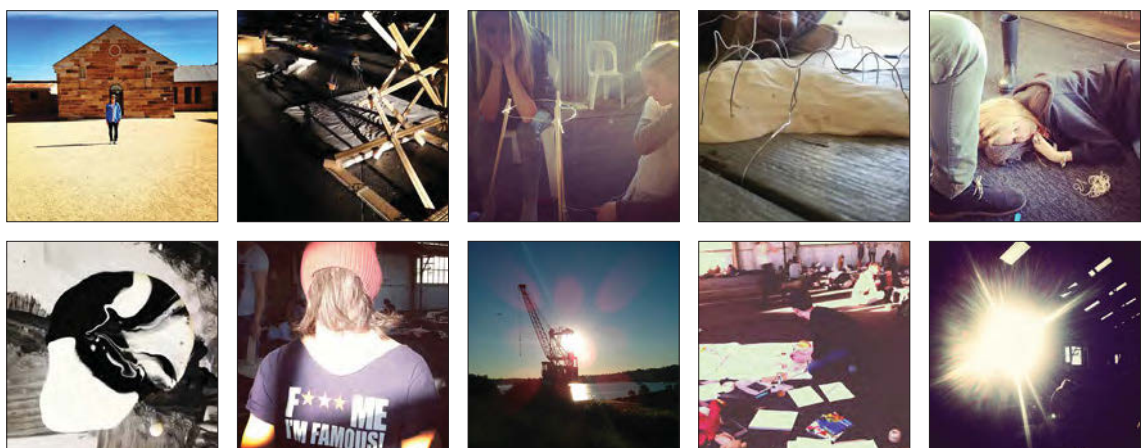
This approach raises issues because of the nature of the researchers relationship with the participants as a tutor. As a staff member who was working closely with the students on-location across the three days of the design camp, it was unavoidable that my professional practice and my research interests would be intertwined, and as such it was necessary to take steps to clarify the distinction between the two roles of tutor and researcher. This was of particular concern



during the interview process due to the intimate nature of one-on-one interviews. Interviews were carried out in study rooms at the UTS library, over three weeks in June 2012, and again in August 2013. Conducting the interviews on campus at UTS was primarily motivated by a desire to set some contextual constraints for participants. The deliberate choice of the UTS library, away from the spatial context of the UTS School of Design, aimed to create a neutral space for both the participants and interviewer.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were shown a summary of the social network data that they had contributed throughout the three days at design camp. This data included the number of posts, 'likes' and image content itself manually collected and collated from Instagram (and Twitter, where applicable). In most instances, these sheets acted as prompts throughout the interview and were used as an instrument to guide descriptive conversation around the image content itself, rather than triggering memories of forgotten aspects of their experiences during the design camp.

Prior to undertaking the interviews, the Instagram content shared by each interview participant using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag was analysed by identifying any metadata that was attached to each post, if a filter had been used, and what number image it was in the *#designerexplorer* stream. A detailed content analysis of each image was also conducted. As part of the discursive approach towards data interpretation and analysis undertaken throughout the research, content analysis was used to identify specific elements and activities employed by each participant to highlight individual behaviours or tendencies that could be further discussed throughout interviews.

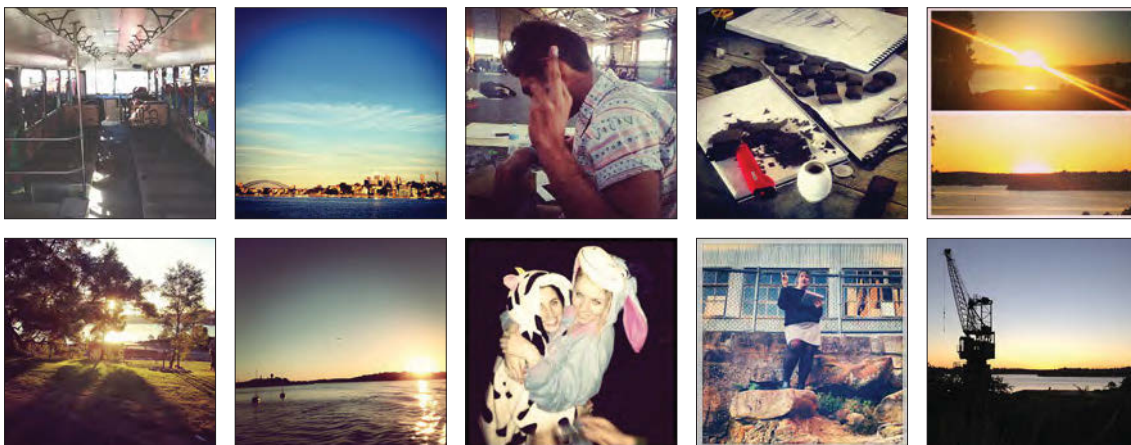


The melding of participant-observer perspectives through a process of reconstructing events and piecing together narratives aligns with aspects of discourse analysis, a flexible framework explicitly interested in the ways in which ‘social actions and/or meanings are constructed in and through text and talk’ (Nikander, 2008, p. 415). In discourse analysis, researchers do not view identity as being distinct from the ‘interactions, conversations, and textually mediated practices that are an intrinsic part of their makeup’ (Nikander, 2008, p. 415), rather, a discursive approach is adopted in order to understand the ‘phenomena in terms of how they are talked into being, and in relation to their social and interactional functions’ (p. 415).

This conversation approach was used to establish normative discourses and vocabulary that participants might use when talking about digital social technologies, and their associated practices. Research validity can be established by understanding how each research participant orientates themselves to their practices through the discourses they use to talk about them:

...a discourse researcher looks for pattern and order in how text and talk are organized and for how intersubjective understanding, social life, and a variety of institutional practices are accomplished, constructed, and reproduced in the process (Nikander, 2008, p. 415).

Moreover, a focus on everyday language ‘for it’s occasioned and situated functions’ (Nikander, 2008, p. 415) gives insight into the social realities that are being created. In the Designer Explorer project, each interview was considered from the perspective of the narrative being

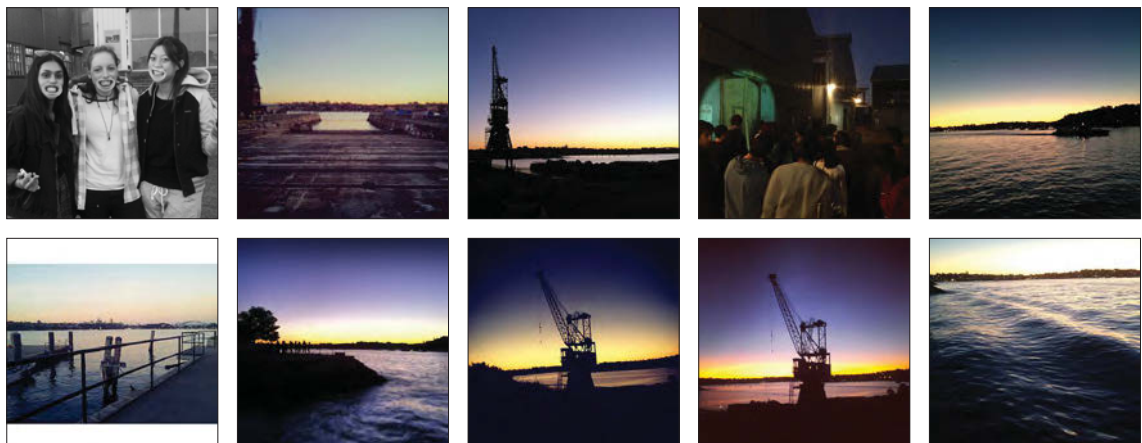


constructed about each participant's subjective use of digital social technologies, and the use of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag.

5.8.2 Conducting Interviews

The first few minutes of each interview were intended to build rapport between the student and researcher. Drawing on advice from David Silverman (2010), prior to beginning the formal and recorded aspect of each interview, time was spent conversing with each participant to make them comfortable and inform them about the purposes and intent of the research. Once the recording device was turned on, participants were asked to introduce who they were by briefly describing themselves. Before asking specific questions about their subjective experiences during the Designer Explorer project, each interview began by establishing a foundational understanding of their perspectives and approaches to participating in the project.

Probing questions were asked about each participant's own understanding of what digital social technologies are and how they might use them as part of their everyday routines. In asking participants to consider the digital social technologies they use, and for what purposes, the questions focused on the functions of digital social technologies that were specifically used as part of a context creation practice. As noted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5, these were primarily focused on establishing what activities individuals might undertake that work towards *persistence*, *visibility*, *spreadability*, *searchability*, and *authenticity*;

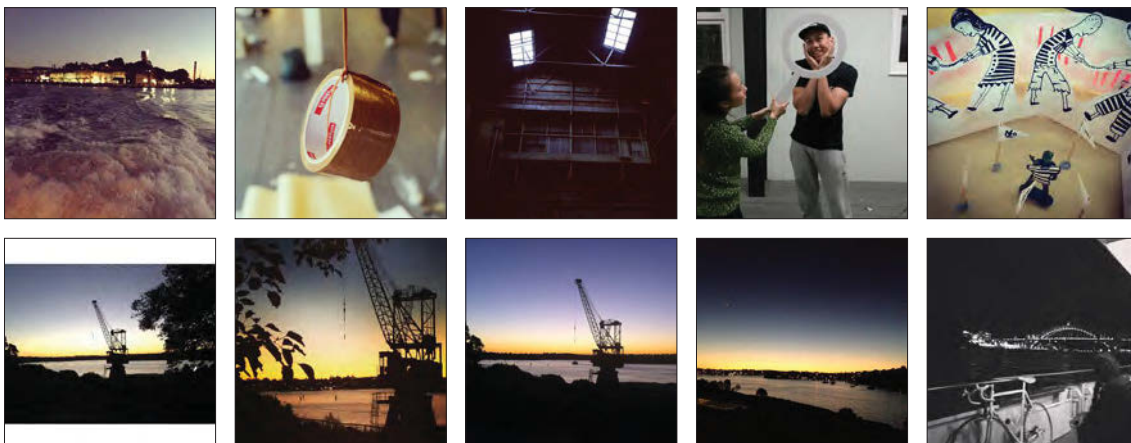


for example, questions about their audience, content and the ways in which they portrayed themselves through their social network profiles.

In 2013, the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee had granted approval to ask participants additional questions on their use of Facebook specifically, beyond the context of the Designer Explorer project. These questions probed the similarities and differences in use across the different platforms (Facebook versus Instagram and Twitter, for example). These questions were intended to probe whether participants thought their context creation practices changed across the different social network platforms, specifically, *did the types of content they share change based on the different audiences?* These questions also probed notions of privacy and publicity and asked participants to consider their personal feelings about their publicity and privacy on various social media platforms.

Questions were also asked about each participant's motivations for using digital social technologies, guiding participants to consider their own perspectives about sociality and the rewards of engagement (for example, friends liking and commenting on their content) and *how did this feed into their identity performances?*

Throughout the Designer Explorer project data collection phase at Cockatoo Island, the research focus was explained in deliberately general terms, to avoid interviewees trying to guess what the researcher interviewer might be interested in hearing about, and constructing an impression of the interview themselves. Participants were aware that the researcher interviewer was interested in knowing more about their identity performances and the ways



they used social network platforms. As illustrated by one participant, ‘Sarah’¹, she came to the interview with preconceptions about my motivations for conducting the research:

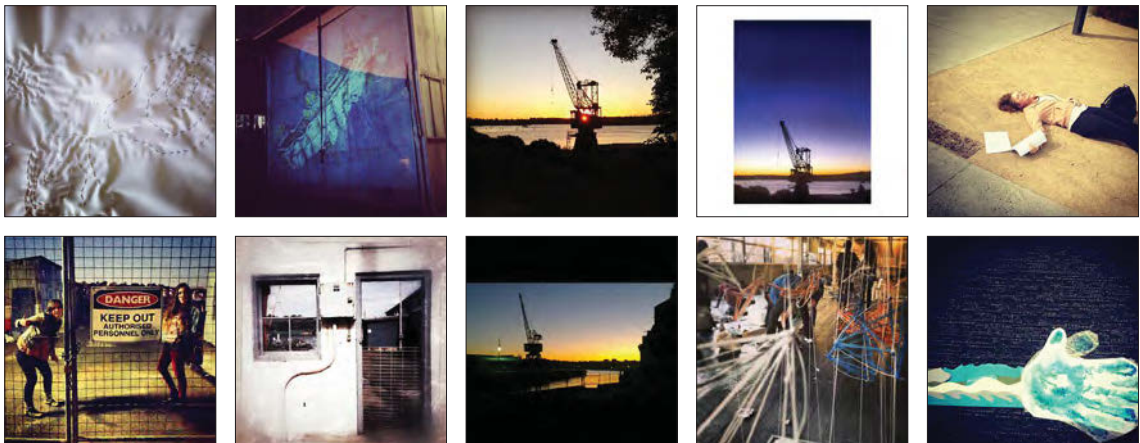
- Researcher: Do you also want to appear a certain way to other people?
- Sarah: Oh, actually I thought about this before coming here. I thought you’d ask that sort of question. ‘Cause we’re the selfie generation.

As such, the way in which interviewees talked about their identity creation and worked with the interviewer to *construct meaning* during the interview was also taken into consideration when interpreting and analysing the interview data.

5.8.3 Interpreting Interviews

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim and then subject to data interpretation. A similar grounded theory approach that was applied to the Instagram data was also applied to the interview data, with key themes and ideas identified through manual coding of four of the Designer Explorer interviews. Coding was produced by hand, rather than through the use of qualitative analysis software. As an ethnographic researcher, conducting interpretation in this manner was intended to facilitate as much immersion as possible.

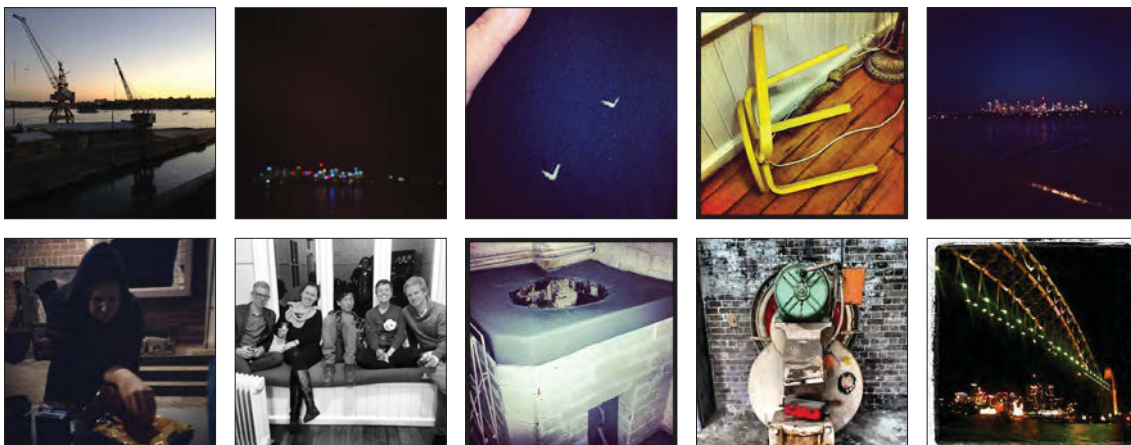
¹ Each participant described throughout this research has been nominated a pseudonym to protect their anonymity, as set out by the UTS Human Research ethical guidelines.



A fifth interview was conducted and transcribed, but was omitted from further analysis and discussion for several reasons. The interview not as fruitful as the other four interviews; the interview participant struggled to commit to the interview process and was reluctant to discuss their own identity performances, due to several contributing factors that affected the tone of the interview. There was a minor conflict of interest as the participant was a student from my Design Thinking tutorial, and the interview took place inside a noisy space, making it challenging to communicate and the recorded audio difficult to discern.

This coding process was approached in two stages. The first was to listen to the interview recordings in their entirety and make general notes of key themes and ideas. The second stage involved close reading of each of the interview transcripts and making more detailed annotations highlighting significant moments in each interview, as well as identifying key themes related to identity that emerged. This interpretation was also supplemented with the content analysis of all of the Instagram data shared by each individual participant. As established previously, the intent of this was to develop a deeper understanding of each participant's activities and sharing behaviours during the design camp.

Once the interviews had been examined and interpreted individually, the four annotated interview transcripts were then examined next to each other to look for overarching themes. These themes were established in order to *make sense* of the data in the context of identity and its related practices by establishing a thematic framework for further discussion of the interview data.

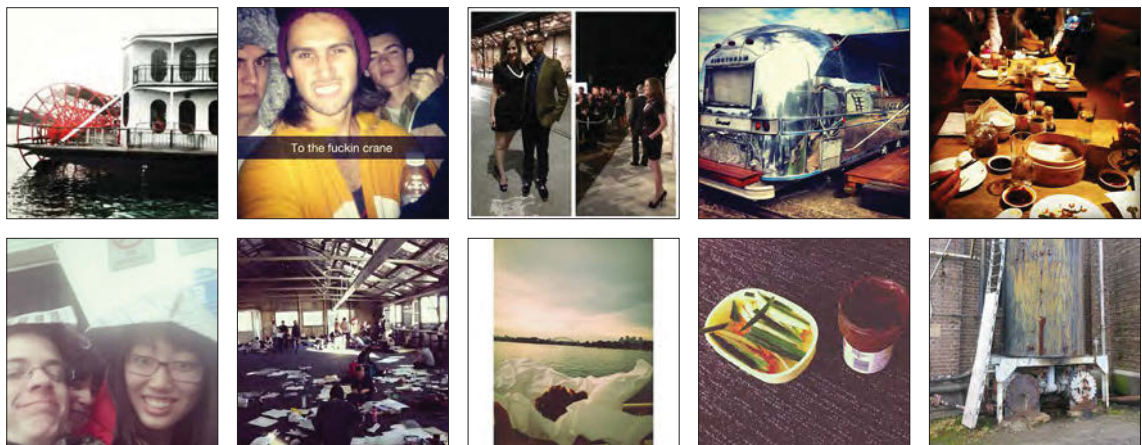


5.9 Conclusion

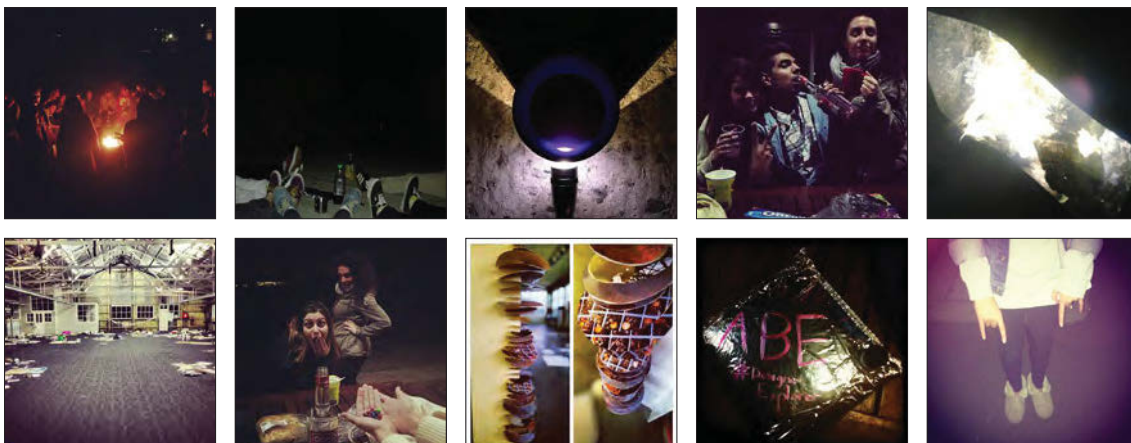
This chapter has established the Designer Explorer project context and outlined the methodological approaches used throughout this research. It is through the discursive approach to data collection, interpretation and analysis of the data collected throughout the Designer Explorer project that it became evident that the DNEAs involved in the project were working collectively to form the Designer Explorer networked public.

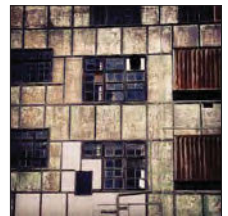
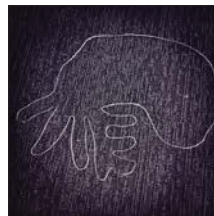
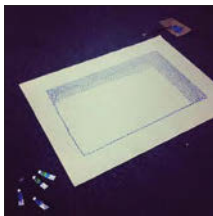
The recurring themes and common elements seen throughout the Instagram content, revealed through a process of data interpretation, provide evidence that the Designer Explorer participants were displaying behaviours commonly seen in networked publics. While this data reveals much about front stage performances, the analysis of various data sets alongside each other also provides insight into the acts of individuals occurring in the back stage, that is, each individual's negotiation of their context for self.

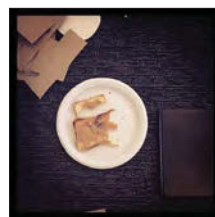
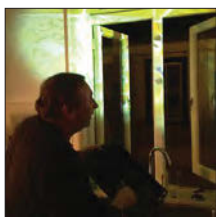
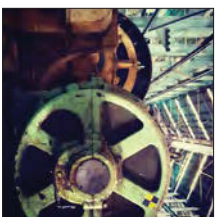
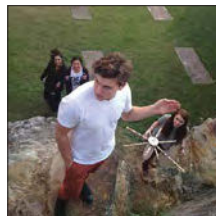
The following chapter examines the make-up of this networked public more closely by identifying the contextual elements and activities of practice made visible through the use of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag during the UTS first year design camp including the ways in which the hashtag was used to present the locational, material, situational and social contexts of the participants through expressions of sociality, performances evidencing DNEAs coping with context collapse, the production of sub-networks, the various role performances being negotiated and modes of feedback within the Designer Explorer context. These activities



subsequently provide evidence of DNEA context creation practice, as discussed in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self.







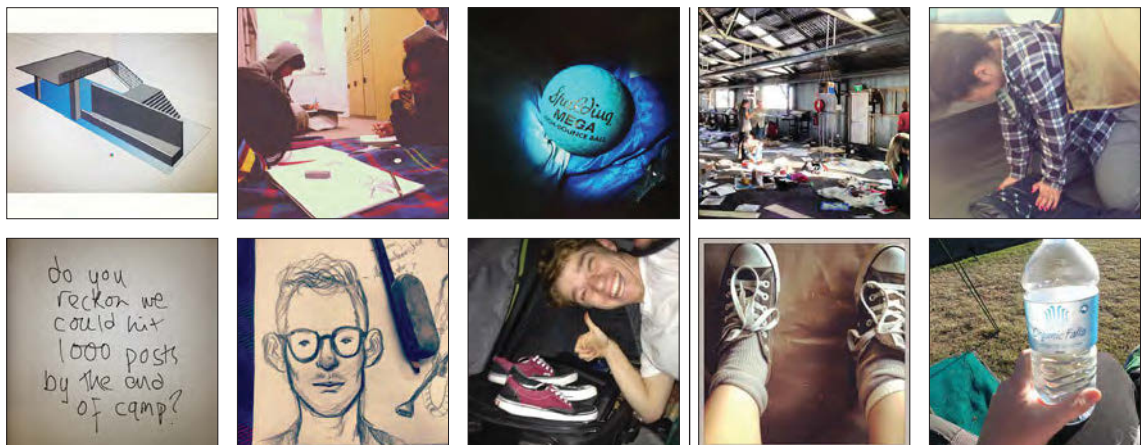
Chapter Six

Designer Explorer: A Networked Public

6.1 Introduction

As established in the previous chapter through interpretation of the data collected throughout the Designer Explorer project, the DNEAs involved in the project were working collectively to form the Designer Explorer networked public. This chapter examines the make-up of this networked public more closely through identifying the contextual elements and activities of practice that were made visible through the use of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag during the UTS first year design camp in 2013. Recurring themes and common elements seen throughout the Instagram content, as revealed through interpretation of the Designer Explorer project data, provide evidence that the Designer Explorer participants were demonstrating behaviours prevalent across networked publics and demonstrating that these activities were constituting DNEA context creation practice.

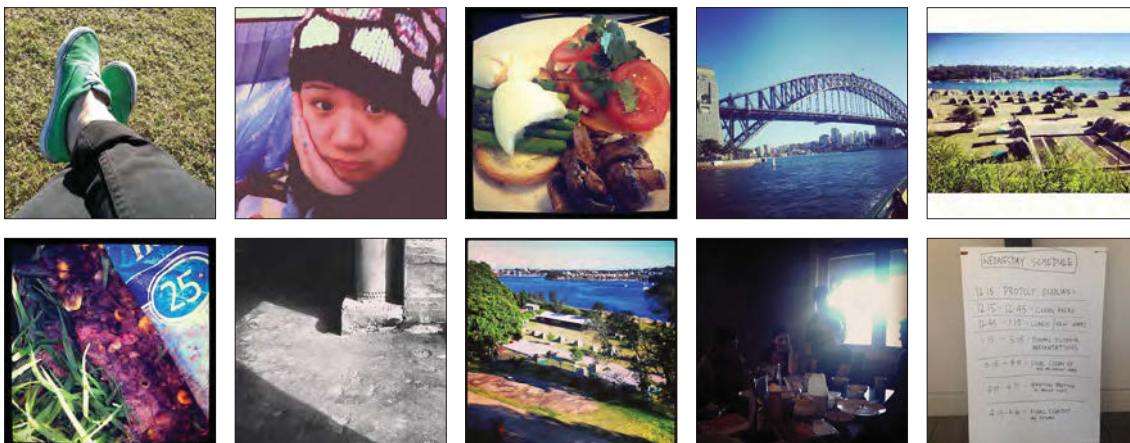
This chapter begins by returning to Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies and re-establishing the core concepts behind networked publics and framing them in the context of the Designer Explorer project. The chapter then examines the behaviours of these DNEAs more closely through a detailed analysis of four key activities of practice seen throughout the



Designer Explorer project, coping with context collapse, negotiating the network, performing roles and circulating feedback. Further, identifying the contextual elements that individuals harnessed in their identity performances. The highlighting of key sentiments shared by interview participants further elucidates the key activities that support this discussion. It is through analysis of the interviews that meaningful elements of practice can be discerned through the ways in which the DNEA interview participants talk about their own experiences. Due to the density of data produced throughout the Designer Explorer project and description of activities, a deeper discussion on the interrelation between the four activities and the greater significance of them is left to the following chapter. As such, this chapter concludes by establishing the framework for discussion in the following Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self.

6.2 The Designer Explorer Networked Public

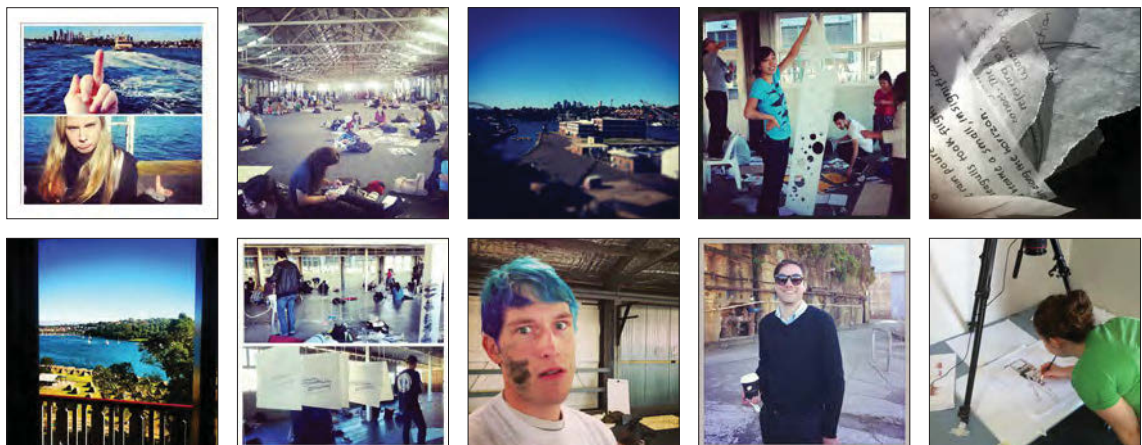
As has been established throughout this thesis, the changing typologies of digital social technologies support the creation of networked publics. Networked publics are co-constructed by groups of DNEAs who come together through shared skills and understandings about the activities of practice that contribute to the functioning of a networked public. There are two aspects of the Designer Explorer networked public that are investigated throughout this discussion: the first is the effect of a collective of DNEA members coming together to construct and present the networked public as a cohesive entity; and the second is the active and ongoing activities of practices that individual members undertake as they pull together



contextual elements to mediate their context for self within the Designer Explorer networked public.

As discussed in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, when DNEAs come together within the shared social space networked public, they work in teams to produce unified thematic representations of the newly formed networked public. When groups of individuals are unified through membership in a networked public, they actively undertake practices that situate themselves within the shared context of that networked public, returning again to Schatzki's teleoaffective hierarchies, or *fields of practices* (2000, p. 12), in which, within any one practice, groups of practitioners make arrangements of activities as they work together to construct a practice.

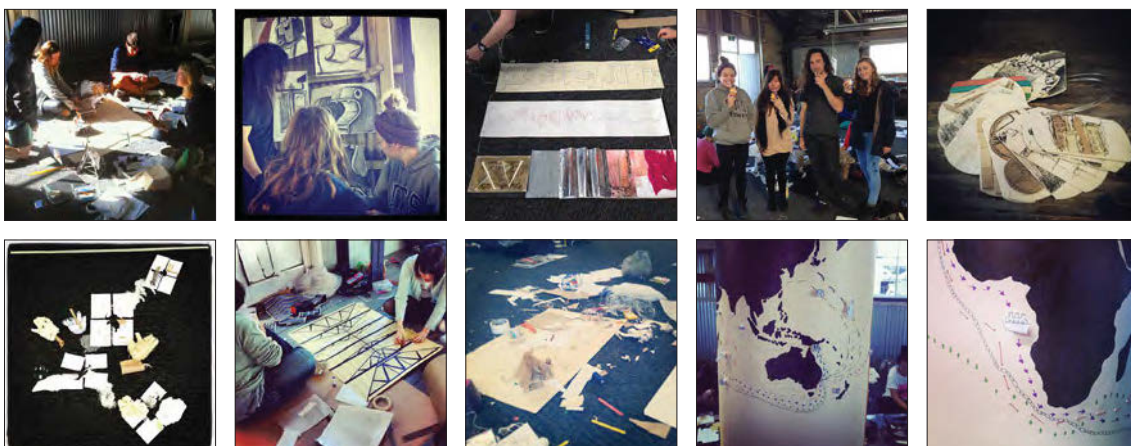
Referencing Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.3, which describes the ways in which contextual elements circulate within a networked public, the Designer Explorer participants were engaged with contextual elements from the various locational, material, situational and social contexts they are engaged with across the three days. As the Designer Explorer project begins, the networked public is still in the process of forming. The visibility of the shared experience of the UTS first year design camp is demonstrated through the stream of content being uploaded to the #designerexplorer hashtag, facilitating the creation of the Designer Explorer networked public.



This research has identified three core aspects that play a fundamental part in how an individual DNEA engages within a networked public as they negotiate their context for self: firstly, the *contextual elements* that are drawn in contextual ecologies, taken from the locational, material, situational and social contexts that DNEAs are part of; secondly, the diverse audiences that make up networked publics; and thirdly, the contextual ecologies and *diverse audiences* that are drawn into the *activities of practice*. As these three aspects interrelate with each other, crucially, they are bound together through an individual's context for self and made visible through identity performances situated within networked publics, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

The circulation of these core aspects becomes evident when the Designer Explorer data is examined closely. In the initial stages of the Designer Explorer project, in order to produce meaningful configurations of contextual elements, the participants draw predominantly from the available locational and material contextual elements. Activities of practice prioritise that these are visible in the identity performances they undertake.

Over the three days of the Designer Explorer project, there is a visible shift in thematic content being produced. The Designer Explorer networked public appears to persist as participants adjust the contextual elements they are drawing on. As noted in Section 3.4, DNEAs work together to construct new realities for audiences to consider. As the camp progresses, and the Designer Explorer participants become further inculcated together socially—across online and offline contexts—the data presents evidence that the social contextual elements became increasingly valuable within the Designer Explorer networked public. The engagement and



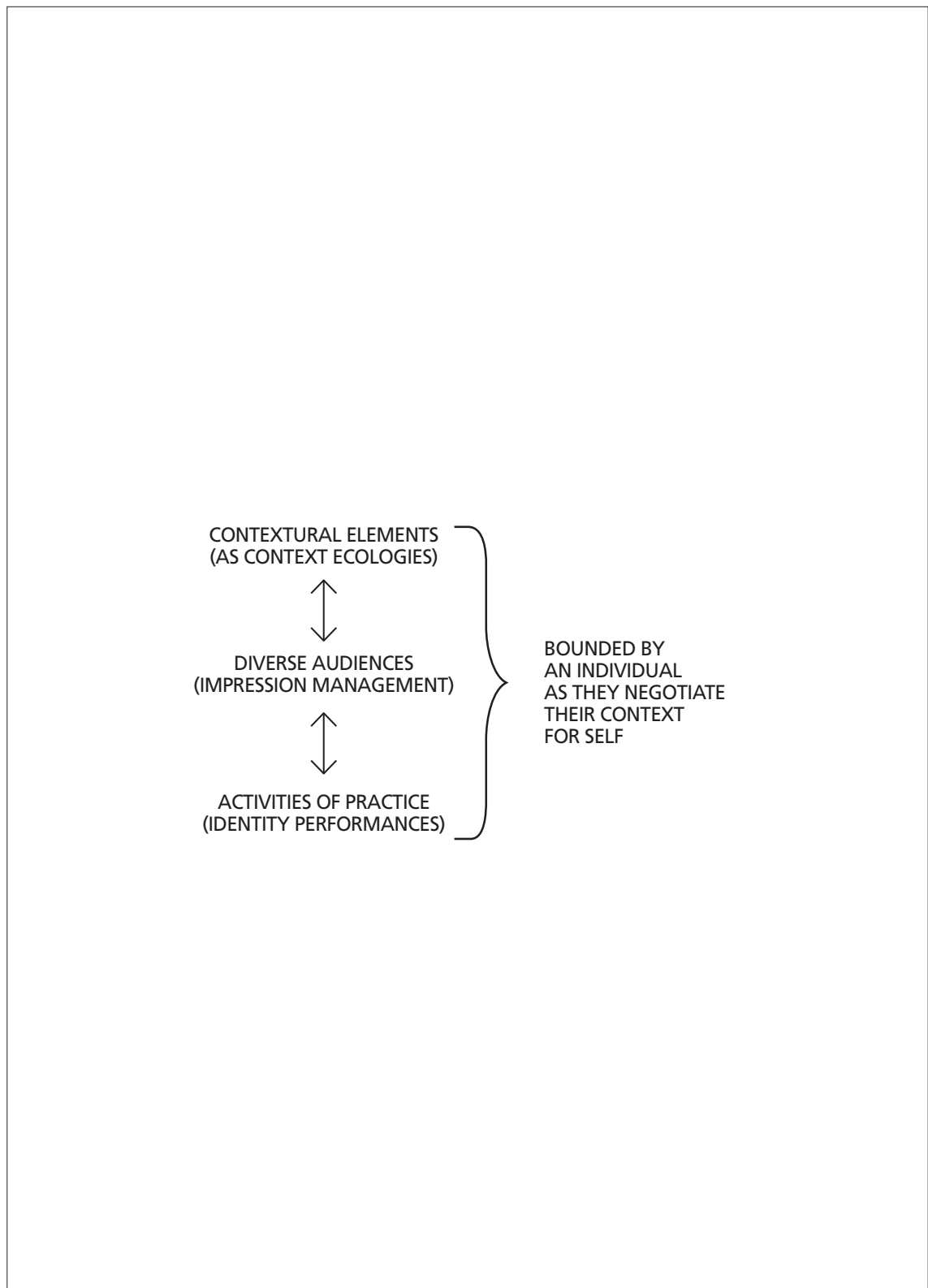
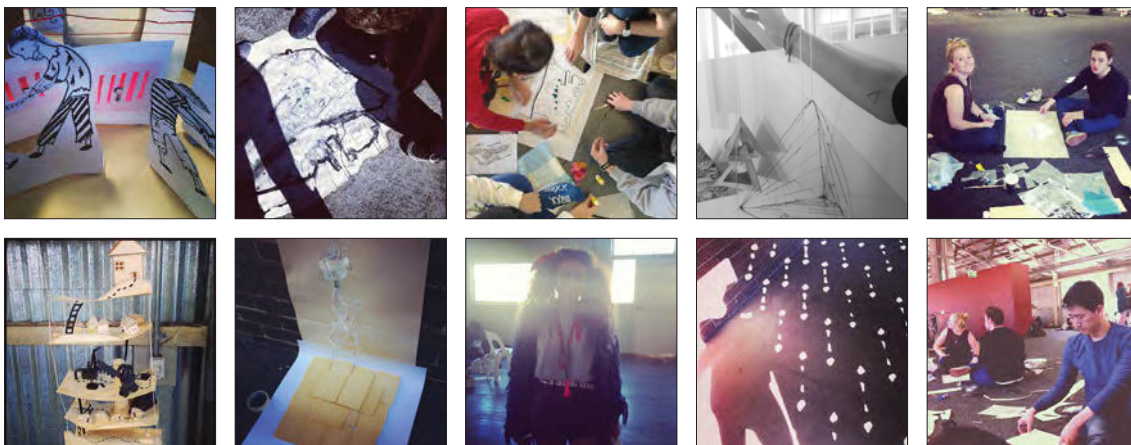


Figure 6.1: Dialogue between contextual elements, diverse audiences and activities of practice.

behaviours seen in posts shared to Instagram in the first few hours of the design camp are vastly different from those seen towards the end of the project, emphasising the mutable and malleable conditions of the contextual ecology that the Designer Explorer participants are drawing on.

Within the Designer Explorer context DNEAs are developing their practical knowledge through tacit and explicit acts of knowledge transfer between each other and a process of embodied situated learning about their practice. As discussed in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.4.2, practices become routinised through the reproduction and blocks of shared knowledge about how elements should be connected within a practice—that is, when several elements of a practice are conjoined together. This is descriptive of what Wellman (2002) refers to as *network capital*, which describes the ways in which individuals both communicate and obtain resources from each other. The images shared to Instagram act as resources, or contextual elements, that guide other Designer Explorer participants as to the types of images that should be reproduced. Through mimicking each other's behaviours, individuals undertake a dynamic process of affirmation from their audience and also reinforce others' impressions, resulting in shared notions of belonging—a reward of this particular practice. These social interactions are valuable activities for DNEAs as the reinforcement allows their context creation practice to *travel*, and they are also significant to DNEAs as they transition through their emerging adulthood.



When viewed as a collection of data, it becomes clear from the emergence of the two overriding themes that the participants are drawing on a specific contextual ecology, with the most dominant influences coming from the locational, material and social contexts of the participants. Because the values and accepted norms of any networked public are collectively produced, any activities that were seen through the *#designerexplorer* hashtag over the three days of the design camp cannot be seen to sit in isolation; the experiences of a networked public are shared between members. As Sarah Pink notes, ethnographic material should be seen as collections of ‘individual images with situated meanings’ (2007, p. 129). By engaging with the networked public, whether that is continuously or not across the three days, the Designer Explorer participants are producing collective knowledge and understandings about contextual elements available for use within the context creation practice. As the Designer Explorer networked public develops over the three days of the design camp, the contextual elements that the Designer Explorer participants are responding to are located within the Designer Explorer context. Participants are drawing on their ‘socialized competence’ (Hine, 2000, p. 51) and are gathering the most significant contextual elements to produce identity performances.

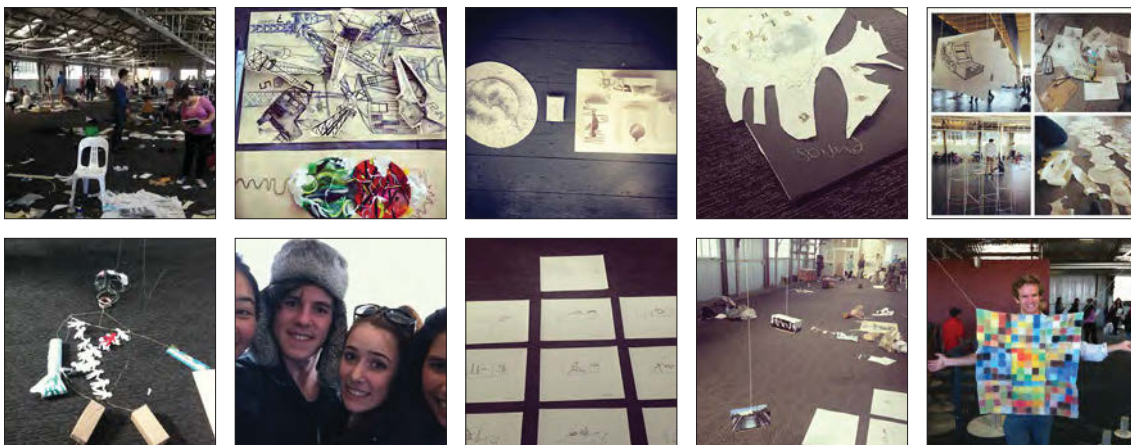
The Designer Explorer networked public is bolstered through the inculcation of further members and the ongoing reproduction of activities of practice. As each Designer Explorer DNEA shares a range of content using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, they are contributing to the production of the social norm for the Designer Explorer environment by leaving material evidence and visible traces for other participants to interpret and incorporate as contextual elements in their own negotiation of their contexts for self. As highlighted throughout this



thesis, the maintenance of a practice is a shared effort. Within the Designer Explorer networked public each member actively decodes and re-contextualises the elements of practice used by others as they undertake their own activities of practice. As active members of a networked public, the participants are influencing each other in the type of content they share and accepted normative behaviours expected within the Designer Explorer networked public.

Significantly for this research, when the content shared through the Designer Explorer networked public is examined as a collective, the shifting themes in the content across the three days suggest that the Designer Explorer DNEAs were responding to each other and undertaking specific impression management activities as they began to engage more comprehensively with other members of the networked public. As established in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, as DNEAs transition through their emerging adulthood, they are involved in an ongoing process of configuring their own sense of self against their peers and other social relations. The identity performances of DNEAs are inherently social processes in that an individual's context for self shifts in response to the feedback they receive from their audiences.

As discussed in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Section 2.5, networked publics enable an individual's public visibility and social constructs facilitate individuals in seeing themselves a part of broader communities. For DNEAs, these communities are constituted through diverse audiences that sit across both online and offline contexts. That nature of identity performance through digital social technologies means that DNEAs become reliant



on the imagined audiences they envision for themselves as they actively participate in a particular networked public. As highlighted in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, Litt and Hargittai (2016) propose that individuals negotiate two types of audiences when they engage with digital social technologies. These are *targeted audiences* and *abstract audiences* and are constructed through a range of social ties, including personal, communal, professional and phantasmal ties. The audiences encompassed within the Designed Explorer networked public are particularly diverse. There are many things at stake for the Designer Explorer participants and they are performing several different roles to cater for their diverse social and situational contexts. As each participant engages in the networked public, the audiences that a DNEA imagines are viewing their identity performances affect the impression management strategies they deploy when undertaking identity performances. DNEAs tailor their identity performances to cater to these subjective audiences, as explored in Section 6.4.1.

6.3 Identity Performances: Elements

Throughout the three days of the Designer Explorer project, the participants were harnessing a range of contextual elements that were available to them in order to form contextual ecologies through which they could negotiate their contexts for self and associated identity performances. The contextual elements that were integrated into, and made apparent through, the Designer Explorer networked public are outlined below. Of primary interest here are the material contextual elements and the competences that are visible throughout the data. The meanings of practices are speculated upon briefly and explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self.



Material elements identifiable from the data, as delineated by the locational, material, situational and social contexts of individuals:

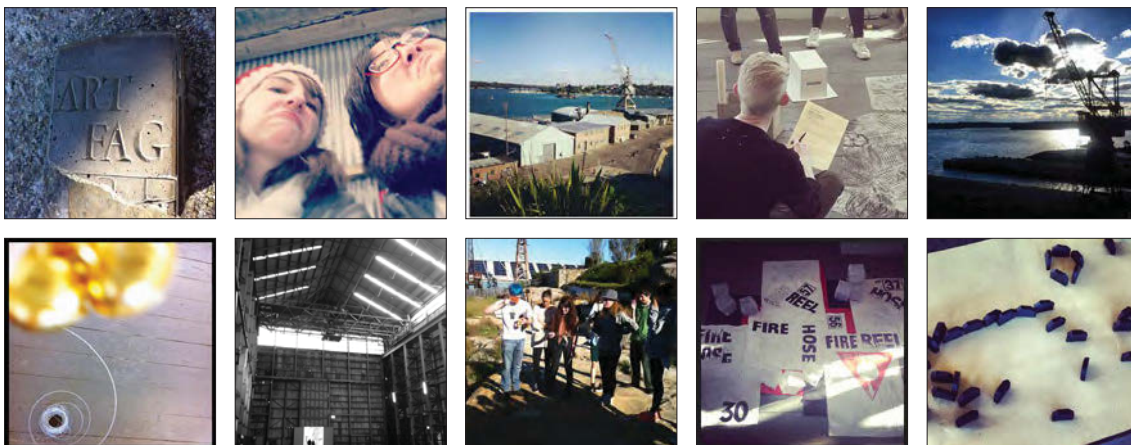
Locational: Sydney, Cockatoo Island and landmarks.

Material: *Online:* Digital images, Instagram (biographies, captions, comments, cropping, filters, 'follow', geo-location, hashtags, 'likes', @mentions, profile pictures, 'publicity settings', tagging, 'trolling'). *Offline:* Buildings (Mould Loft, Turbine Hall), industrial ruins, 'onesies' (costume clothing), alcohol, food, map-making materials, the assessment brief.

Situational: UTS first year design camp, the camp assessment task, emerging adulthood, time of day.

Social: Audience (design camp groups, other members of the Design Thinking cohort, other Designer Explorer participants, teaching staff, members of the public, Cockatoo Island rangers, other networked publics).

It should be highlighted that some material elements are not identifiable from the data collected throughout the Designer Explorer project such as browsing history, 'lurking', subscribing, following, unfollowing, lists, adjusting privacy settings, and receiving notifications. However it is beyond the scope of this research to investigate how these may impact on DNEA context creation practice.

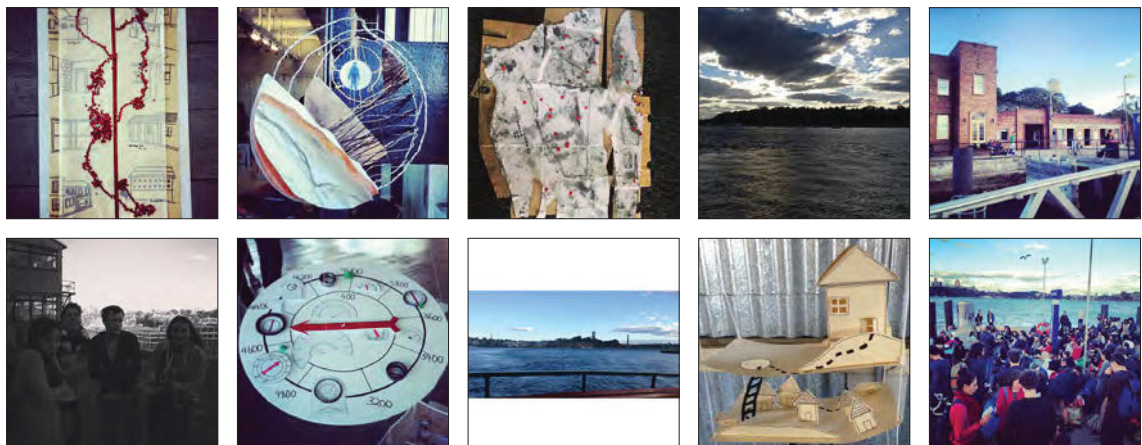


6.4 Identity Performances: Activities

As competent context creation practitioners, the Designer Explorer participants are skilled at coordinating their behaviour across differing social realms to produce the activities of practice that are a result of, and belong to, the newly formed Designer Explorer networked public. Throughout the three days of the Designer Explorer project, participants undertook a range of different activities and diligently configured the contextual elements available to them as they produced their context creation practice in response to the Designer Explorer context.

As noted in Chapter Five: Designer Explorer: The Project, Section 5.5.2, and evidenced in Figure 5.2, the participants were not acting homogenously within the Designer Explorer networked public. Across the three days of the project, some participants only shared one image, while others shared over 20 images. Nor were participants sharing consistently. Over the three days the ratio of content to unique user decreased from an average of 3.3 posts per unique user on day one to 2.1 posts per unique user on days two and three of the project. When analysing the data from a global perspective, this suggests that only some participants shared content consistently to the Designer Explorer networked public across the three days.

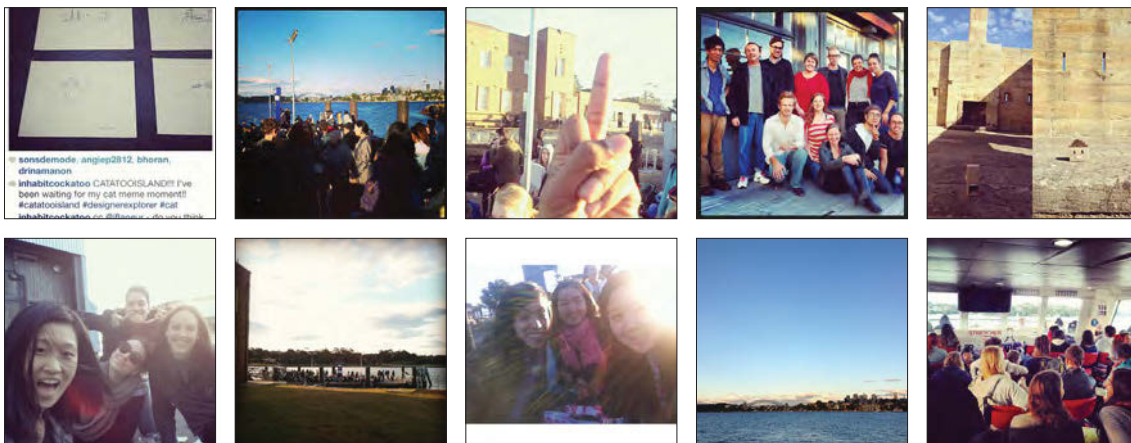
Crucially, the data does not account for non-visible members of the networked public—that is, participants who were actively engaged in the networked public by viewing the stream of *#designerexplorer* content, but who may not have actively contributed their own content, or produced feedback (through likes and comments) for other members of the networked public. Given this, it is challenging to track the engagement of individual participants comprehensively



across the three days of the project. Rather than emphasising the particular trajectories of individual participants, interpretation of the data led to the identification of core activities of practice that could be analysed further through examining identity performances that were encompassed within these activities.

The identity performances visible through the *#designerexplorer* hashtag demonstrated that the Designer Explorer DNEAs were using competences that they already possessed by applying them to activities of practice occurring in the Designer Explorer networked public, subsequently making them unique to the networked public through processes of recontextualisation. The result was the emergence of context-specific activities. While many more activities took place throughout the project, and indeed, are visible throughout the data, this thesis focuses on those activities of practice that exemplified the negotiation between the core interactive and identity performance aspects of a networked public, that is contextual elements, diverse audiences and activities of practice as seen in Figure 6.1. Also taken into consideration were activities produced by the Designer Explorer interview participants specifically, content that was specifically representative in its expression of the Designer Explorer contextual ecology and, finally, content that illustrated the reproduction of practice through commonalities and/or variations of common contextual elements being used by individuals as they negotiated their context for self.

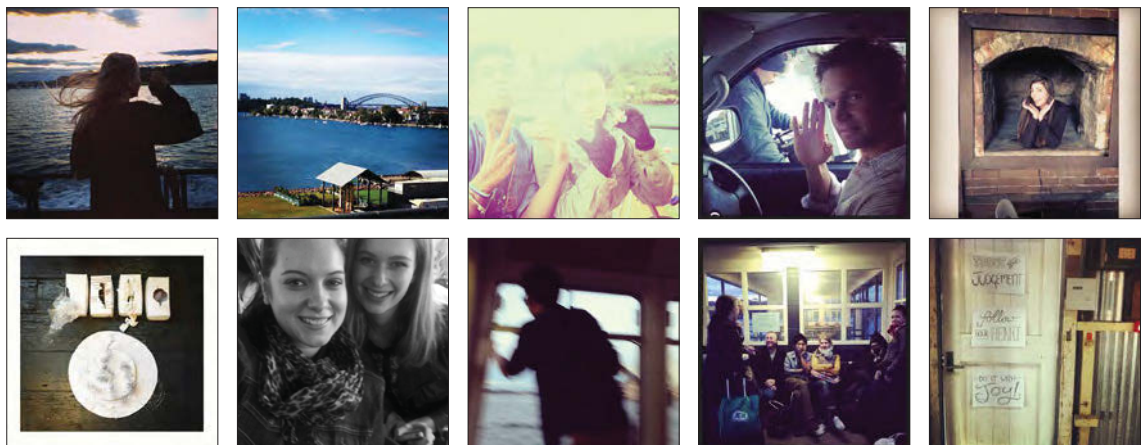
The four core activities of practice identified were: *coping with context collapse*, *negotiating the network*, *performing roles* and *circulating feedback*. For each of these four activities of practice,



the Designer Explorer data provides evidence of multiple forms of identity performance taking place. The autonomy of each participant is evident in that, while the activities may be structured within an overall practice framework, the contexts that DNEAs are operating within allow individuals to adopt and adapt their performances to suit their own purposes, motivations and goals. Throughout the project, each participant produced a narrative of their own Designer Explorer experience by contributing to the stream of content being shared. As emphasised in the previous section, the performances each participant undertook shifted and changed in response to the circumstances each participant was confronted with across the three days of the design camp, mirroring the overall thematic trajectory of the collective Designer Explorer networked public identity.

Instagram enables the agencies of each identity performance to become explicit and traceable. The DNEA context creation practice is both altered and coordinated against the context of Cockatoo Island and the participant DNEAs' first year design school experience in general, resulting in overlapping identities encompassing the personal, professional and social. Participants are learning through experience, and are forming and negotiating their contexts for self and presenting this while on Cockatoo Island. It was assumed that when users applied a hashtag they were aware of the context they were ascribing content to, of adding their content to the collective of content being produced within the Designer Explorer networked public.

More often than not, the posts shared by individuals are positioned within multiple activities. This is due to the convergence of several contextual elements of practice within each piece of shared Instagram content. These are crucial aspects of this research and are described

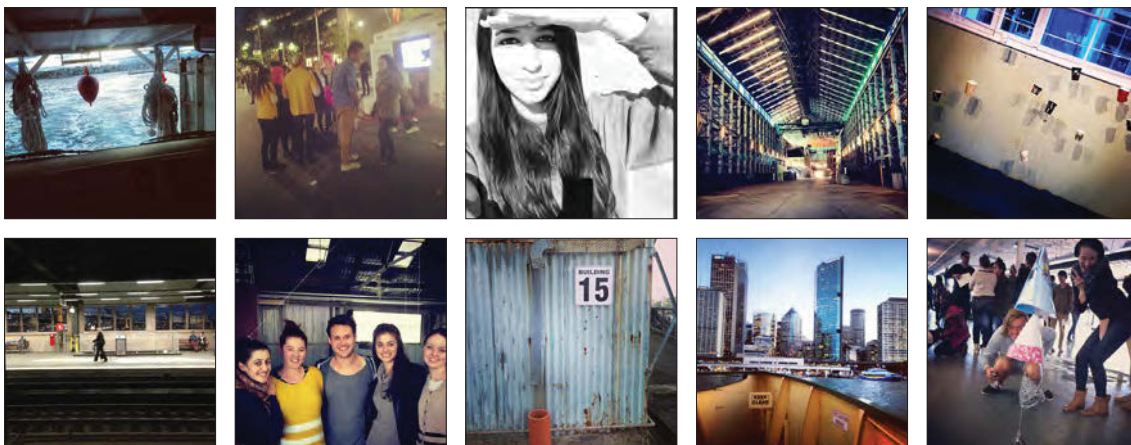


more comprehensively in the following sections and in the following chapter: Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self. The four activities are now described in further detail.

6.4.1 Activity One: Coping with Context Collapse

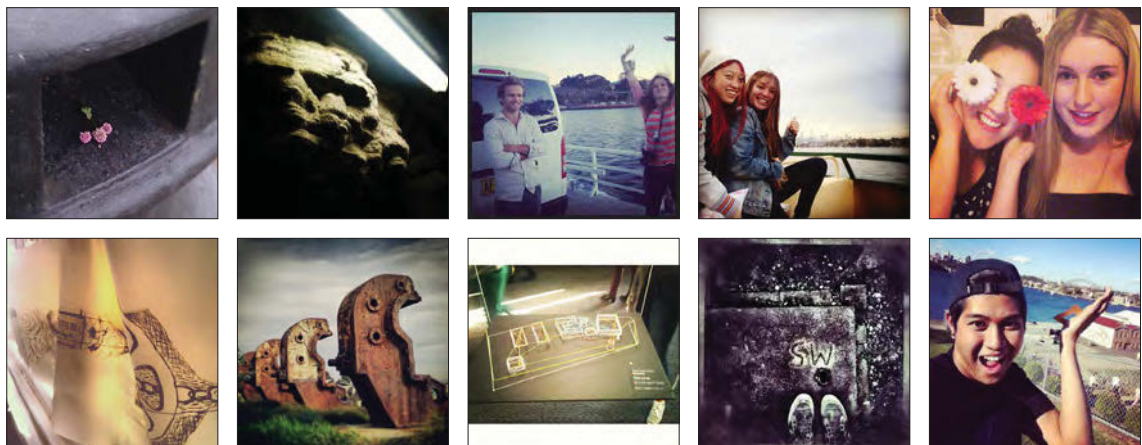
A significant aspect of the DNEA context creation is how individuals cope with context collapse. As discussed previously, the dynamism of networked publics encourages versatility in the composition of both the general membership of networked publics and the composition of each individual member's audience. As discussed previously in Section 6.2, the Designer Explorer context explicitly encouraged context collapse and brought together a diverse group of DNEAs.

As discussed in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, the ongoing presence of an audience acts as a key functional aspect of digital social technologies and enables DNEAs to undertake *impression management*, as they negotiate the interplay between the front stage and back stage. As DNEAs move between the two as they circulate their contexts of self, they are constantly negotiating the blurring boundaries of public and private presentations of self. They employ complex arrays of activities to manage their impressions across multiple and diverse audiences as they adjust their behaviour and selectively give and give off details to suit their own purposes and goals.



The DNEAs who participated in the Designer Explorer project were negotiating multiple audiences and circumstances of context collapse during the project. As a result, a series of activities of practices that dealt with these concerns became visible through the *#designerexplorer* stream as the participants demonstrated their competence of engaging with these varied and overlapping social contexts.

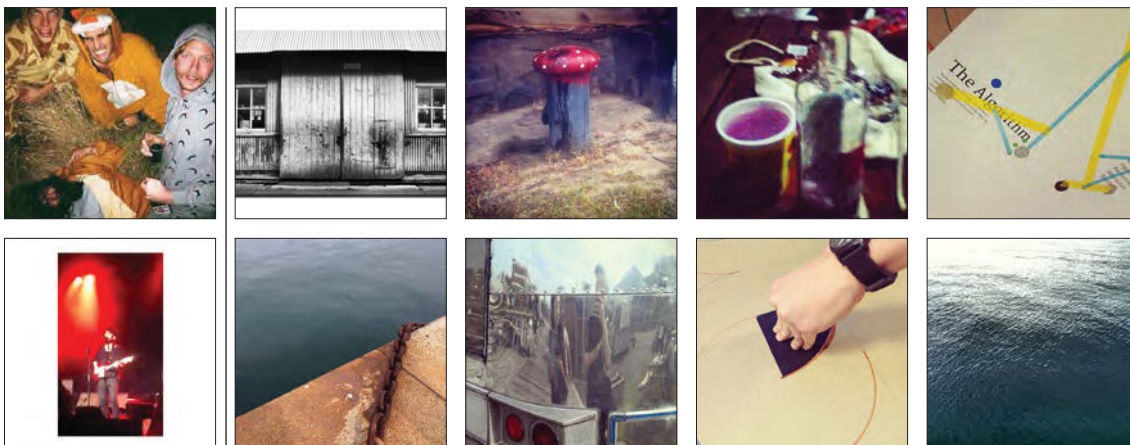
While the Designer Explorer participants are linked through their shared experience of their first year of university and the Design Thinking camp context, each participant was negotiating diverse audiences during the three days of the camp. The audiences that the Designer Explorer participants were engaging throughout the project were made up of diverse known and unknown imagined audiences. For the sake of clarity, the Designer Explorer audiences are also distributed into the two categories of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ audiences. Internal audiences encompass individuals who knew about the Designer Explorer project, and external audiences encompass individuals who may have had no knowledge about the project. The audiences *known* to participants were made up of the other Designer Explorer participants, including UTS students and UTS teaching staff—some of whom may have participated in the project, and some of whom may not have participated at all. Members of the Designer Explorer networked public may have already been connected through articulated friendship links (see Section 2.5) prior to the camp, or indeed, became connected at some point throughout the project. These known audiences were also made up of other participants who were actively participating in the project by sharing content within the networked publics, but may not have been directly connected through an articulated friendship link. Furthermore, the participants



were also compelled to moderate the context collapse imposed on them by connecting with other participants who they may not have desired to be connected with, for example, other students who they did not know or the UTS teaching staff.

Throughout the three days of the Designer Explorer project, there were also several audience members who were not participating in the project, but had access to the content being shared through the *#designerexplorer* hashtag because of existing articulated friendship links. These external audiences were made up of the ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ of the Designer Explorer participants. There is a secondary *known* audience to consider: the Cockatoo Island staff and members of the public visiting Cockatoo Island. While these audience members may not have been directly associated with either the design camp context or the Designer Explorer project their presence, both connected and unconnected, had an impact on the identity performances of some Designer Explorer participants.

Throughout the Designer Explorer project, each participant had an imagined audience created through configurations of members of these diverse internal and external audiences. As described previously in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, an individual’s audience is not static. As DNEAs reconfigure their context for self through identity performances, their imagined audience moves between configurations of targeted imagined audiences and abstract imagined audiences, or any combination of the two.



Post-camp

Imagined audiences differ for each participant and are a direct result of each of their contexts for self. As described in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.3, the moment an identity performance is undertaken, DNEAs are constructing an idea of who they imagine the audience to be, and gather together contextual elements that are appropriate to this identity performance. This is demonstrated through an excerpt of the conversation with Designer Explorer participant, Sarah, about who makes up her audience on social network platforms:

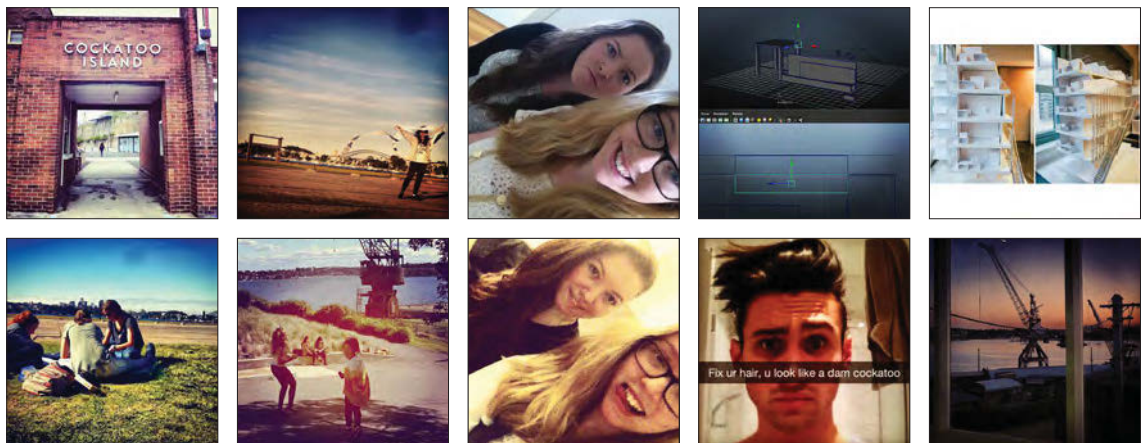
Sarah: So there's people, that's sort of my audience, like people whose interest, same interests as me. As well as my friends, yeah, I think.

Here, Sarah illustrates that her imagined audience is made up of people who like the same things as her, and distinguishes these people as being separate from her friends. It can be assumed that, for Sarah, her 'friends' in this context, are people she personally knows. As boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 220) note, 'friends' on social network sites are not the same as 'friends' in the everyday sense, which is illustrated by Sarah's distinction of the two.

Researcher: Who is it in your head that you're imagining is the audience who's seeing the picture? Say we had a beautiful plate of food in front of us now. Who are you imagining you're taking that photo for?

Sarah: Me, yeah.

Researcher: It's for you?

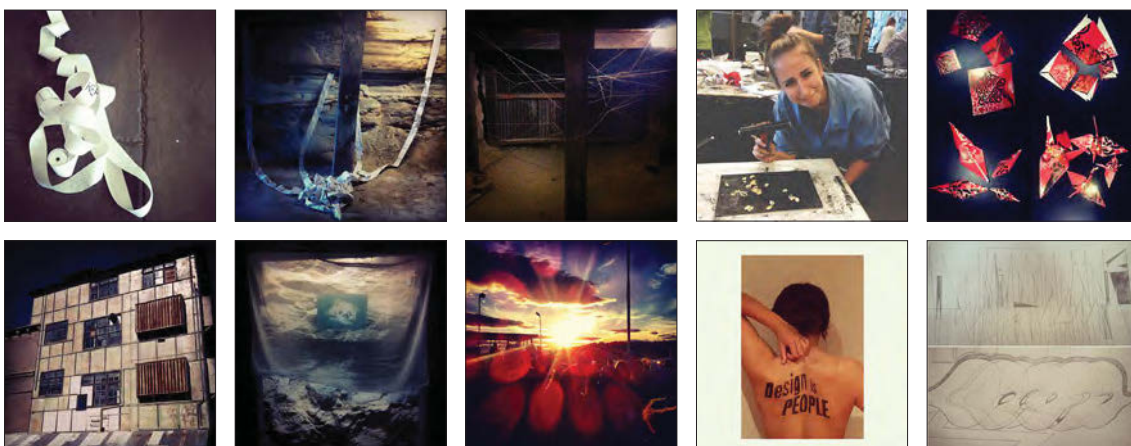


- Sarah: Yeah. I think, I always thinking, oh, if I saw this on my feed, how would I like it? Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay, so someone that was similar to you?
- Sarah: Yeah, yeah. [...] Similar to me, yeah, or my friends, yeah.
But I think mainly my friends actually.

Sarah sees her imagined audience as being similar to her, and she performs for them in a way that *she* would like to see a performance. It is the expectations she has of her own audience that drive her performance, as discussed further in Chapter Seven: Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self.

There were several examples of identity performance that gave evidence of individuals managing their collapsed contexts including participants acknowledging their external audiences through captions and comments on Instagram posts, visible shifts in intended audiences throughout the project, group selfies, @mentioning/tagging members of their Design Thinking groups, abstraction of content by withholding clarifying contextual information, the use of additional hashtags (see Section 6.4.2), and role performances as design students (see Section 6.4.3).

Throughout the Designer Explorer project, several participants undertook identity performances in order to explicitly engage with their multiple known audiences. Participants acknowledged their diverse audiences by directing content specifically at some audiences, or by including justifying image captions and comments. Consider Image 11 shared by



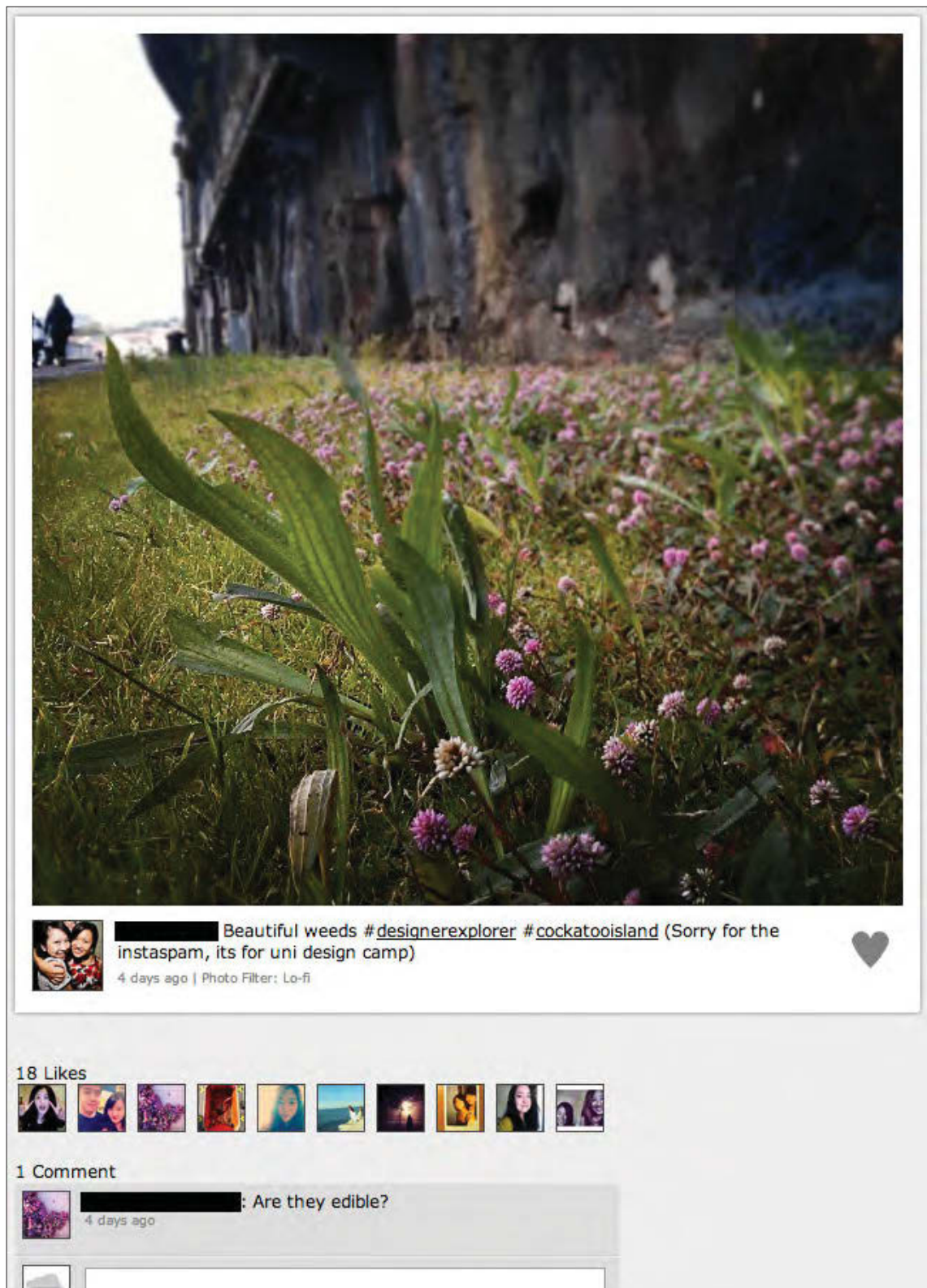


Image 11: 'Beautiful weeds #designerexplorer #cockatooisland (Sorry for the instaspam, its for uni design camp)'

Sarah on day one of the design camp. Her caption reads, ‘Beautiful weeds #designerexplorer #cockatooisland (Sorry for the instaspam, its for uni design camp)’. As a material element, this caption serves two purposes. The first purpose is to communicate the context of the Designer Explorer camp and her ‘designerly explorations’ and the second purpose is to describe and justify to her imagined audience members from external imagined audiences and networked publics the content and reasoning of her post. The content Sarah is sharing may not make contextual sense to her external audiences. Therefore, as an act of impression management, Sarah is compensating for the sacrifice of ‘coherency and continuity’ (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 307) in what could be perceived as a typical Instagram performance by her. Additionally, the words ‘Sorry for the instaspam, its for the uni design camp’ suggests that she is concerned about how her audience is perceiving her. As discussed further in the following chapter, within their digitally networked practices, DNEAs are driven by a complex constellation of socially normative expectations and constraints which create rewards for them in the form of ‘likes’ and comments that act as an affirmation of their identity performance, and subsequently assist them in positioning their contexts for self.

The expectations and constraints set out by the social and situational contexts of DNEAs also engender particular acts of *decorum* (Section 3.4). In order to maintain diverse audiences across their networked publics, DNEAs introduce elements and activities into their context creation practice that work towards mitigating undesirable interpretations from others of their impressions. Referring again to Image 11, the use of the Instagram phraseology ‘instaspam’ illustrates Sarah’s competence in the ‘genres of usage’ common across global use of Instagram.

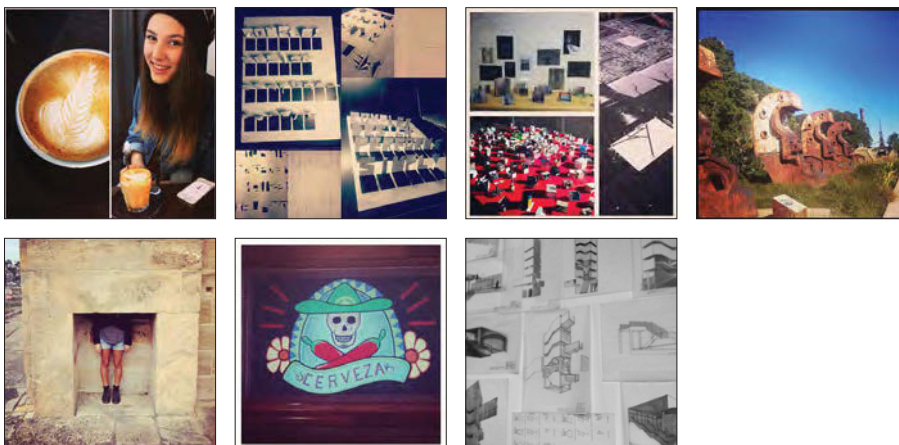




Image 12: 'Finished! But still a bit psycho @[redacted] @[redacted] @[redacted]'

As described in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.4.2, the material cannot be disassociated from its socio-cultural contexts. In this instance, Sarah is incorporating the competences understood in the global context of Instagram when she uses the word ‘instaspam’. As Sarah engages with the Designer Explorer networked public, she cannot dissociate herself from the modes of use that sit beyond the Designer Explorer context. Instagram users manipulate the language used in their captions to contextualise content in the space of Instagram and also configure meanings around appropriate use. While the content in Image 11 may make sense and is contextually appropriate for the Designer Explorer context, by classifying her image as ‘instaspam’ Sarah is displaying *decorum* in her front stage by acknowledging to her external audiences that she knows this may not be normative, or valuable, content within the other networked publics she belongs to.

Now consider Image 12 shared by Sarah on day three of the design camp. In this image, we see vastly different content to Sarah’s earlier image. This social image features Sarah and her three Design Thinking group members hamming it up to the camera, taking part in a group selfie with each individual pulling a different expression. Sarah has supplemented the image with the caption: ‘Finished! But still a bit psycho @[redacted name] @[redacted name] @[redacted name]’. As an identity performance, the content in this image is vastly different to the content Sarah shared in Image 11, illustrating a visible shift in her audiences from one primarily targeted towards her external audiences, to content aimed at the imagined audience made up of the Designer Explorer networked public and specifically targeted at her group members by using the material element of an *@mention* to tag her friends in the caption of the post. This highly social image of Sarah and her friends emphasises the malleability of audiences and the ease at which DNEAs cope with context collapse. In Image 12 Sarah does not explain or justify her content to her external audiences, as she did in Image 11. For Sarah, as she constructs her own narrative of the Designer Explorer environment and becomes a member of the Designer Explorer networked public over the three days of the design camp, sharing this expression of group achievement is prioritised over offering contextual understanding for members of her other networked publics.



Image 13: 'good morning world #architecture #cockatooisland #sydney #australia #designerexplorer #isdesign #uts'

Another example of the mutability of audiences is evident across two images from another Designer Explorer participant, Emma. One of the first images to be posted during the design camp was Image 13, shared by Emma when she arrived on Cockatoo Island on the morning of day one. This image features a view of the ‘North Apron’ at Cockatoo Island—a popular site for many of the images posted to the Designer Explorer project as illustrated in Image 03. With the image, Emma included the caption ‘good morning world’ followed by a range of locational and contextual hashtags including *#cockatooisland*, *#sydney* and *#australia*. There is very little information in this post that locates it specifically within the context of the first year design camp specifically, though it does link to Emma’s context as a UTS design student through her inclusion of the two hashtags *#isdesign* (Interior Spatial Design) and *#uts*. Emma is alluding to her external audiences through her inclusion of the words ‘good morning world’ in the caption and the limited inclusion of further contextualising information about the image. The lack of clarity around the content abstracts Emma’s targeted imagined audience and suggests context collapse.

In much the same way that Sarah’s Image 11 and Image 12 shift from abstract locational content to more social images, a second image shared by Emma later on day one of the camp shows a transition in intended audiences. In Image 14, we see a group selfie of Emma and her Design Thinking team members, all smiling for the camera. There is very little contextualising information in the image itself, in its close-cropped framing of the subjects and lack of background information. However it is supplemented with a geo-tag locating the image on Cockatoo Island and has the caption: ‘what a bangin’ team @[redacted name] @[redacted name] *#designerexplorer* *#interior* *#spatial* *#design* *#girls* *#isdesign* *#uts* *#cockatooisland* *#sydney* *#australia*’, offering audiences further contextual information. When Emma discusses this image during her interview, she described the intention of this caption in greater detail:

Researcher: Did you interact with other people? did you mention people, you know, @ mention people or use it to find people?

Emma: Yeah. I, well, for that photo of the group of, my group of girls...That we did the, um, project together, I



Image 14: 'what a bangin' team @[redacted] @[redacted] #designerexplorer #interior #spatial #design #girls #isdesign #uts #cockatooisland #sydney #australia'

made, made sure to, um, include them in that photo with their usernames and everything.

Here Emma is demonstrating her competence as a practitioner in both the technological contexts and social contexts she is engaging within. 'I made, made sure to, um, include them in that photo with their usernames and everything' which suggests that Emma is both capable of using the functions of Instagram to create a tag, and also emphasises that Emma sees it is important to tag her group members in the photo, and subsequently include her group members in the activity. As noted previously, genres of usage establish socio-cultural value to material things. While it is unclear exactly what her motivations are for tagging her group members, the simple act of inculcating her peers in her identity performances has greater social effects. Emma may be intending notifying her group members that she has posted a photo of them to simply let them know they feature in a publicly shared image, or Emma's intent might be to garner a response from them or other audience members. Emma may be motivated to gain social rewards through feedback and bolster her context for self further.

6.4.2 Activity Two: Negotiating the Network

As discussed in the previous section, DNEAs are subject to context collapse when they operate within networked publics and as such have developed proficiencies in their digitally networked practices that help them cope with the effects that result from this. Compelling activities that took place during the Designer Explorer project were identity performances that illustrated the varying negotiations each participant had with the overall network. These negotiations were primarily identifiable through the establishment of sub-networks by smaller groups of participants operating within the Designer Explorer networked public. Key identity performances, as evidenced in the data include using additional hashtags when sharing content, including contextually-related and unrelated-to-context hashtags, creating and including supplementary hashtags, wearing onesies and participating in context-specific sociality.

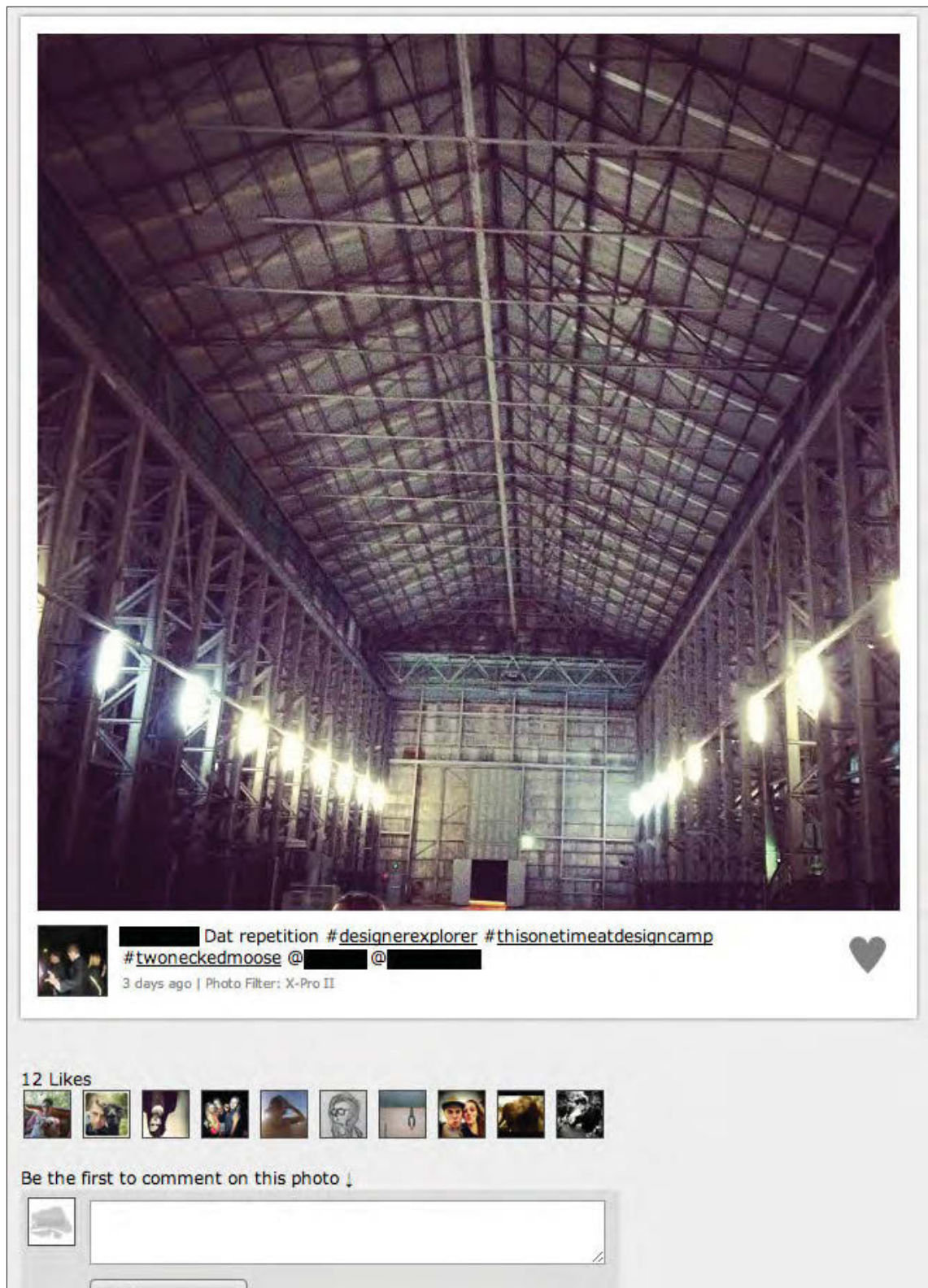


Image 15: 'Dat repetition [#designerexplorer](#) [#thisonetimeatdesigncamp](#) [#twoneckedmoose](#) @[\[redacted\]](#) @[\[redacted\]](#)'

As identified previously, one of the most interesting performances observed multiple times throughout the Designer Explorer project was the use of additional hashtags by participants alongside the *#designerexplorer* hashtag. As Table 5.3 showed, 414 distinct additional hashtags were used to supplement content being shared during the Designer Explorer project. These additional hashtags were descriptive of the content of the images they were attached to, though some were completely unrelated to the Designer Explorer context such as *#drwho*, *#cleanliving*, *#gabbana*, *#hashtag*, or *#moviebox* or were contextually locational hashtags such as *#designcamp*, *#uts*, *#cockatooisland* and *#designthinking*. As described earlier in Section 2.5.2, hashtags are used to increase the visibility and searchability of content. Within digitally networked practices, the increased visibility means that content is exposed to other networked publics, which, from a dramaturgical perspective, widens the stage for a performance to take place.

Throughout the Designer Explorer project, there was evidence that the participant DNEAs were doing more than simply widening their stage, they were actively expanding their stage to incorporate many networks. When DNEAs undertake their context creation practice, they use hashtags to create ‘layers’ of visibility of their stage to target their diverse audiences as they function across multiple networked publics at any one time. One of the ways that these layers of visibility are achieved is when participants include additional—yet contextually relevant—hashtags, and distinguish sub-networks of Designer Explorer participants from the primary Designer Explorer networked public. During the Designer Explorer project, two such hashtags were *#designerexplorer* and *#thisonetimeatdesigncamp*. Images 15, 16 and 17, all shared by different participants, all use the hashtag *#thisonetimeatdesigncamp*.

These hashtags remain relevant to the context of the Designer Explorer project through their similarity to the *#designerexplorer* hashtag and by alluding to the design camp context. Through minor tweaks in spelling and the use of certain words, these hashtags enable Designer Explorer participants to operate below the ‘visibility’ of the main *#designerexplorer* hashtag. Significantly, the Instagram content still contributes to the overall *#designerexplorer* stream because participants have also included the project hashtag in their posts. Effectively, participants could use the additional hashtags independently of the *#designerexplorer* hashtag



Image 16: '#chunder #designerexplorer #thisonetimeatdesigncamp'

and they would still be contextualised within the design camp context. Inclusion of the primary project hashtag suggests that these participants want to remain visible within the wider networked public while at the same time creating their own sub-networks to operate within.

Another example of an identity performance seen to be explicitly negotiating the Designer Explorer network in this way was the use of less-contextually relevant recurring additional hashtags alongside the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, for example, *#semicirclesociety* and *#twoneckedmoose*, as seen in Image 15 and Image 18. Sub-groups of Designer Explorer participants coordinated the use of these hashtags to establish their own 'in-jokes' that they used throughout the project. These hashtags were difficult to interpret without further contextualising information, but because they were used alongside the primary project hashtag, were seen as contributing to the layers of sub-networks that operated below the visibility of the main *#designerexplorer* hashtag.

Establishing sub-networks through the creation of additional hashtags increases searchability and potential spreadability of the content that the hashtags are attached to. The increased visibility of content may result in further social rewards for individuals. As established previously, individuals are motivated into engagement that suits their own purposes and goals that best suit their own context creation practice. When sub-groups of Designer Explorer participants create sub-networks through the use of additional hashtags, they are undertaking an intentional act targeted at producing the circulation of feedback, in whatever format this may be. They may be communicating with other members of the Designer Explorer group; however, the content being shared may not be inclusive of everyone and purposefully used in a way that does not make sense to non-members of the sub-network. This action enables DNEAs to sit below the visibility line where they can be identified in the context of the Designer Explorer networked public, concurrently distinguishing themselves as unique individuals.

As noted previously, some visible identity performances that took place during the Designer Explorer project were applicable to several context creation activities. The participants who were actively creating sub-networks within the Designer Explorer networked public may have

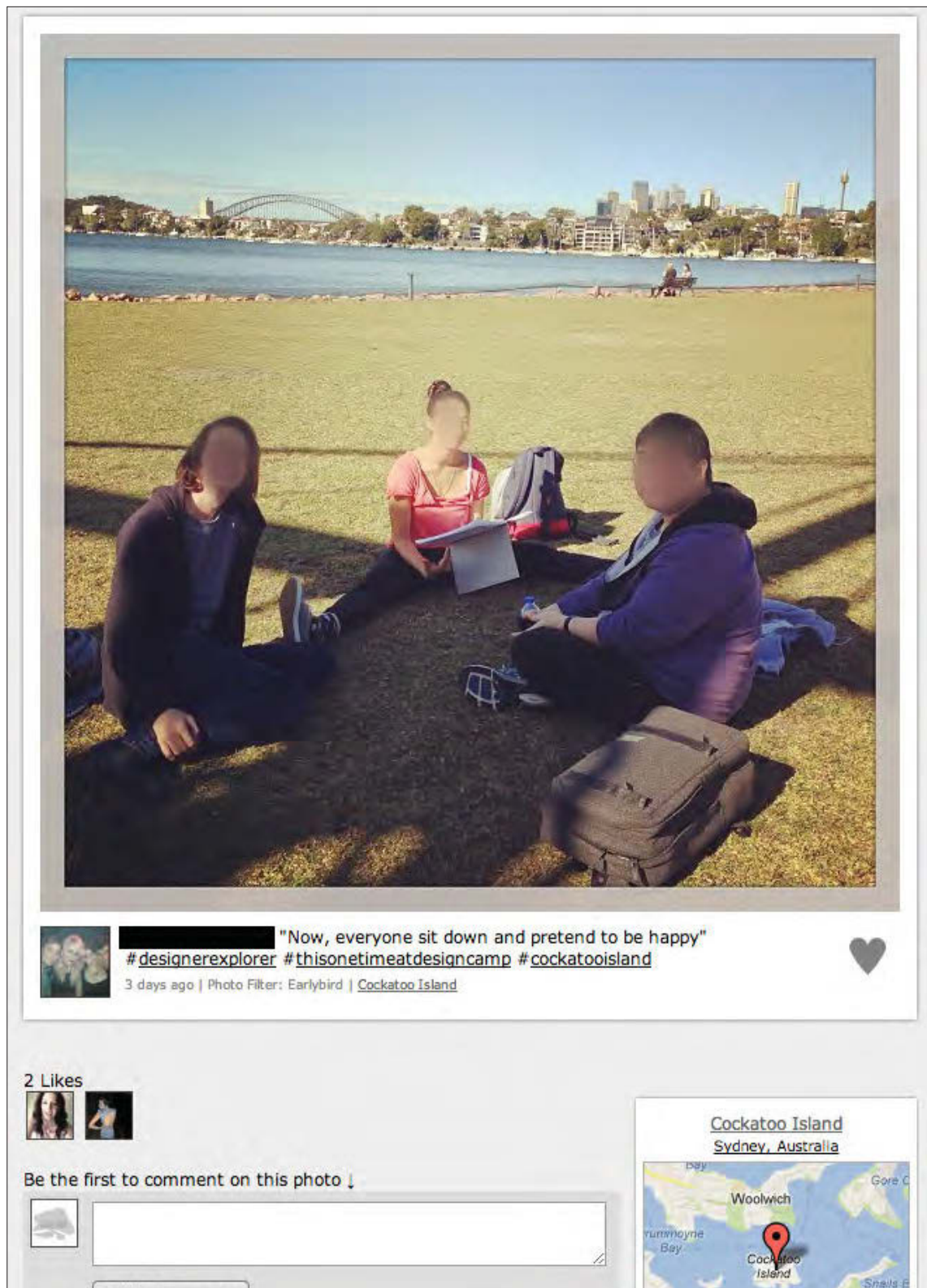


Image 17: "'Now, everyone sit down and pretend to be happy" #designerexplorer #thisonetimeatdesigncamp #cockatooisland'

used this as another act of coping with context collapse. Within a networked public, just as with any social group, it cannot be assumed that all individual members are interested or invested in each other—regardless of commonalities and shared understandings. The blurring boundaries between online and offline contexts raise challenges for individuals dealing with different audiences and physical contexts. In their digitally networked practices DNEAs use digital social technologies in ways that enable them to effectively deal with different social situations. Just as some participants may have chosen to only participate in the Designer Explorer networked public as observers as their way of coping, some participants carve out their own spaces to operate within the networked public. By including additional hashtags, participants are directly managing their visibility in multiple ways, through establishing new links, or through directing content at their targeted imagined audiences as compensation for out-of-norm sharing behaviours.

This highlights the ways in which individuals proactively negotiate the balance between individuality and belonging within a social group in digitally networked front region practices. As described in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.4, when individuals make identity performances to their audiences in the front region, they execute what Goffman (1959, p. 16) refers to as *decorum* where identity performances are managed by standards and rules of particular contexts. As DNEAs negotiate their contexts for self within the Designer Explorer networked public, they are managing their own ambitions as autonomous emerging adults, while negotiating the socially prescribed norms of the contexts they are situated within. For the DNEAs participating in the project, there are common understandings that belong to this population that lead to the construction of *proficiencies* of practice. In many instances throughout the Designer Explorer project, it was apparent that many of the participants were positioning themselves as having particular proficiencies both in their use of digital social technologies, and significantly, in their skills at negotiating networked publics.

As established in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.5, for the Designer Explorer participants, the use of digital social technologies and their proficiencies are normative, rather than elite, and are the result of the ongoing use of social networks



Image 18: 'We've seen the back of the two necked moose #designerexplorer #semicirclesociety @[redacted]'

throughout their teen years. This became evident in the four interviews, as each participant recounted their previous experiences with social network platforms other than Instagram. This is demonstrated in the conversation with one of the Designer Explorer participants, Sam, below:

Researcher: Do you have any motivations behind using Facebook?

Sam: I guess Facebook was at school, you got Facebook because it was cool. Because the Internet was so new and interesting. Um, and I guess there was like... what was it? There was that Bebo or something? [...]

Sam: I never did Bebo. Then there was MySpace, and I kind of got MySpace, but MySpace then phased out and then came Facebook, and then I got Facebook then because everyone kind of had it and I'm like, oh okay.

In this conversation Sam is not necessarily distinguishing himself as being distinct generationally, rather he is demonstrating particular understandings and knowledge about the trajectories of particular social network platforms, and which ones have been the most socially appropriate to use across particular periods—an understanding that is unique to the DNEA population. Following this, Sam continues the conversation by indicating his understanding of the standards of decorum and complex social codes that apply when digital social technologies are considered socioculturally. Sam continues:

Sam: I guess the person I was, using Facebook then, to the person I am now using Facebook is completely different. Because back then it was like funny and you wrote stupid things and you did stupid stuff and like it was just so weird and new and, you know, no one really... I guess you can't say no one really knew what they were doing, because people know what they're doing, but it's just one of those weird... it's like a new foreign kind of thing. And I guess

you're kind of just doing things and, um, because everyone else was doing things as well.

Having experienced their teen years using digital social technologies, these technologies are part of the normative daily practices of DNEAs as they enter their emerging adulthood and discover new subjectivities; there is an aspect of reflexivity inherent in their use of technologies. When Sam emphasises 'I guess the person I was, using Facebook then, to the person I am now using Facebook is completely different', his context for self is not disconnected from the technologies, rather, digital social technologies are indelible to the social context in which he is producing his identity performances, and crucially, his own understanding of his autonomy. While Sam may be speaking about a social network platform different to that which was employed through the data collection phases of this research, this is a telling example of the significance of digital social technologies for this group of individuals. The technological capabilities of the platforms themselves are de-emphasised, instead emerging adulthood leads to reflexivity about self identity and the socio-cultural significance of using particular digital social technologies for social means.

6.4.3 Activity Three: Performing Roles: Design Students and Emerging Adults

Throughout the Designer Explorer project, the participants were using the Designer Explorer networked public to mediate various social relationships and roles they have as emerging adults. As discussed in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, DNEAs experience great shifts in role requirements expected of them as they experiment with their autonomy. For the DNEAs involved in the Designer Explorer project, there was evidence identified in the data that they were grappling with multiple roles from their extended social and situational contexts during their time at the design camp. It is noted in Section 3.5 that, while the role requirements are less fixed for emerging adults, they are still bound to certain roles and, as such, the identity performances seen during the project were indicative of their roles as first year students, emerging designers, design camp attendees, colleagues, friends, children and teenagers. The complexity of many performances throughout the project illustrated specific competences that DNEAs have in negotiating their multiple roles across the collapsed context

of the Designer Explorer networked public and in being able to shift between the various roles with fluidity and ease.

As noted previously, the Designer Explorer participants negotiate two types of audiences when they engage with digital social technologies. These are *targeted audiences* and *abstract audiences* and they are constructed through the diverse social ties found within the Designer Explorer networked public—some of these *known*, some *unknown*. As each participant engages in the networked public, the audiences that a DNEA imagines are viewing their identity performances impact the impression management strategies they deploy when undertaking identity performances. DNEAs tailor their identity performances to cater to these subjective audiences. The design camp context provided the Designer Explorer participants with two key *known audiences* to whom they could engineer identity performances: fellow design students and the teaching staff—both of which extended across the online and offline contextual ecology of the Designer Explorer networked public. Furthermore, during the design camp, the Design Thinking students are taken out of the traditional classroom learning environment and thrust into a different learning context at Cockatoo Island, effectively providing them with an expanded performance stage through which to experiment with their design student identity as it emerges.

Given the context of the participants within the UTS first year design camp, it is unsurprising that much of the content shared throughout the three days of the project involved identity performances of individuals performing the role of design students. Content shared via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag included images of Design Thinking design camp activities such as mapping and ‘exploring’ group work, expressions of group membership through group selfies, performances of participants as emerging adults wearing onesies (costume clothing) and participating in context-specific sociality.

As described in Section 6.2, the overall thematic trajectory of the collective Designer Explorer networked public identity shifted across the three days of the design camp from primarily locational and materially focused content illustrating the Cockatoo Island and design camp context, to images expressing increased sociality towards the end of the camp. The identity

performances that were expressing some form of design student role performance followed a similar trajectory in that in the beginning stages of the project, participants were primarily sharing content that was task orientated. This was illustrated through documentation of assessment-task related activities, such as map-making and ‘exploring’ (Section 5.3). As the camp progressed, the images being shared via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag increasingly shifted to those emphasising the social aspects of the design camp experience, such as producing group work and group achievements, or through participants sharing group selfies.

Consider this conversation with Sarah in response to seeing other participants sharing images of their group work and map-making to Instagram and Twitter via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag:

- Sarah: Yeah, yeah, but I thought it was really cool, the hashtag.
Um, I think, like, me and my whole group as well, we kept scrolling through the hashtag to see what everyone else was doing.
- Researcher: Right.
- Sarah: Um, and, like, sort of, like, you know, um, peeping into other groups. Like how they were doing, especially when [we] were constructing our maps, they were, like, oh, this group’s doing this and this group’s doing that...
And remember we didn’t, like, well, yeah, I think all, like, the four girls in my group, um, we didn’t, um, post any process shots of our map just in case someone stole our idea.
- Researcher: Oh wow!
- Sarah: ‘Yeah. I think, yeah, because I know, like, and if you saw the feed, I don’t think a lot of people showed a lot of the process. Like what they were doing. And then I remember one night I went home and then I checked the... ‘cause I don’t have Twitter, but then...Um, I do check, like, people’s

Twitter feeds and I checked that. I looked up the hashtag on Twitter. So that was really fun as well, just seeing, like, everyone's thoughts and, like... How, yeah, just the group, like, the whole mass of students... Like how they were interpreting and they were experiencing the same experience as I was.

As with any practice, individuals are motivated to take up and contribute to a practice in a way that suits their own purposes and goals. Participation in the Designer Explorer networked public provided these DNEAs an opportunity to craft their identity performances and frame themselves specifically in the role of first year design students. For emerging design students, by nature, sharing their creative work in public can be challenging as the process typically happens in the offline context of the classroom. Therefore, there is a lot at stake for the Designer Explorer participants when they present their design work via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, leaving visible traces for audience members to draw on. The Designer Explorer DNEAs are negotiating the blurring boundaries of the *front* and *back stage*—and they face a challenging decision: how much of their design project work should they share with the Designer Explorer audience members in order to balance feedback without other students appropriating their creative work?

The online context of the networked public provides a new context for these DNEAs to negotiate their context creation practice. When Sarah identifies that she and her fellow group members consciously withheld images that were showing their design process, 'just in case someone stole our idea', Sarah is identifying the blurring boundaries between online and offline contexts and the perceived effect the Designer Explorer networked public may have on her over an extended period. For the Designer Explorer participants, when they are performing the role of first year design student, it is important for them to illustrate their competence in attending to the assessment brief by showing their design project work. However, they concurrently manage their own concerns that arise within the back stage. These concerns are sometimes contradictory to the role performances necessary in the front stage; as a result DNEAs establish ways to mitigate the negotiations between the two stages. In response to

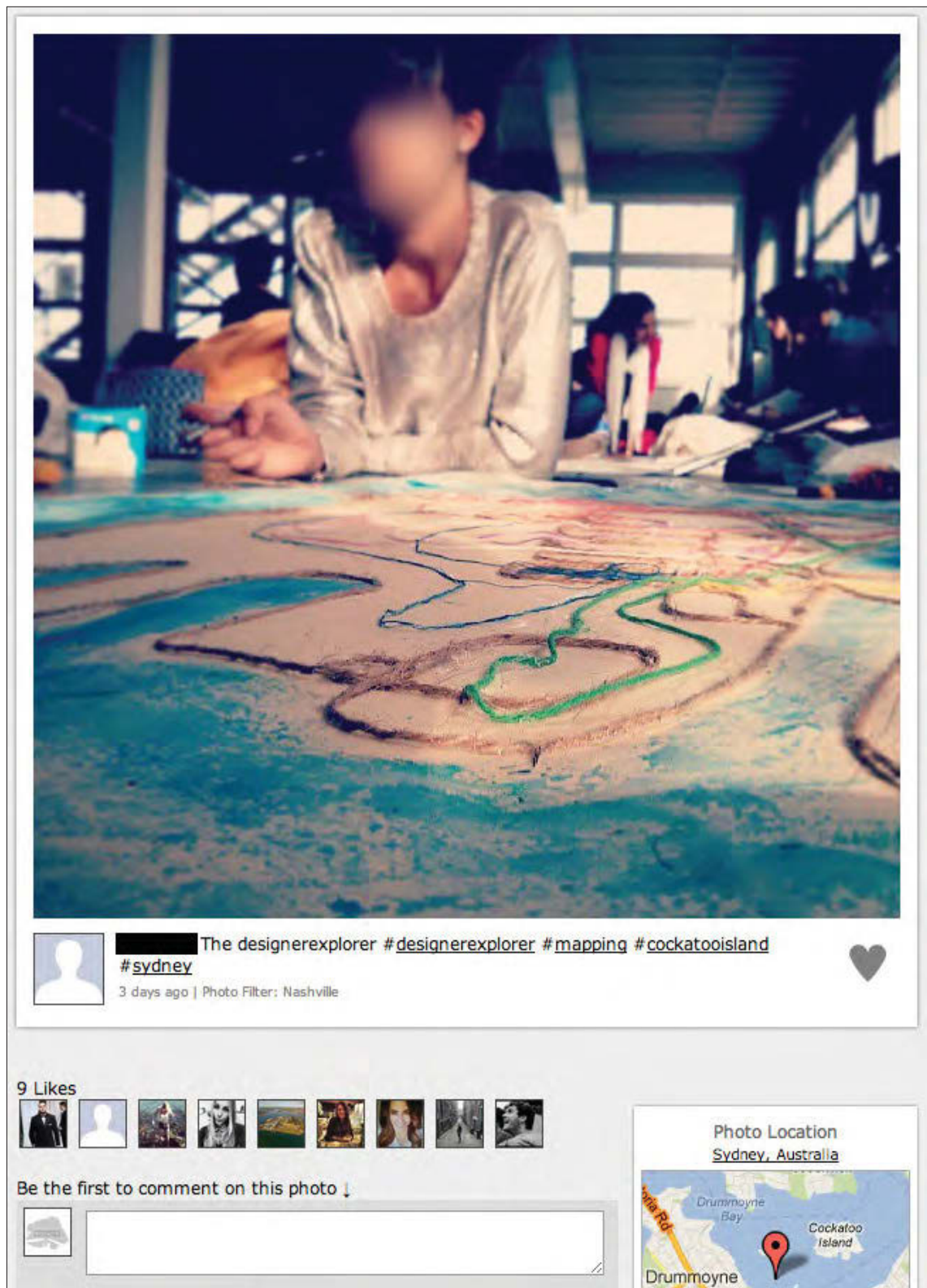


Image 19: 'The designerexplorer #designerexplorer #mapping #cockatooisland #sydney'

the Designer Explorer networked public, Sarah and her group are tailoring their visibility of content to suit their own purposes and goals—that is protecting their integrity as design students and managing the privacy of their creative process.

While Sarah and her group actively withheld content, other Designer Explorer participants attended to their role as design students by drawing on very specific contextual elements from the design camp context to present their identity performances such as making use of the functional aspects of digital social technologies, and Instagram specifically, as material contextual elements, to present aesthetic representations of their design process. This is illustrated in Images 19 and 20 where students share images of work they are producing for their Design Thinking assessment. Rather than simply sharing a picture of the maps they are producing, both Images 19 and 20 illustrate the visual acuties of these participants, the images are thoughtfully composed, cropped and make use of Instagram filters. By pulling together the material elements, the Designer Explorer participants are able to craft their performances to best demonstrate their accrued competences that enable them to best perform as design students.

Roles establish expectations and patterns of behaviour that individuals can use to guide their presentation of self. As discussed previously in Section 6.2, when the Designer Explorer participants share images that share thematic and/or aesthetic qualities, in the context of a networked public they are undertaking a routinised behaviour, which enables the practice to circulate. When Sarah notices that her fellow participants were ‘experiencing the same experience I was’ and other participants are producing highly aestheticised images, this provides evidence that the DNEA context creation practice is circulating through shared understandings about the formation and use of contextual elements within the Designer Explorer networked public. It also establishes what activities of practice and their associated elements best contribute to an accurate and authentic role performance. When the Designer Explorer participants view images shared with the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, they are *decoding* these images (as material elements) and reproducing them within activities of practice as they contribute to the Designer Explorer networked public. In this instance, it is this shared understanding of the significance of sharing particular types of images related to

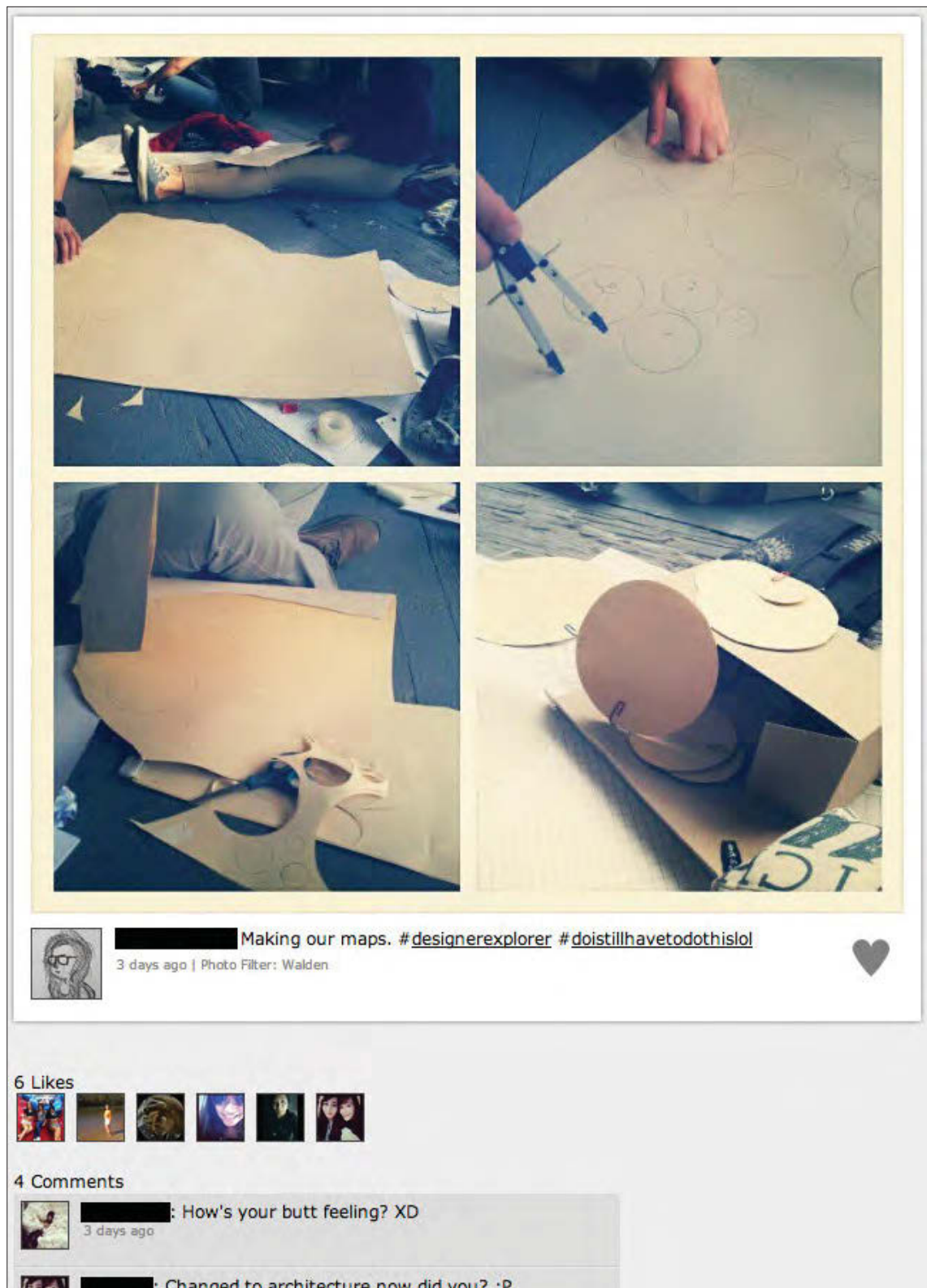


Image 20: 'Making our maps. #designerexplorer #doistillhavetodothislol'

the assessment task and participation in design camp activities that are a meaningful part of the shared experience of the Designer Explorer networked public.

One of the most compelling aspects of the DNEA context creation practice that was revealed through the Instagram data was the variety of ways the Designer Explorer participants illustrated competences of practice in managing the context collapse between their existing audiences and members of the Designer Explorer networked public. Throughout the Designer Explorer project this was achieved through undertaking activities of practice targeted at performing particular roles. As noted previously, the circulation of practice enables individuals to produce knowledge and understandings about what activities and elements best contribute to a specific role.

Consider Image 21 from Designer Explorer participant, Cece. In this image Cece takes up the role of a first year design student by featuring a split-screen image containing a close-up of the Design Thinking assessment brief alongside a selfie within which she has a “sad face” expression. Her caption reads: ‘My sad face since I have to do an assessment for camp *#designerexplorer*’. Cece has also included a comment which includes the hashtags *#sad #assignment #assessment #camp*. Through this Instagram post, Cece is conveying to her imagined audience her context and how she feels about it and is constructing her own reality of the design camp to share with her audiences. She is specifically using material elements available to her from the design camp context to authenticate her role as a design student. As described previously, crafted identity statements are used by DNEAs to control others’ access to their back stage. When they are performing in the front stage, individuals execute decorum as they portray different role performances. Decorum propels individuals to present an idealised self to their audiences, that is, how they want to be perceived by their audiences. Cece is pulling together contextual elements from both her online and offline contexts, that is the assessment brief and her own constructed ‘sad face’ expression in her selfie, using hashtags and the marriage of these two images together using a split screen, to create an explicit crafted identity performance that incorporates contextual elements that when viewed together identify her role as a design student.

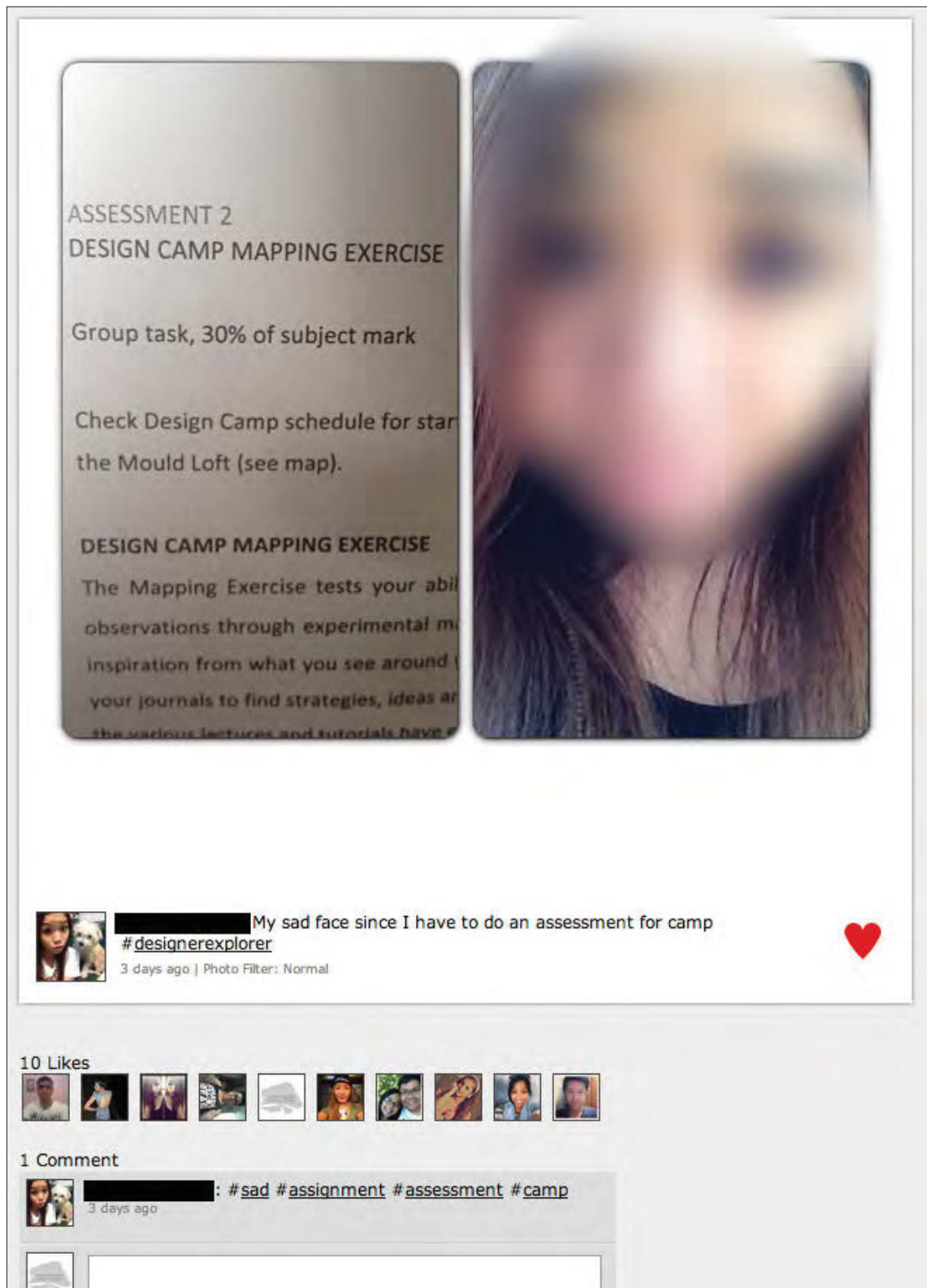


Image 21: 'My sad face since I have to do an assessment for camp #designerexplorer'

There is a second crafted identity statement from Cece in Image 22. In this second image, she has taken a selfie of herself drinking from a paper cup and included the caption: 'It's so cold on the island. :(#designerexplorer #hotchocolate #cold #freezing #cockatooisland'. In this image, Cece is again diligently undertaking a process of impression management in her presentation of self, though this time there is little contextualising information to identify her in her role as a design student, aside from the hashtag and geo-location identifying her as being at Cockatoo Island, which leads to some ambiguity as to who her target imagined audience is. It is possible that Cece is embracing context collapse and envisioning an abstract imagined audience made up of members of both the networked public and her external public. By encompassing many audiences into one and creating content that is specifically targeted to evoke a response from audience members, for example through the use of the ':(sad face emoticon, Cece is displaying her competences of drawing contextual elements together into identity performances to further develop her context for self. It also reveals the complexity of maintaining multiple roles at one time within digitally networked practices.

As noted in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.3, DNEAs are motivated to make displays of their *personhood* that illustrate their individual distinctness, their *autonomy* and the *continuity* of their identity and will take up a variety to roles in order to achieve this. Throughout the Designer Explorer project participants were not only conducting identity performances presenting their role as competent design students, they were also presenting a variety of performances featuring crafted identity statements that were engendered towards their emerging adulthood generally. Overall it revealed the negotiation that these emerging adults are undertaking as they transition between their roles as adolescents, first year design students and independent adults.

One of the most revealing moments throughout the Designer Explorer project was when participants undertook identity performances that revealed the complex interplay between the front and back stage and the ways in which the Designer Explorer participants worked collectively to develop activities that negotiated this interplay between the two. The functions of digital social technologies allow DNEAs to control aspects of their public and private spheres, meaning that they can manipulate the boundaries between front and back stage by

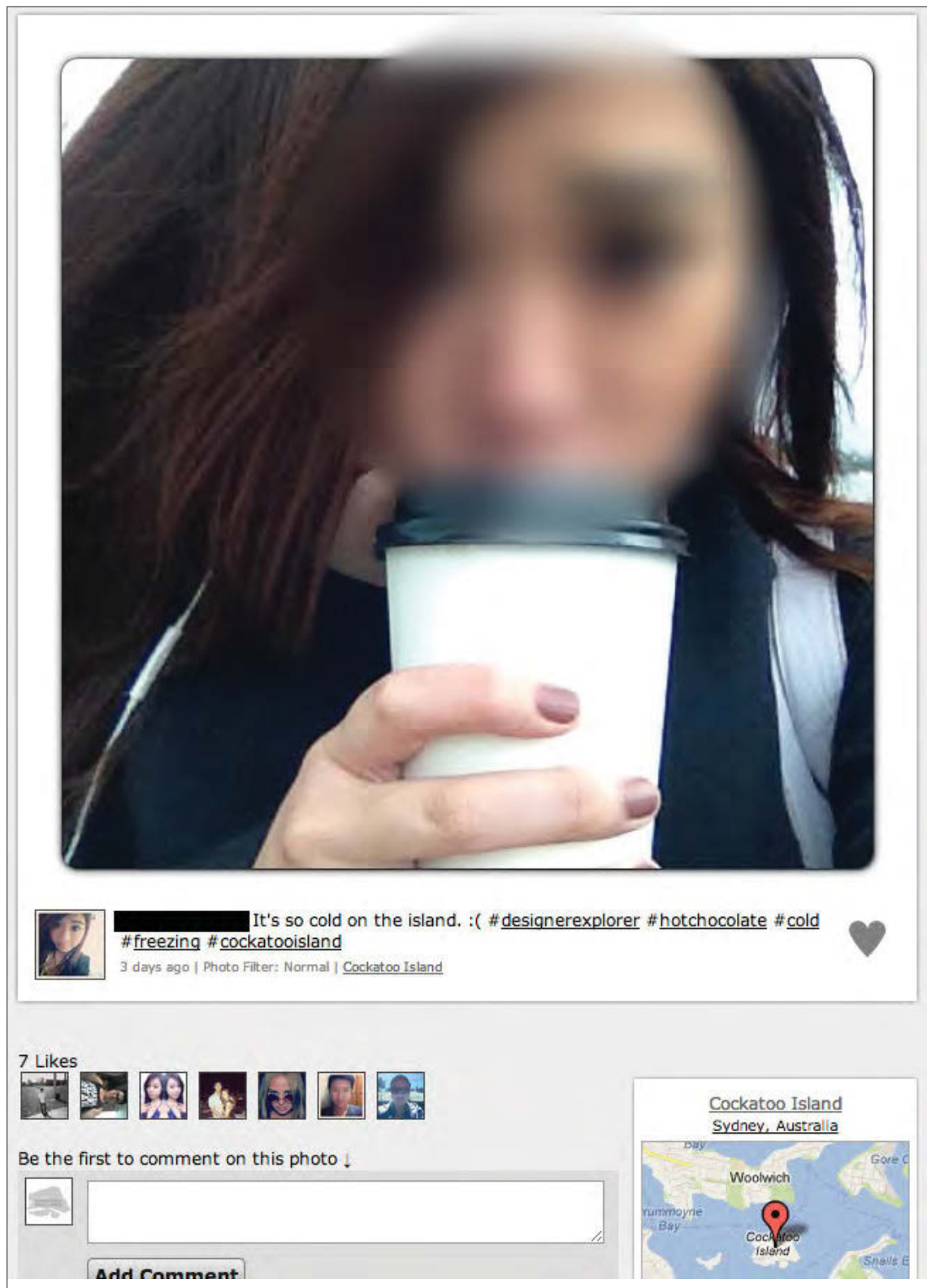


Image 22: 'It's so cold on the island. :(#designerexplorer #hotchocolate #cold #freezing #cockatooisland'

making them as separated or merged as needed. In order to both maintain their developing autonomy as emerging adults, while also displaying continuity in their identity, the Designer Explorer participants incorporated elements from their private sphere targeted at producing convincing performances across their various roles. One participant, Dan, shared several posts to Instagram throughout the Designer Explorer project that illustrated a range of identity performances negotiating his roles as a design student, adolescent and autonomous emerging adult.

The first example of this can be seen in Image 23, where Dan shares a screen-captured image of a text message between his father and himself. While it is difficult to discern the precise motivation behind sharing the screen-captured conversation with the wider Designer Explorer networked public, there are several interesting aspects to be gleaned from this Instagram post. Dan is explicitly locating himself within his role as someone's child, and the practices that are associated with that relationship, such as communicating with his father. Simultaneously, Dan is using this activity as an element in performing to his peers, identifiable through the performance being affirmed in a comment from a friend seen below Dan's post: '@[redacted name]: Cute x's Dan'.

A subsequent post from Dan illustrates an explicit engagement with his role as a design student in Image 24, while still maintaining his autonomy through employing elements of practice that make his performance unique to him with his use of additional hashtags in caption: *#imsogladmygroupwasnttheonlyonetohangourwork*, *#soorig*, he is also demonstrating his participation in offline activities specific to the design camp context. These identity performances from Dan serve multiple purposes. They enable Dan to maintain his inclusion in the Designer Explorer networked public, while concurrently undertaking identity performance activities that enable him to negotiate his context for self as an autonomous emerging adult.

The first year design camp at Cockatoo Island provides a unique circumstance in which DNEAs can undertake experimental identity performances. There were several instances seen throughout the data where participants pushed the established boundaries of the themes in the

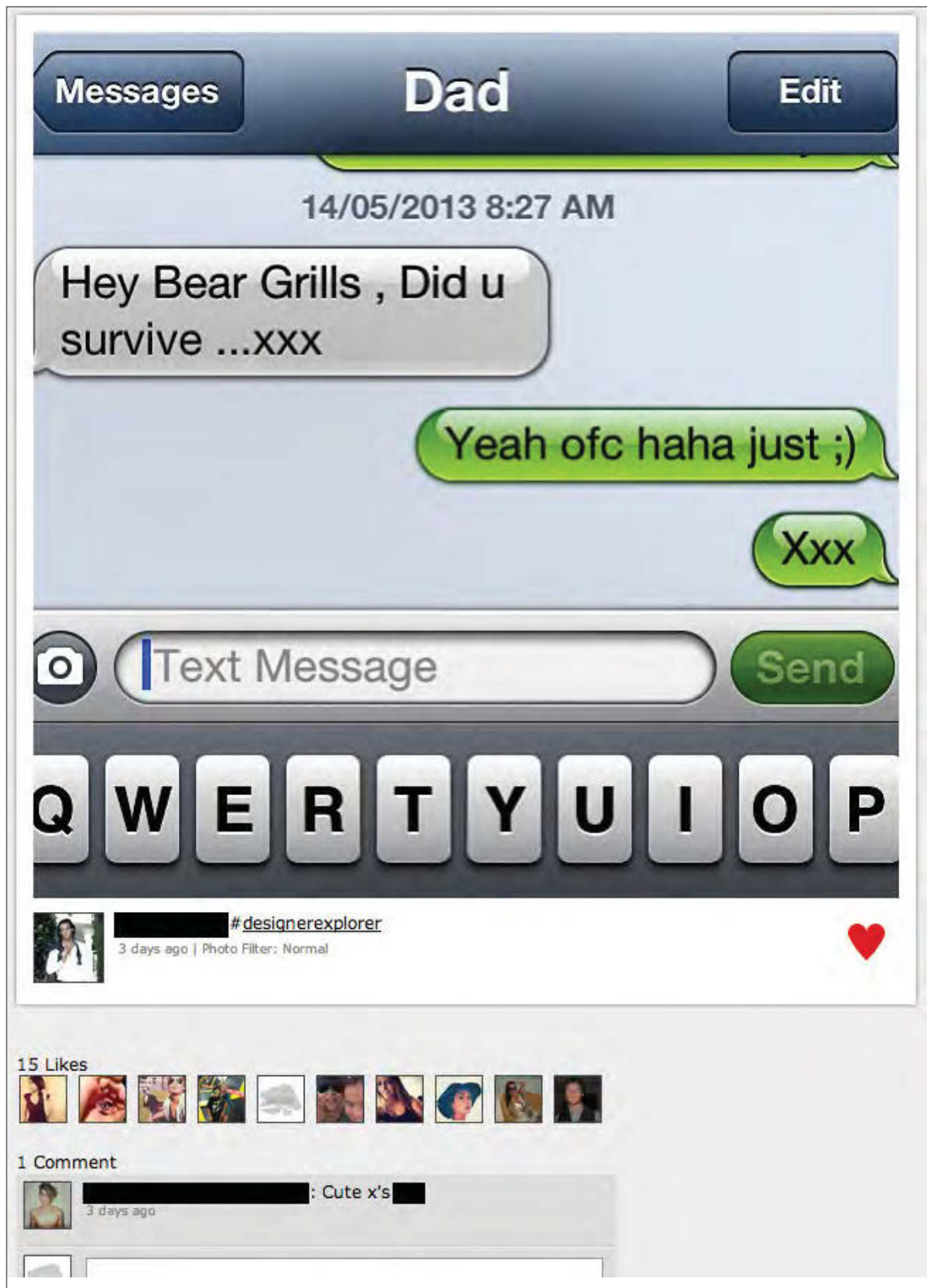


Image 23: '#designerexplorer'

content being produced collectively within the Designer Explorer networked public, intended to experiment with their own contexts for self through activities that were more explicitly engaged with their role as autonomous emerging adults and exert their agency in the design camp context. During the camp many of the Designer Explorer participants participated in contextually-specific social activities and, as such, chose to share images of their social doings at Cockatoo Island via the *#designerexplorer* hashtag. This activity became particularly evident in the Instagram content that was shared at the end of day one and day two of the design camp, after the formal design camp tasks had been finished for the day. Once the Designer Explorer participants separated from UTS staff for the night, the *#designerexplorer* hashtag content stream experienced another thematic shift in the type of content it was populated with. Many of these images featured the participants undertaking various nocturnal party antics, many of which contained one particularly distinct material element—the animal-themed ‘onesie’ costume, as demonstrated in Image 25 from Dan.

During the evenings at the design camp, a large proportion of the Designer Explorer participants chose to wear these costumes. As seen in the earlier visual data interpretation (see Section 5.6), onesies were featured in many of the social images being shared and became a significant feature of the images being shared to the *#designerexplorer* stream overnight. While it is not clear from the data whether this was a coordinated action that was instigated prior to the camp, or something that emerged as a result of the social connections being established throughout the design camp, it is clear that the costumes were a key part of the Designer Explorer experience and were being used to reinforce the social context. As discussed previously in Section 6.2, contextual elements that are drawn into contextual ecologies, taken from the locational, material, situational and social contexts that DNEAs are part of, as with Cece’s use of contextually-specific material elements to effectively convey her role as a design student, and concurrently evoke responses from her audiences, the use of the onesies costume became inculcated into the contextual ecology of the Designer Explorer networked public. Subsequently, identity performances by participants that featured onesies were a contribution to the contextually-specific narratives that belonged to both the design camp experience and the Designer Explorer networked public.

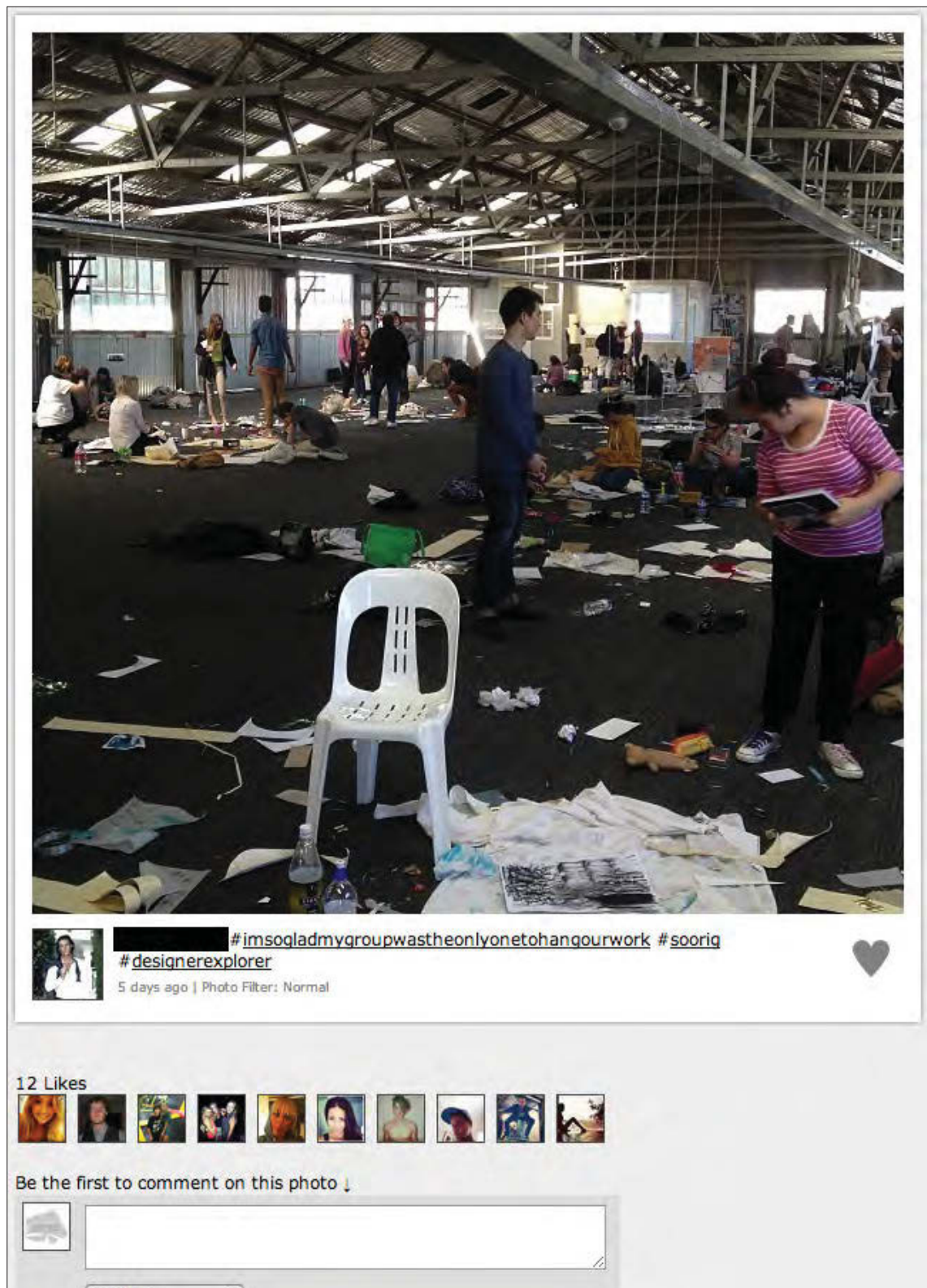


Image 24: '#imsogladmygroupwastheonlyonetohangourwork #soorig #designerexplorer'

DNEAs devise the characteristics of their roles through a negotiation of how they imagine themselves to be given a particular situation and pulling prompts from role models. In the case of the Designer Explorer participants, prompts are taken from their fellow cohort of DNEA practitioners, made accessible through access to the Designer Explorer networked public. For the Designer Explorer DNEAs, wearing onesies opened up opportunities for further identity exploration for each individual and concurrently worked to create a sense of belonging among the group. As described previously, within the Designer Explorer context, DNEAs are developing their practical knowledge through tacit and explicit acts of knowledge transfer between each other and a process of embodied situated learning about their practice. For DNEAs, a social reward like a sense of belonging develops when the shared experience is reinforced among their cohort of fellow practitioners. This is seen in the way the Designer Explorer participants share group photos of their achievements at the design camp (as illustrated in Image 12 and Image 14) and the way they collectively produce a unique narrative of the Designer Explorer experience through Instagram. The validation and acknowledgement that comes from feedback from their fellow practitioners bolster the context creation practice of individual Designer Explorer participants. This leads to the final activity of practice identified throughout the Designer Explorer data: Activity Four: Circulating Feedback, as described below.

6.4.4 Activity Four: Circulating Feedback

The final activity of practice that is discussed is the circulation of feedback between members of the Designer Explorer networked public. The feedback that individuals receive from their audiences plays a crucial role in their formation and reformation of their contexts for self. The flows of communication that are characteristic of networked publics facilitate the interchange of feedback between individuals and their audiences. As described in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, these flows mean that an individual's context for self is bound in a reciprocal relationship with the contextual elements that are part of a networked public. Consequently, for the Designer Explorer participants, as they performed to their audiences throughout the project, they were subject to feedback about these



Image 25: 'Them beasts! #designerexplorer #beastiality #deerintheheadlights @[redacted]'

performances, not only from their existing audiences, but also from other members of the Designer Explorer networked public.

Examining the ways that feedback circulated within the Designer Explorer project is a significant part of this research because it directly evidences the ways in which the DNEA context creation practice travels within the space of a networked public. This section considers two aspects: firstly, the collective of Designer Explorer participants as co-constructors of a practice in the design camp context; and secondly, the implication of this for individual practitioners. This research proposes that DNEAs have specific competences and understandings about how to effectively use the functional aspects of digital social technologies in order to best suit their own purposes and goals.

Throughout the project, the Designer Explorer DNEAs embraced the functions—as material elements of practice—of digital social technologies in ways that provoked *persistence*, *visibility*, *spreadability* and *searchability* of their identity performances (boyd, 2014, p. 11). The results were several performances that engendered the production of feedback from their fellow cohort of Designer Explorer participants. The data collected throughout the project showed that there were several visible instances of the circulation of feedback during the Designer Explorer project. This included activities of practice, such as giving and receiving ‘likes’ and comments on Instagram posts, as well as through global evidence like the thematic cohesion that was established throughout the three days of the project. Significantly, the post-camp interviews also provided insight into the subjective experiences of individuals who participated in the project.

As described in Chapter Two: Digital Social Technologies, and illustrated in Figure 4.1, contextual elements come together as contextual ecologies that sit within networked publics. The act of ‘liking’ or commenting on a post, or reproducing aesthetically similar content, demonstrates the use of the material and other contextual elements of practice. When an individual uses these elements in an activity of practice, they are contributing to the contextual ecology of the Designer Explorer networked public. Because the Designer Explorer networked public is newly constructed and constituted by a diverse cohort of members, the

initial contextual ecology situated within the Designer Explorer networked public contains varied, and potentially disparate, contextual elements. As the camp progressed, however, and participants became further inculcated together socially, social contextual elements within the contextual ecology became increasingly valuable within the Designer Explorer networked public. As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, material elements of practice such as onesies and additional hashtags, alongside dedicated role performances, became significant within the networked public because they could be used as resources by other members of the networked public within their own activities of practice.

The Designer Explorer DNEAs produce meaningful configurations of elements and activities of practice as they re-form their contexts for self within the Designer Explorer networked public. These configurations are driven by an individual's own perceptions and processes of decoding. In order for contextual elements to be recontextualised or reconfigured into further activities of practice, individuals rely on feedback from their audiences. The Designer Explorer networked public is able to persist as participants adjust the contextual elements they are drawing on for their activities of practice.

The configuration of elements works at multiple levels. Individuals are able to experiment with their emerging adult identity and, concurrently, these identity experiments contribute to the contextual ecology that other networked public members are drawing on. As discussed in Section 4.4.2, practices become routinised between cohorts of practitioners through the reproduction and blocks of shared knowledge about how elements of a practice should be conjoined within a practice.

Within digitally networked practices, the images shared to Instagram act as resources, or contextual elements, that guide other Designer Explorer participants as to the types of images that should be reproduced. The Designer Explorer participants collectively produced unified representations of the themes most important to the newly formed Designer Explorer networked public. Over the three days of the project, there was a visible shift in thematic content being produced, reflective of the production of new contextual elements being introduced into the contextual ecology in response to the ongoing feedback that was circulating. The contextual

ecology grew as participants within the networked public produced more resources to draw from in their activities of practice.

The circulation of feedback also directly contributes to the development of a shared sense of belonging within a networked public. Significantly, given the context of the Designer Explorer networked public at the UTS first year design camp, this sense of belonging was fostered through activities of practice that explicitly crossed online and offline contexts. There were several instances seen throughout the data, in which participants used Instagram to communicate with their group members, or other wider networked public audience members, calling on them to participate in offline activities. As can be seen in Image 26, participants made use of the functional aspects of Instagram to recruit other Designer Explorer participants to participate in contextually-specific sociality. This participant who shared the Instagram image is relying on the functional aspects of the networked public to provide *visibility*, *spreadability* and *searchability* to their post that extends the activity across online and offline contexts. The comment ‘To the fuckin’ crane’ references a specific location on Cockatoo Island. Members of the Designer Explorer networked public would know what this meant, but it would have been ambiguous to any external audiences who had no prior knowledge of the locational context of Cockatoo Island.

Within digitally networked practices, the shared sense of social belonging directly stems from the circulation of feedback across online and offline contexts. The social belonging is reinforced as more participants are inculcated into these social activities—as seen in the continued reproduction of similar activities as the camp continued. As described previously, DNEAs devise the characteristics of their roles through a negotiation of how they imagine themselves to be given a particular situation, pulling prompts from role models. The Designer Explorer participants take prompts from their fellow cohort of DNEA practitioners, who act as role models for the normative behaviours of the Designer Explorer networked public. Within the Designer Explorer networked public, the participants cannot rely on receiving face-to-face feedback from other participants, so they must look to the *#designerexplorer* stream to garner feedback about their performances, which may come in the form of ‘likes’, comments or, crucially, seeing content that is similar to their own.



Image 26: 'Be there #cranepartygalore #designerexplorer #df'

As DNEAs develop their practical knowledge through tacit and explicit acts of knowledge transfer between each other and embodied situated learning, part of this knowledge transfer includes feedback from other participants who replicate others' interactions. Through mimicry of others' behaviours, the DNEA participants are undertaking a dynamic process of affirmation of others' activities of practice. Within the space of the Designer Explorer networked public, this works to establish a sense of social belonging among the cohort of participants. Because these activities of practice are reinforced through processes of recontextualisation and reproduction, particular activities of practice become resources within the networked public. The Designer Explorer data can also be examined to look for insights at an individual level. Feedback is procedural and constituted by the relations within a networked public. The ways in which an individual reacts to an identity performance is constituted by the subjective contextual elements individuals draw in from their own locational, material, situational and social elements, which in turn directs the type of feedback they might give. Feedback can be understood in two ways: as reactionary or strategic. The feedback an individual provides for others' identity performances are directed by their own subjective values, goals and motivations—or, contexts for self. Some feedback may be a genuine and instinctive emotion-based response to the content, or, some feedback conveyed strategically in order to produce more desirable outcomes for themselves.

The participants were not acting homogenously within the networked public because each participant was engaging with the project in a way that suited their own purposes and goals. The accepted modes of interaction and engagement within the networked public were not always shared across the collective of participants, as demonstrated in Graph 2 which illustrates the total number of posts shared to Instagram using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, measured against the accumulated 'likes' per 'number of posts shared'. At one end of the spectrum there is an accumulation of 552 'likes' to 36 participants who each shared one post to Instagram, while at the other end, 31 posts are shared across the three days of the Designer Explorer project by a single participant, which accumulated a total of 501 likes, illustrating that the sharing behaviours of participants varied greatly across the three days of the project.

In recounting their experiences and talking about their use of digital social technologies more generally during the interviews, the DNEA participants talked about their own approaches to using social network platforms. What became evident throughout these conversations is that each individual has their own motivations behind their activities, which manifest in differing ways through the content they share to Instagram. Often these motivations were reflexively established based on their contexts for self, values and expectations for appropriate behaviour in particular contexts. Consider this conversation with Designer Explorer participant Emma:

- Researcher: And do you try and mix up the kind of content that you share or, do you mostly post videos or photos from Instagram?
- Emma: Um, I do try and mix it up. I don't... see, a few of those posts as well were ones I was tagged in from other people. So, I have this, I don't know whether it's just me, but I don't like posting too much. Because I know when I get too much from other people on my timeline it just, I mean, newsfeed, it just gets annoying. And so I don't want to portray myself as that annoying person...

Here Emma is demonstrating her own negotiation of her context for self within networked publics, and her subsequent impression management techniques. Each individual user has their own perception and motivation for engagement, which affects the identity performances they undertake within a networked public. The roles that individuals take up within their identity performances are informed by expectations of others, but as Walker (2000) notes, there is a reflexive element in which 'an actor uses his or her imagined performance of a role as a basis for constructing identity' (p. 102), in that an individual projects future performances based on previous performances and the feedback they received.

Some interviews with the Designer Explorer participants also offered further insight, retrospectively, into interpretations of the identity performances of other members of the

Designer Explorer networked public. As noted in Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self, Section 3.1, a DNEA's context for self acts as a site of perception through which to view and act in the world. Networked publics provide a lens through which individuals interpret the performances of others and inform their own contexts for self, which extends to incorporate the values and expectations they set for the performances from other members. DNEAs want to make visible their proficiencies of use, both in terms of their technical abilities and their demonstration of the knowledge competences they have in a wider socio-cultural sense.

- Sarah: I think the objective is to make it look nice and to get as many likes, rather than this is what I want to share. Which is my objective as well, that's why I do filters and I crop things, I don't just post.
- Researcher: So you want to get likes, is that the motivating factor?
- Sarah: Uh, yeah, yeah, I think so, but I think ending up with a beautiful picture, I think that's, everyone sort [of] has that motivation, but with people who are extremely like that who, like, you know...move things around, and make people pose...I think that's just gone too far. It just takes away the casualness of Instagram I think.
- Researcher: Of the instant element, maybe?
- Sarah: Yeah, or even the intimacy, because it's staged.

While Sarah's opinion is generalised to a wider perspective about the use of Instagram, it does highlight the ways in which, within networked publics, participation will vary, and crucially, also the perceived legitimacy of the performance. For Sarah, in her own use of Instagram, she is motivated to post images that 'look nice' to gain as many likes as she can. However, she ascribes her own values to this process because she feels there is a loss of intimacy if the content of a post has been staged. Sarah's knowledge of the skills and competences required to use Instagram enable her understandings about the performances of others. The circulation between identity performances and an individual's context for self means that Sarah spends time justifying the purpose of content she is sharing to her audiences and highlighting the

impression management processes she is undertaking in order to manage how audiences perceive her. However, she has very little control over others' perception of her activities.

As individuals negotiate their notion of self against the context in which they are situated, other audience members may perceive these performances in unintended ways, as highlighted in this conversation with Sarah:

- Sarah: Yeah. I think people didn't really post about themselves, apart from one user, I forget his name, he posted heaps... And, like, I remember looking on the Twitter feed, like another, another guy was annoyed at him.
- Researcher: Oh really?
- Sarah: Cause he posted his... Yeah, but he posted a lot, yeah.
- Researcher: Yeah. And why did that bother you? Or did it... it bothered you, right, that he was posting so much or...?
- Sarah: Uh, no, sort of just an annoyance. Like, I think if you post a lot it stops being, becoming about sharing, but more about spamming, yeah. It's not like, it's not interesting, like little titbits of people's lives...
- Researcher: Yeah.
- Sarah: But it's more spam, like, yeah.
- Researcher: Okay. Okay, that's interesting. Um, okay, so...
- Sarah: Yeah, and also the pictures weren't that very good, so that's...
- Researcher: [laughs]
- Sarah: That, I think that added into it. If they were really nicely shot pictures I wouldn't have minded, but, um, I think because they were, like, pretty average, I was like, yeah...

By Sarah's interpretation, there is an expectation of particular competences and knowledge of how the Designer Explorer participants should be operating within the networked public. In maintaining a value system for visual aesthetics, anything that counters this becomes less valuable, and disruptive to an individual's own perception of coherency, or as Sarah states—

spam. All practitioners, as ‘carriers of practice’, engage in an active and intentional process in which they combine elements into activities that suit their own purposes. Across a spectrum of digitally networked practices, while values may be shared within a networked public, the formation of particular activities of practice may compete with other participants’ practice.

6.5 Conclusion

As Goffman (1959) noted, ‘the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances’ (p. 249), thereby bringing into focus the complexity of and legitimising each individual’s approach to their negotiation of these context for self, particularly among networked publics such as the Designer Explorer public. The particular reflexive processes an individual undertakes within their identity performances can be hard to discern. In this sense, rather than establishing a prescription of what constitutes a DNEA’s context creation practice, by treating contexts for self as malleable contexts that are positioned within circulating flows of action, the emphasis lies not on each individual’s context for self, but rather, it can identify the elements and activities that DNEAs undertake in their context creation practice.

This chapter has analysed four core activities of practice seen through the Designer Explorer project: *coping with context collapse*, *negotiating the network*, *performing roles* and *circulating feedback*. The four activities illustrate the ways in which the DNEA context creation practice circulated within the Designer Explorer networked public. This chapter identified the three core aspects that play a fundamental part in how an individual DNEA engages with context creation practice. As identified in Figure 6.1, within a networked public contextual ecologies are created as members draw in contextual elements from the locational, material, situational and social contexts that individual DNEAs are part of. The DNEA context creation practice circulates as members of networked publics draw upon the contextual ecology of a networked public to produce and reproduce activities of practice. These three aspects interrelate with each other and are bound together through an individual’s context for self, made visible through identity performances and shaped by the feedback provided by their audience members.

When Designer Explorer DNEAs came together within the shared social space of the networked public, they used the resources available to them within the design camp context to undertake a sophisticated array of identity performances. Over the three days of the project, the collective of participants undertook performances that were engendered towards producing a unified thematic representation of the newly formed Designer Explorer networked public. As each Designer Explorer DNEA shared diverse content using the *#designerexplorer* hashtag, they contributed to the production of the social norm for the Designer Explorer environment by leaving material evidence and visible traces for other participants to decode and recontextualise as contextual elements in their own context creation practice. The Designer Explorer networked public not only persisted through the production of shared resources, but it was also bolstered through the inculcation of further members and the ongoing reproduction of activities of practice.

The Designer Explorer networked public provided DNEA participants a platform on which they could undertake identity performances intended to reconfigure their own contexts for self as they negotiated the varying roles of emerging adulthood as they worked towards their own autonomy. DNEA selfhood is largely relational and in flux as the locational, material, situational and social contexts of individuals shift and change. As Harré (1998) notes, 'one's attitudes, for example, are rarely a stable configuration of dispositions, but appear now in one form and now another' (p. 7). Because the Designer Explorer participants were performing to the same, relatively stable, audience across the three days of the design camp, they were bound to the dynamics of the social relationships that resulted from this context, and adjusted their performances accordingly.

This chapter has identified a framework which illustrates the circulation of practice within a networked public. The following chapters discuss the significance of DNEA context creation practice generally. The following chapter emphasises the interrelation between the four core activities as subscribing to this framework. For the Designer Explorer participants this is not the only networked public they will belong to throughout their emerging adulthood, therefore their context creation practice must be able to travel into new contexts.

Chapter Seven

Designer Explorer: Contexts for Self

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six identified three core aspects of DNEA context creation practice that are fundamental to how individual DNEAs engage within a networked public as they negotiate their context for self: the contextual elements that are drawn in *contextual ecologies*, taken from the locational, material, situational and social contexts that DNEAs are part of; the *diverse audiences* that make up networked publics; and the combination of contextual ecologies and diverse audiences into *activities of practice*. As these three aspects interrelate with each other, they are bound by an individual's context for self and made visible through identity performances situated within networked publics, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

The identification of these three aspects leads this research to consider what is meaningful about DNEA context creation practice overall. As discussed in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, Section 4.4.3, DNEA context creation practice is significant because it enables individuals to formulate their emerging adult identities situated within social contexts. The ability to undertake activities of practice as they negotiate their mutable identities provides individuals with a sense of stability. Individuals sit at the centre of whatever networked public they happen to be engaging with at a particular point in time, and actively orientate their context for self in relation to that position. An individual's context for self creates a lens, or 'site of perception' (Harré, 1998, p. 8), through which they can view the world and the actions of others within it. As DNEAs perceive the world, they view the activities and actions taking place within a networked public and, driven by their subjective understandings, purposes, goals and aspirations, respond with their own identity performances.

The identity performances that take place within a networked public are visible manifestations of an individual's context for self, representative of their reality and understanding of the world

they occupy at any given moment in time. This reality is formed by the contextual elements that come together into the contextual ecology that exists within a particular networked public. These contextual ecologies are made up of contextual elements drawn from the locational, material, situational and social contexts that members of the networked publics are engaged in. Because contextual ecologies are fundamentally mutable and malleable, as contextual elements move, develop, shift, get replaced, adapt and change within networked publics, so do DNEAs' context for self change because they are subject to the same forces on the identity performances they undertake.

The fundamental outcome of the Designer Explorer project was the creation of the Designer Explorer networked public. The ease with which participants of the project came together to produce it highlights the impact that the changing typologies of digital social technologies and digitally networked structures have on the social lives of DNEAs collectively. Furthermore, it emphasises the significance of these emergent contexts in providing DNEAs with new frames to produce identity performances as they negotiate their contexts for self. It is evident that contexts for self are able to flourish within networked publics. The rush of contextual elements instigated by the microcosm of the Designer Explorer networked public and the adeptness of DNEA participants at configuring them together in meaningful ways through digitally networked practices suggest that context creation practice is a vital part of the way DNEAs operate in normative daily settings.

As the data presented in Chapter Six shows, throughout the Designer Explorer project, the DNEA participants displayed specific proficiencies for bundling together contextual elements from their own locational, material, situational and social contexts into new assemblages as they produced activities of practice in direct response to the Designer Explorer context. Four of these activities were identified in the analysis of the data: *coping with context collapse*, *negotiating the network*, *performing roles* and *circulating feedback*. These activities of practice produced evidence that the configuration of elements directly contributed to the knowledge and understandings shared between the collective of Designer Explorer participants throughout the three days of the project.

The dialogues that occur between individuals and their contexts are considered in two ways in this chapter. The first is the context creation practice negotiated by individuals as they form and re-form their context for self in relation to their in-the-moment positioning. The second is the significance of the context creation practice as it circulates among the cohort of Designer Explorer participants and the significance of this to DNEA context creation practice generally.

Interpretation of the Instagram data from the Designer Explorer project identified two overarching themes that emerged over the three days of the project: representations of the locational contexts, and the social contexts of the Designer Explorer project. This chapter aggregates insights from these two perspectives into a discussion about the broader significance of digitally networked practices that can be gleaned from the Designer Explorer project. Evidence of social co-construction of practice established by the cohort of DNEA practitioners and four of the core activities of DNEA context creation practice identified throughout the Designer Explorer project help examine what the project reveals about the context creation practice of DNEAs, and why spaces like the Designer Explorer networked public are significant for individuals as they negotiate their contexts for self through the mutable and malleable conditions of digital social technologies.

7.2 Context Creation and Meaningful Activities

This section discusses the context creation practice evident throughout the Designer Explorer project. Participants presented numerous identity performances situated within and sometimes across the four core activities of practice that were visible during the project. To position these activities as significant beyond the Designer Explorer networked public and establish them as meaningful within the wider scope of emerging adulthood, two key ideas have been distilled from the data: *collapsed contexts* and *circulating contexts*. These are directly facilitated through networked publics and are essential to DNEA context creation practice.

The Designer Explorer project gave DNEAs opportunities to undertake identity experimentation, demonstrating varied and sophisticated activities that illustrated their management of the collapsed contexts instigated by the Designer Explorer networked public. This was seen through individuals negotiating multiple networks concurrently through

layered, targeted identity performances and the revelation that DNEAs integrate contextual elements from sometimes conflicting contexts as a way of mediating their front and back regions throughout their digitally networked practices. Simultaneously, collapsed contexts are supported through the *circulating contexts* that existed in the Designer Explorer networked public.

Circulating contexts are bolstered by the flows of network publics and facilitate the interchange of feedback between individuals and their audiences which is fundamental to the development of an individual's context for self. The circulation of context was made most evident within the Designer Explorer networked public as participants produced identity performances that contributed to the co-constructing of unified content themes across the three days of the project.

The Designer Explorer participants negotiated a variety of *role performances* in order to mediate their own shifting context for self as they concurrently negotiated diverse audiences throughout the project, compounded by the context collapse created by the particular audience characteristics of the Designer Explorer networked public. As such, participants demonstrated their ability to *perform multiple roles* concurrently. In the context of the Designer Explorer project, these role performances were motivated by a desire for emerging adult autonomy. The DNEA participants used the platform provided by the networked public to undertake *experimental identity performances* in which they tested out idealised or desired identities for themselves. Furthermore, these experimental performances were supported by the ongoing feedback provided by other members of the networked public, allowing individuals to make nuanced adjustments to their performances as they decoded and recontextualised others' activities of practice into their own, subsequently contributing to the reproduction of practice.

As established throughout this thesis, the context creation practice that DNEAs undertake is relational and socially bound. The social structures encouraged by networked publics play a fundamental role in the ways in which activities of practice are produced within networked publics. A core driver of context creation activities within the Designer Explorer networked public was the collapse of context and the increasing interweaving of the front stage and back stage regions that occurs within networked publics. The merging of diverse audiences

within networked publics provides DNEAs with the motivation to develop activities that are engineered towards embracing these situations rather than avoiding them. However, as evidenced through the actions seen within the Designer Explorer networked public, DNEAs are proficient at producing actions that circumvent context collapse, rather than oppose it.

7.2.1 Collapsed Contexts

For DNEAs a core part of their management of context collapse in networked publics is developing a practice that allows them to create distinct identity performances that can be conveyed to multiple audiences at one time. It is necessary for DNEAs to cater to their diverse audiences without having to sacrifice coherency in their own sense of self. Because of this, DNEAs embrace the blurring boundaries between their diverse audiences, enabling them to target their identity performances more constructively. This can be seen in the ways they actively engage multiple targeted and imagined audiences concurrently within single activities of practice by incorporating contextual elements targeted at multiple audiences within a single identity performance.

As described in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public, the Designer Explorer participants created layered performances by establishing sub-networks within a networked public by using additional hashtags or by creating their own contextually-specific hashtags. This activity increases the visibility, searchability and potential spreadability of the content the hashtag is attached to. For DNEAs, this is significant because it allows them to access multiple audiences concurrently and produce social rewards for themselves, subsequently leading to ongoing identity performances. DNEAs actively seek affirmation of their identities by widening the scope of their audiences; this increased visibility opens up the potential to receive feedback from their audiences.

An imagined audience enables DNEAs to target their performances and select the most appropriate contextual elements to achieve their goals. Through an intentional configuration of contextual elements, DNEAs can accommodate multiple audiences with one, synchronous, performance. The Designer Explorer networked public was unique in its audience make-up because the members of the networked public knew they were performing to audiences made

up of diverse known and unknown members. Without knowing who their specific audiences were, the Designer Explorer participants were compelled to conjure an imagined audience to perform to within the Designer Explorer networked public.

Within a practice, it is up to practitioners to decode and recontextualise their activities of practice to suit whatever context they happen to be engaged within, and to accommodate their known and unknown imagined audiences. Within the Designer Explorer networked public, participants produced layered and experimental identity performances that could be interpreted by multiple audience members. The stream of content produced within the Designer Explorer networked public drove the spread and consumption of particular themes of content among the members of the networked public. The unmediated social structures of networked publics encourage experimental identity performances that enable DNEAs to make themselves distinct from others. As seen in Section 6.4.3, some groups of Designer Explorer participants used the networked public to undertake experimental identity performances, making these extroverted behaviours visible to a much wider audience through the Designer Explorer networked public.

7.2.2 Circulating Contexts

Because DNEA identity performances are driven by their own perceptions of what an audience wants to see, individuals actively construct their performances around their imagined audiences. This is significant because some audience members may interpret identity performances by decoding an identity performance one way, while other audiences may group other contextual elements from the same performance to decode it in another way, and some audiences may not be able to decode some contextual elements at all. This may result in both positive and negative effects for individuals depending on their receiving audience.

As discussed in Section 6.4.4, not all identity performances will be effective or understood by every member of a networked public, and therefore may not produce the desired response a performer expects. Because DNEAs are proficient in their context creation practice through their particular understandings and knowledge about the rules of practice, any actions that do not subscribe to the rules of practice are exposed as inauthentic and audience members

respond accordingly. DNEAs reflexively engage with their identity performances by making nuanced adjustments to their contexts for self, based on the ongoing stream of feedback provided by the flows of the Designer Explorer networked public. When audience members engage with an individual's identity performances, they may provide feedback on these identity performances in the form of 'likes' and comments, which act as an affirmation of the identity performance. Conversely, audience members may not provide feedback and not respond at all, consequently leaving it up to the individual's own perceptions. As such, DNEAs may continue to perform their contexts for self in the same way, or not at all.

When DNEAs are linked together through networked publics, it encourages continuous networked sociality for those who are engaging at any given moment. As imagined audiences shift, so do the performance tactics that DNEAs employ, and in some cases performances are highly targeted to specific audiences. As established in Chapter Six: Designer Explorer: A Networked Public, Section 6.4, it is the expectations an individual has of who their audience is that drives their performances. While layered identity performances are sophisticated in their ability to address multiple audiences at one time as they cope with context collapse, targeted identity performances are meaningful because they enable DNEAs to control what their audiences see, without having to necessarily end their participation in a networked public or restricting the visibility of their content by changing their privacy settings. As discussed in Section 6.4.1, the Designer Explorer participants configured contextual elements to purposefully withhold information, or exclude some audiences.

Because DNEAs have a range of goals, motivations, aspirations and roles they perform, they imagine targeted audiences for the identity performances they undertake to suit their particular needs and goals for their emerging adulthood. Enduring social group membership and positive feedback from their peers work towards affirming their emerging adult identity and so the activities of practice that DNEAs create are motivated by the potential social rewards they can gain. It was evident throughout the Designer Explorer project that the imagined audiences of each individual were flexible and shifted depending on the subjective goals, motivations, aspirations and roles of each individual participant. The audiences an individual DNEA imagines for themselves fluctuate depending on their subjective purposes at a particular moment. Just as with layered identity performances, targeted identity performances

are purposeful in their use of contextual elements that situate themselves in particular social positions in order to encourage a response.

When DNEAs perform their identity in the front stage region, they are presenting an idealised and socially desirable performance of their context for self, shaped by their desired reception from their audiences. For DNEAs, this typically takes form through the performance of a role. This is executed through various acts of decorum (Goffman, 1959), in which each identity performance is managed by the standards and rules of a particular context. In the case of the Designer Explorer networked public, the participants performed several different roles to cater for their diverse social and situational contexts, including roles as first year students, emerging designers, design camp attendees, colleagues, friends, children and teenagers. As discussed in Section 6.4.2, the complexity of many performances throughout the project illustrated specific competences that DNEAs have in negotiating their role performances across the collapsed context of the Designer Explorer networked public and the ways in which they were able to shift between their different role performances with fluidity and ease.

As articulated throughout this thesis, a DNEA's context for self is a malleable entity that is subject to change as new contextual elements are added to the contextual ecology an individual is situated within. This was manifested in two ways throughout the Designer Explorer project: firstly, through the active melding of the private and public sphere, where participants transferred contextual elements from other roles into new roles; and secondly, through activities of practice which controlled the visibility of an individual's context for self through configuring contextual elements into performances that revealed or concealed what they wanted the Designer Explorer audiences to see. These performances were an example of the proficiencies that DNEAs have in managing their own ambitions as autonomous emerging adults, while negotiating the socially prescribed norms of the contexts they are situated within.

Emerging adulthood is fraught with identity concerns that push DNEAs to proactively negotiate the balance between their autonomy and sense of belonging within a social group. They are driven by a complex constellation of socially normative expectations and constraints as they engage with their multiple audiences and take measures to protect the integrity of their back stage region. DNEAs specifically target their identity performances to manage

how others may perceive them. Networked publics give their members visible presentations of the normative expectations for that context. However, because DNEAs belong to many networked publics concurrently, the acts of decorum shaped by whatever imagined audience they happen to be engaging with and the identity performances DNEAs undertake may reveal contradictions between the differing audiences of individuals, or expose aspects of an individual's context for self in unintended ways, leading to performance reshaping and compensation behaviours by individuals, as seen in Section 6.4.1.

These behaviours are driven by DNEAs seeking a sense of social belonging within contexts that they value highly at a given moment. It is evident in the data that, as the project progressed, the Designer Explorer networked public became increasingly valuable to participants. For DNEAs, a sense of social belonging is a fundamental part of their emerging adulthood, and the shift towards highly social imagery that became the dominant theme across the project demonstrated the Designer Explorer participants were recontextualising activities of practice in two key ways: firstly, to establish a sense of social belonging, and secondly, to enable them to maintain their distinctness as individuals through personalising the activity to instigate a response from their audiences.

Throughout the Designer Explorer project the participants used the *#designerexplorer* hashtag to demonstrate sophisticated proficiencies of production and consumption of content produced within a networked public. The collapsed context created by the Designer Explorer networked public provided participating DNEAs with diverse audiences and subsequently increased opportunities for them to test out their emerging adult identity. This was seen through layered and targeted identity performances, as well as identity performances that demonstrated the close interrelation between the private and public spheres of some individuals. Furthermore, the circulation of contextual elements within the Designer Explorer networked public meant that many participants could continuously reconfigure their contexts for self in a dedicated manner throughout the project. As the Designer Explorer participants gathered together in the social context of the networked public, the identity performances of individuals were shaped by the flows of contextual information and feedback that occurred between members. This was seen through individuals performing many different roles throughout the project and the experimental identity performances that acted as provocations for their audiences.

Emerging adulthood is a highly dynamic transitional period of life, one that is not defined by universal, immutable, prescriptive practices, particularly for the population of DNEAs investigated in this research. Instead, it is a period in which individuals undertake high levels of identity exploration as they establish autonomy, develop their worldview and work to support their social contexts. As DNEA members of the Designer Explorer networked public gathered together, they co-constructed and coordinated their activities with each other as part of a shared digitally networked practice. Networked publics provide resources for ongoing performances. Sharing resources are meaningful to DNEAs because the ongoing use of material contextual elements allows a networked public to grow, enabling future opportunities for DNEAs to reproduce their context creation practice.

7.3 Conclusion

Identity is never static, nor stabilised. The identities of DNEAs are subject to ongoing processes of change, and circulate through processes of negotiation between the front stage and back stage regions. Individuals adjust their context for self and their visible identity performances based on circulations of feedback they receive from their audiences. Because networked publics operate in circulating flows that create ongoing, real-time feedback loops between individuals and their audiences, they are ideally placed to examine the processes that DNEAs undertake to configure their contexts for self and their identity performances.

It has been evident through the ethnographic investigation of the Designer Explorer project that the participating DNEAs are part of a cohort of practitioners who have developed a context creation practice in response to the contemporary typologies of digital social technologies. This is seen in the Designer Explorer project through the production and reproduction of activities of practice that draw on contextual elements that are brought together through the contextual ecology of the Designer Explorer networked public.

The Designer Explorer networked public facilitated a sense of social belonging among the cohort of DNEA practitioners who participated in the project. It was evident throughout the project that the participants were collectively co-constructing the social values and norms of the Designer Explorer networked public by using contextual elements to produce and

reproduce context-specific activities of practice. The flexibility of contextual ecologies and the configuration of contextual elements evident within the Designer Explorer networked public demonstrated the Designer Explorer DNEAs are competent at configuring their context creation practice within new contexts.

By presenting the significant concepts and meaningful outcomes of the Designer Explorer project, this research offers a snapshot of the potential of DNEA context creation practice to travel. It also provides insight into the conditions of identity practices for young Australian adults. The complexity of the activities of practice seen within the Designer Explorer networked public infer that DNEA context creation practice has travelled from other contexts and has the potential to travel into new ones as DNEAs move through their emerging adulthood. The concluding chapter discusses the significance of this practice in greater detail and expands the scope of it to consider the wider implications of the use of digital social technologies as part of DNEA identity practices.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8.1 Summary and Contribution

This thesis has investigated the implications of the shifting typologies of digital social technologies throughout the lives of digital native emerging adults. The pervasiveness of digital social technologies across blurred digital and physical boundaries has led to these technologies becoming heterogeneous spaces in which temporal and spatial contexts are destabilised. This research has proposed that the willingness of these individuals to adopt digital social technologies as part of their daily habits and routines has had significant implications for the identity practices of these individuals. It has theorised that this has led to the creation of specific activities of practice that give rise to an enduring context creation practice, and proposed that this is an integral part of the transition process that digital native emerging adults experience as they move through emerging adulthood. The Designer Explorer project allowed insight into a group of digital native emerging adults participating in the unique experience of the University of Technology first year design camp in 2012 and 2013.

Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self established that as young people move through their emerging adulthood they are concurrently working to establish both a sense of belonging and becoming. Throughout this period, young people experience great shifts in their situational and social contexts, which can have a destabilising effect on their sense of self. The findings of this research suggest that DNEAs cope with these changes by actively reconfiguring their *context for self* through identity performances within networked publics. Networked publics, as described by boyd (2008, 2014), are networked social spaces that foster a range of interactions and relations between DNEAs and their diverse audiences, providing DNEAs with a platform for identity experimentation which is a crucial part of the emerging adult experience.

Practices are purposeful actions undertaken by individuals as part of the complex constellations of activities that make up their everyday interactions and the experiences of their lives. As a key part of their everyday practices, DNEAs traverse their social contexts through the multiplicity of digital social technologies available to them. The functions of digital social technologies enable contextual information to flow, in real-time, between individuals and their audiences in the form of visual and textual digital content. However, the destabilisation of context means that DNEAs are continuously drawing on their locational, material, situational and social contexts to form identity performances that help them develop a greater understanding of themselves and the identities they present to the world. As sophisticated practitioners, it is this continuous flow of contextual information within networked publics that assists DNEAs in negotiating the motivations of belonging and becoming through this phase of life.

The continuous flow of contextual information has created a diverse and emergent space for researching digitally networked practices. However, there are a number of methodological issues for researchers. Ethnography in digitally networked circumstances has been reliant on context as a stabilising factor. However, given the constantly shifting flows of context that exist within networked publics, digital ethnographers are now engaged in research conditions that are characterised by destabilised context. This research has responded to these conditions by developing methodological strategies that *observe* and *make sense* of the complexity and dynamics of context made visible through the identity performances of DNEAs. The thesis has used digital ethnographic approaches to chart how DNEAs draw context together through digital social technologies in ways that are meaningful to the growth of their emerging adult identities, as they seek the autonomy of full adulthood.

Situated within the field of design, this research used a mixed-method approach in its collation, interpretation and analysis of empirical data collected through the Designer Explorer project—a case study exploring a group of Sydney-based young adult Instagram users during their first year of university, attending a design camp at Cockatoo Island, Sydney. It combined visual data analysis of Instagram content shared to the *#designerexplorer* hashtag and semi-structured interviews with the Designer Explorer participants after the design camp to analyse their digitally networked practices as they took part in the Designer Explorer project. A key

aspect of this thesis was the emergence of the Designer Explorer networked public during the data collection phase of the research.

To support the ethnographic approaches used in this research, a practice theory lens was applied to make sense of the ways the participants were engaging with the Designer Explorer networked public and closely examine the digital visual content produced by the project participants. It was also used as a framework to orientate and anchor the flows of context characteristic of networked publics. The thesis positioned Shove et al's (2012) elements of practice as *contextual elements*, in which the contexts of DNEAs are separated into four categories: the locational, material, situational and social. When contextual elements from these four categories come together within networked publics through the intentional and unintentional actions of DNEAs, relational contextual elements cluster together in *contextual ecologies*. The Designer Explorer participants draw contextual elements into configurations that form activities of practice for their identity performances to diverse audiences and actively reconfigure their contexts for self.

A compelling insight drawn from the collection of Instagram digital visual content was the multilayered, targeted and experimental approach DNEAs took in embedding context in their identity performances while they were engaging in the Designer Explorer networked public. The research identified four core activities of practice that Designer Explorer participants demonstrated particular competences in: *coping with context collapse*, *negotiating the network*, *performing roles* and *circulating feedback*. Close analysis of the digital visual content produced for identity performances located within these activities of practice revealed that the *collapse* and *circulation of contexts* contributes significantly to the complexity of the dynamics of context within networked publics. The expertise that the Designer Explorer project participants displayed in configuring contextual elements together to undertake these activities of practice suggests that DNEA context creation practice is a fundamental part of the way that DNEAs operate in their normative daily settings.

The complex networked social linkages that DNEAs are operating within encourage individuals to embrace temporality, assisting DNEAs to develop a greater understanding of themselves and the identities they present to the world. Through positioning their context for

self within whatever context they are in, DNEAs spread their identity narratives through new contextually specific identity performances. It is evident through the findings of this research that DNEAs use whatever contextual resources are available to them in order to produce their identity. This is significant as it provides emerging adults in transition with the ability to construct a sense of belonging and becoming. For young Australians working towards the autonomy of adulthood, balancing the temporalities of the two are a highly valued part of emerging adult wellbeing (Woodman, 2004, p. 86).

The predominant significance of DNEA context creation practice lies in its ability to *travel*. As established in Chapter Four: Practice: Context Creation and Identity Performance, because of the temporal and spatial nature of practices, one of the challenges of examining practices is defining a stabilised practice-as-entity. This becomes particularly significant when examining digitally networked practices, where the contexts in which individuals are undertaking a practice are themselves highly mutable and malleable. For the Designer Explorer participants, their competences as practitioners provide them with the flexibility to move across different digital social technology platforms and engage with alternative audiences as they move between different networked publics. As evidenced through the data collected during this research, DNEAs commit to configuring contextual elements into activities of practices, and continue to reproduce them within other networked publics. Their context creation practice is bolstered, allowing DNEAs greater scope for their role performances and experimental identity performances as they negotiate their autonomy as emerging adults.

A notable insight from this research is the manifestation of networked sociality through the Designer Explorer project. Close analysis of the Instagram digital visual content produced throughout the project revealed the specific and purposeful use of particular contextual elements within digital visual content, and it became evident that the participants worked together to construct unified thematic representations of the Designer Explorer networked public. This was most clearly seen in the two overarching content themes illustrating the locational context and the social context of the design camp experience. This, seemingly organic, coordination of context by a group of diverse individuals demonstrates the value and normality of networked sociality for this population of young people. Because a DNEA's context for self is not disconnected from digital social technologies, DNEAs are vital to the

social contexts they are helping to produce through networked publics, encouraging further practitioners to participate. The DNEA context creation practice will continue to become increasingly stabilised as an entity, and indeed, travel, as participation in the practice increases.

Digital social technologies are changing the ways individuals negotiate their identity across the different contexts they engage with. This thesis has put forth a set of theories that help explore DNEA identity production more closely.. The digital ethnographic approaches used to examine the DNEA context creation practice has enabled deeper insight into the intricacies of the collapse and circulation of context that occur within networked publics, and demonstrates how context creation practice is configured across contexts that are temporal, spatial, mutable and malleable. The research emphasised hashtags and networked publics as sites that facilitate the simultaneous production and consumption of digital visual content through digital social technologies. In its mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis of this digital visual content combined with interviews from DNEA participants, this thesis has revealed the complexities of DNEA identity production.

The close examination of the dynamics of context in this research offers much towards the emergent research landscapes of digital social technologies and digitally networked practices. The ethnographic examination of the circumstances of destabilised context that is characteristic of networked publics illuminates the complexities and challenges that digital ethnography scholars face when conducting research in these contexts. This thesis has provided an account of a specific group of individuals, however, further research is required to investigate the ways in which DNEA context creation practice travels through other scenarios and circumstances of context to test the theories in this thesis.

8.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

As set out in Chapter One: Introduction, undertaking ethnography in online contexts is a challenging space for conducting research. Reflecting on the digital ethnographic methods used throughout the research process and the epistemological challenges, it is important to note key limitations in the methods applied through the Designer Explorer project. This

leads to reflecting more broadly on the theoretical limitations of the thesis and identifying opportunities for future research directions.

By nature, digital social technologies are in flux—functions and interfaces change, new platforms emerge. As it was applied throughout this research, within the practice theory framework, digital social technologies are considered to be a contextual element themselves. These constantly shifting contexts have posed an interesting methodological challenge throughout the research process. This thesis has specifically focused on the use of the digital social technology Instagram. A concern throughout the research process has been the limitation of using a single platform to examine digitally networked practices because it has the potential to restrict the types of data being collected and does not account for technical change across digital social technologies and the effect that this may have on practitioners.

It would be beneficial for further investigation of the theories set out through this research to use other digital social technology platforms. Since the primary data collection for this research took place in 2013, digital social technologies have developed and shifted the ways in which individuals produce and consume content. For instance, there are now platforms that dismantle time-based continuity of content by embedding algorithms that direct the content an individual sees and does not see through their social awareness streams, and platforms which are purpose-built to delete content as soon as it has been viewed by the recipient. These technical developments offer compelling circumstances for further research as individuals develop their identity practices to accommodate these emerging contexts.

Within digital ethnographic settings, innovative methods of data collection and analysis need to continue to be developed to respond to the changing social and technical conditions of digital social technologies. Future research may include in-depth investigation into the practice of ‘task-switching’ across different digital social technology platforms, as well as case studies that closely examine the production of different types of digital visual content, such as video media. Furthermore, research may integrate digital social technology probes more comprehensively into the interview context. A particular emphasis on co-construction and participant observation may provide further insight into activities of practices when individuals are producing an account of their experiences.

Chapter Three: Networked Publics: Contexts for Self identified that the experience of age that a cohort of individuals shares is shaped by the social conditions that individuals are immersed within. Networked publics are inherently spaces that bring together diverse groups of individuals. When populations of individuals gather together through networked sociality, they too bring their own locational, material, situational and social contexts with them. The focus on a specific group of DNEAs limits this research's ability to comprehensively discuss digital participation practices with regards to access and skill. This research would benefit from a broader scoping of DNEA populations to incorporate diversity beyond a cohort of first year university design students located in metropolitan Sydney, Australia. Further investigation of the Australian context would be helpful.

This thesis poses several questions for further investigation of DNEAs: What activities of practice appear when DNEAs operate in other contexts? How do they configure their identity performances when they engage in networked publics that are made up of diverse group members, alternative audiences and other populations? How does their context creation practice travel as they become older and continue to develop their autonomy?

While this thesis has examined the context creation practice of DNEAs, it has only gathered *publicly visible* Instagram and Twitter data and, as discussed previously, the particular patterns of behaviour of a *specific* group of individuals. However, networked publics are not solely spaces for DNEAs. There are many other populations that are worthy of closer examination. Indeed, digital social technologies have implications for those younger than the participants of the Designer Explorer project. The teenagers of today, and even those children who are younger, will live and mature in worlds with different forms of digital social technologies. The trajectory of digital social technologies is broad. Technologies will continue to evolve in functionality through negotiation between users and technology developers as individuals adopt and adapt their use to suit their own purposes and goals.

The digitally networked practices of other practitioners need to be considered for their value in demonstrating alternative activities of practice that negotiate flows of context. The characteristics of membership within a networked public are not homogenous across all users. Indeed, it cannot be assumed that all members engage in the same activities of practice.

Additionally, it should not be assumed that publicity within networked publics is of primary importance to members. As such, further investigation is needed into non-DNEA and non-visible members (i.e. 'lurkers') of networked publics. It is worthwhile developing digital ethnography methods that better accommodate and incorporate data that is not publicly visible. While this poses ethical challenges to researchers, there is much value in being able to access data around digitally networked practices that incorporate both the public and private spheres.

Finally, an aspect of the Designer Explorer project not addressed in-depth throughout the thesis, but of increasing value to scholarship, is closer examination of digitally networked practices within the educational context of the first year of university. The emerging adult experience is not defined by prescriptive, immutable experiences. For many young Australians today, much of their emerging adulthood is spent undertaking tertiary education. As such, there are opportunities for this research to extend its contribution within first year experience and transition scholarship including examining the link between formal learning and informal digital participation practices and localising these within the Australian tertiary context.

8.3 Conclusion

As has been inferred through the evidence presented throughout the Designer Explorer project, the DNEA context creation practice is ongoing and dynamic. The findings of this research demonstrate two significant implications of DNEA context creation practice for emerging adult identities: an individual's sense of autonomy through unfixed contexts and the need individuals have for continuity in their identity in destabilised settings, which are both significant aspects of the emerging adult experience in contemporary settings. The experiences of the DNEAs in the Designer Explorer project provide valuable insight for understanding the contextual forces that drive the use of digital social technologies. As digital social technologies change, so too will the dynamics of networked publics. As individuals mediate their identities through networked technologies, these mutable and malleable contexts will continue to be adopted by collectives of individuals and, in response to this, identity practices will be progressively shaped and reshaped. The versatility of a practice theory framework enables it to be applied to other contexts, and the actions of other digital social technology users may provide insight

into the identity practices of other populations. While technologies will continue to evolve and change, individuals will have the same needs to create identities, continued experimentation and development of ethnographic approaches will provide epistemological insight into the efficacy of digital ethnography in examining digitally networked practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: UTS Pathways data (3 pages)

Appendix 2: 2013 UTS Design Camp Brief (3 pages)

Appendix 3: 2013 Designer Explorer Project consent forms (2 pages)

Appendix 4: 2013 Designer Explorer interview question prompts (4 pages)

ATAR cutoff points for UTS subjects¹ 2012/2013

	2012*	2013**
BA Comm (Journalism) - 600013	91.40	89.00
B Design Architecture - 602010	94.05	94.20
B Design Visual Comm - 602070	94.70	95.45

Commencement Pathways

In order to focus the research more specifically, I now lay out some statistics from equivalent degree courses as a way of tracing out the context of the first year Design Thinking students. The statistics are measured across three subjects from different faculties across the university. These subjects were selected based on similarity in ATAR cutoff (between 85.00 to 95.00), the subjects were first semester, first year subjects that were compulsory within their particular degree (BA Communications [Journalism], B Design Architecture and B Design Visual Communication) and that they included cohorts of students that were interdisciplinary (meaning their continuing pathway through their degree may vary). The subjects analysed were: 85503 Design Thinking (B Design Visual Comm), 11211 Architectural Design: Forming (B Design Architecture) and 58110 Introduction to Journalism (BA Communications [Journalism]).

Between 2012 and 2013 there were significant increase in student enrolments across *Design Thinking* and *Introduction to Journalism*, with a increase of 33.82% and 17.58% across the two subjects respectively, whilst *Architectural Design* generally maintained enrolment numbers at 103 students in 2012 and 107 students in 2013.

Based in Sydney, Australia, many of the Design Thinking student have recently graduated from high school and either still live at, or have just moved from, home. Pathways to university vary across the group, with variable motivations for tertiary study and potential career trajectories.

¹ *Universities Admissions Centre (UAC), 2012, *Cut-offs for Main Round offers: 2012 Admissions*, 18 January, UAC, Sydney

**Universities Admissions Centre (UAC), 2013, *Cut-offs for Main Round offers: 2013 Admissions*, 16 January, UAC, Sydney

Measurements for pathways to university include: *Socio-Economic* categories (SES) that rank students into low, medium, or high, *Pathways* through a Special Admissions Scheme process such as sports scholarships, *Inputs* like Jumbunna (indigenous), or the Principal Recommendation Scheme (PRS), or which a large portion of the UTS student cohort belongs to. The measurements below account for the *effective full-time student load* (EFS) of commencing students, as such, the data collected reflects the statistics of students at the beginning of their studies, and does not inform about the career pathways that students might graduate into at the conclusion of their tertiary studies.

There was a significant (26%) increase in student numbers in Design Thinking from 2012 to 2013 — across all areas of admission (high school, TAFE, including a 100% increase in student numbers coming from other universities). The pass rate was higher across this period. A number of factors may have contributed to this — ATAR entries may have been granted at a lower score, there may have been an increase in marketing, a government induced push and admission prerogative from the university.

Pathways Based on Socio-economic Status (SES)

Design Thinking students consisted of 59.5% High SES students in 2012, with a slight drop to 58% in 2013. Medium SES made up 31.2% of Design Thinking students in 2012, which increased to 33% in 2013. While Low SES students made up 9.3% of the cohort in 2012, and dropped to 8.6% in 2013. *Architectural Design: Forming* in 2012 had 57% High SES students, which dropped to 55.3% in 2013. Medium SES students made up 32.7% of the cohort in 2012, which increased to 34% in 2013. Low SES students made up 10.3% of the cohort, with a minimal increase to 10.7% in 2013. Comparatively, *Introduction to Journalism* had 55.2% of its cohort fall into the High SES category in 2012, with a minimal increase to 55.7% in 2013. Medium SES students made up 35.6% of enrolments in 2012, with a slight percentage shift down to 35.4% in 2013. Low SES students made up 9% of the cohort in 2012, with a similar percentage decrease at the Medium SES students to 8.5% in 2013. Overall, High SES students typically make up just over half of the student cohort across all three subjects, which is reflected in data across 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. Medium SES students usually make up between 30—40% of enrolments, with Low SES only accounting for approximately 7–11% of students.

Design Thinking Pass Rates: Delineated by Home Residency (at year end)

Citizenship; domestic/international, whether students are attending a university from interstate or remaining within their home state. Furthermore, this can also be broken down by the categories of regional or metropolitan dwellers.

Sydney metropolitan; 2012: $\approx$ 192 students (99.48% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 325 (96.0% pass rate);

New South Wales country; 2012: $\approx$ 35 students (97.06% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 25 (96.0% pass rate);

Australian interstate; 2012: $\approx$ 4 students (100% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 9 (100% pass rate)

There is no way to decipher from this set of data whether the students are living at home or share housing away from the family home, as this data only measures post codes as 'home address' or 'term address,' however a proportion of almost 100% have their address remaining as Sydney Metropolitan and again, this does not account for the individual trajectories of students with regards to their living situations.

Pass rates across socio-economic (SES) categories, which rates individuals by the average income of households across suburbs (for example, high is categorised as the top 25%); High SES; 2012: $\approx$ 141 students (99.29% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 209 (95.69% pass rate), Medium SES; 2012: $\approx$ 67 students (100% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 120 (95.83% pass rate) and Low SES; 2012: $\approx$ 24 students (95.65% pass rate), 2013: $\approx$ 31 (100% pass rate).

It should be noted that this data does not account for the motivations of individual students, however, research suggests that the diversity housed within this group can portray some insight into the transitional framework first year design students at UTS find themselves within, and use this to speculate on how this may play into the identity creation practices of emerging adults.

ASSESSMENT 2 DESIGN CAMP MAPPING EXERCISE

Group task, 30% of subject mark

Check Design Camp schedule for start and finish times – this exercise begins and ends at the briefing stations in the Mould Loft (see map).

DESIGN CAMP MAPPING EXERCISE

The Mapping Exercise tests your ability to *actively observe* your surroundings, and to creatively record your observations through experimental map-making. It asks you to pay attention to your environment and to take inspiration from what you see around you. Throughout the three-day exercise you may find it helpful to refer to your journals to find strategies, ideas and information that you have built up over the semester. Think about how the various lectures and tutorials have explored objects, sounds, landscapes and questions of memory.

Walking across a bridge, I am adrift in a world of *objects*: the girders and pylons that support me, the durable power of concrete beneath my feet, the dense unyielding grain of the topsoil in which the bridge is rooted. What looks at first like a trivial act of walking is actually embedded in the most intricate web of tool-pieces, tiny implanted devices watching over our activity, sustaining or resisting our efforts like transparent ghosts or angels. (Harman 2010, pp. 25-26).

Refer to **Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*** readings for inspiration and revelation

Your task will be to create 3 maps with the following words as a guide:

- Objects
- Sound
- Historical Bodies

Each of these maps should seek to record something concealed, unexpected or invisible on the island. The maps may vary in size (as small or large as necessary) and you may wish to glue, stick or stitch together different size papers to reflect your observations. In short, the paper itself may become something other than a mere surface for recording. Maybe you don't need to draw at all, but rather cut or bend? Perhaps you could combine the two? The exercise asks you to creatively *translate* your observations into a two or three-dimensional representation that can be understood visually or through touch.

BRIEF

Observe

1. Begin by **exploring** the island *on your own* for at least two hours, observing the objects and terrain that make up the island's geography. Lie on the ground. Press your face into the earth. What does the earth taste like? Climb over rocks. Walk on the grass. Run on the grass. Blindfold yourself. How do you see these rocks and this grass? How did others see these buildings before you? Look for patterns, cracks, colours, smells, shadows, stains etc. Are the objects isolated or in a family? What is the live flora doing compared with the dead? What can you hear in the silence? Does the weather cut the landscape or bring it together? Go beyond simply thinking: look I see and I will now record it. What are the things you see and hear *doing*? What is at their root? How will these objects die?

Process

2. **Come together as a group.** Share your observations and think how you might condense, rework or expand your individual ideas into 3 maps according to the guide (Objects, Sound, Historical Bodies) using the materials provided, as well as materials suggested (see list). You may find it helpful to weed out the most obvious observations first (I saw a rock! So did I!) Eliminate these observations and begin a conversation about the *context* of the object, sound or historical body. How can the initial visual, auditory or textural experience of the island's parts be *translated* into a map? The process of the maps' creation should be recorded. Take notes on how you arrive at the decision to render the maps in a particular way.

Produce

3. **Create three distinct and separate maps** made with the highest production standards available to you. Allocate equal time to each map and work to a deadline, with individual members of the group contributing to production via specific tasks generated in the process stage.

Present

4. Gather at your briefing station in the Mould Loft. Here you will give a detailed presentation (15 minutes) on how your maps were generated, from the initial observation stage through to their production. Your presentation should include evidence of collaboration.

Social Media

Appoint at least one member of your group as the **social media representative** (#designexplorer). This person will be responsible for participating in the social media exercise (the use of Instagram and Twitter) on the island. The project is part of Jenni Hagedorn's PhD research, which investigates agency in the creation of our social identities, and seeks to understand how social technologies afford engagement and participation between people and the physical world during camp.

MARKING CRITERIA:

- Quality, depth and sensitivity of the observations (audio and visual) underlying the map
- Creativity and ingenuity of design for representing your observations (audio and visual) in your map
- Craftsmanship in use of materials and execution of your map
- Evidence of a reflective approach to group collaboration



Designer Explorer: UTS First Year Design Students
Participant Information Sheet (interview)

My name is Jennifer Hagedorn and I am a PhD student at the University of Technology, Sydney. I am conducting research into the use of digital social technologies in the urban environment. I have asked you to participate in this research because I feel your position at UTS will enable you to give insight into the specific topics I am investigating in my research, specifically the pathways of incoming students to the University of Technology Sydney.

The research will involve an interview with me, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed, and may be used as quotable material for the project report and my PhD thesis, which I intend to complete in 2015. Interviews would take up approximately one hour of your time and will be recorded on a digital audio recorder. Your responses may be used as quotable material in the project report and for my PhD thesis.

As a participant, you can be provided with an interview transcript and/or a digital mp3 file of the interview. If desired, you will be informed of the completion of the project report and/or thesis, and given access to an electronic copy if you wish.

You are under no obligation to participate in this research. Please be advised that if you wish to participate, **your identity can remain confidential** in transcripts and further written records, if desired (See the consent form for the confidentiality option). Please be advised you can withdraw from the research at any time and without explanation.

Please feel free to ask any questions before signing the consent form.

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee under the HREC REF NO. 2011-220A. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research you may contact the PhD researcher Jennifer Hagedorn (XXXX XXXX). If you cannot resolve your queries with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: XXXX XXXX, xxxxx@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

I'm am very grateful for your time and help with this research.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Hagedorn
PhD Researcher
Bld 6 Level 6 Room XXX
Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123 Broadway
NSW 2007 AUSTRALIA
Tel: XXXX XXXX E: xxxxx@student.uts.edu.au



Designer Explorer: UTS First Year Design Students
Participant Consent Form

Researcher: Jennifer Hagedorn
School: School of Design
Faculty: Design Architecture & Building, UTS

I _____, consent to participate in the research project *Designer Explorer: UTS First Year Design Students* being conducted by Jennifer Hagedorn, Bld 6 Level 6 Room XXX, Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building, University of Technology, Sydney, Tel: XXXX XXXX.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore my professional knowledge of the pathways of incoming students to the University of Technology Sydney. I understand that my participation involves being interviewed, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed, and may be used as quotable material for the project report Jennifer Hagedorn's PhD thesis, which she intends to complete in 2015.

I am aware that I can contact Jennifer Hagedorn, or her supervisor, Prof. Bert Bongers (Interaction Studio, Peter Johnson Building, UTS 702-730 Harris Street, Ultimo) if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I understand that my identity can remain confidential in transcripts and further written records, if desired.

I have indicated my wishes in the confidentiality option below: (please tick one)

- ☐ My name should be withheld from the public record
- ☐ I consent to my full name being included in this researcher's findings.
- ☐ I consent Jennifer accessing my Facebook profile during the interview.

Signature (Participant)

Signature (Researcher)

Jennifer Hagedorn
PhD Researcher
Bld 6 Level 6 Room XXX
Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123 Broadway
NSW 2007 AUSTRALIA
Tel: XXXX XXXX E: xxxxx@student.uts.edu.au

NOTE:
This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee under the HREC REF NO. 2011-220A. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research you may contact the PhD researcher Jennifer Hagedorn (XXXX XXXX). If you cannot resolve your queries with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: XXXX XXXX xxxxxx@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

**#designerexplorer – Social Media on Cockatoo Island
First Year Design Camp 2013**

Interview Questions

General

In these questions I am interested in finding out about your own, general, experiences with social media.

How do you define social media?

Tell me a little bit about your experiences with social media

- What kinds of social media do you use?
- What is your motivation for using social media
- How often do you access social media?
- How do you access social media (smartphone, web-based)?
- Can you tell me about your experiences with using hashtags and geolocation?
- What kind of content do you share on social media?
- Do you have any concern about your privacy on social media? How do you manage your online privacy?
- How important is it to you to either check-in, post a status update or photo when you're out and about?

I'm interested in finding out a little bit about how you choose to portray yourself through social media.

Could you tell me a little bit about how you "construct" your social media profiles? Does this differ across different platforms?

How do you choose what to share with others via social media? Do you post particular content? Is there content you won't post?

Do you have a particular aesthetic style you use for your images or a tone you use in your tweets, or type of content you choose to share/upload to Facebook?

Who is your audience on social media? When you're uploading content to a social network, who is your imagined audience?

Identity

In these questions I am interested in finding out about your perceptions of online identity and the ways in which you create your online identity.

How would you describe your online identity? In what ways do you display this identity online?

Can you describe some ways in which you think your "offline/real life" identity is embedded in your social media profile/s?

Do you think the identity you use online is the same as your "offline/real life" identity? Why/Why not?

Does your online identity stay the same (i.e. is it stable?) or does it shift and change? In what ways do you think it may/or may not change?

How do you manage your identity on social media?

The next few questions are about the influence of various contexts in shaping your identity

Do you think being able to access social media when you're mobile changes how you interact with social media? Why/Why not? In what ways?

When you're out and about around the city or at an event, do you plug into #hashtags to see what is going on?

On average, how likely are you to post content (status update, check-in, post a photo, tag your friends) about an event while you're still there? (Comparatively, with uploading photos at a later date etc)

In what ways are you influenced by the content that your friends share through social media? (For example, if you were to see them post a photo or status update recommending a particular café/event, would you be likely to trying it out?) Why do you think this is?

If you see someone else (friend, stranger) sharing content (perhaps via a #hashtag) are you likely to share content as well? Why do you think this is?

Facebook – optional set of questions

At the beginning of the interview you consented to us taking a look at your Facebook account and using it as a discussion point for a series of questions. These questions will be primarily focused on your identity and will use the specific context of the Design Camp to contextualise your usage of Facebook.

If you are still happy to do so, could you please log in to your Facebook account, navigate to your profile page and walk me through content you shared during the 3 days of Design Camp?

How do you use Facebook? (Mostly sharing content, keeping in touch, liking posts, keeping up to date with events etc)

What kind of content do you share on Facebook?

Do you think Facebook is different to other types of social media? Why is this?

Is there any difference between the type of content you share on Facebook and the type of content you share on other forms of social media? (Instagram/Twitter for example) Why is this?

Can you describe how you've set up your privacy settings on Facebook?

Can you talk a little bit about who you think your audience on Facebook is?

How do you choose whom to friend (versus not friending) on Facebook?

Can you describe some ways in which you think your identity is embedded in your Facebook profile?

What things motivate you to share something on Facebook? For example, in the context of the Design Camp, can you recall any moments where you thought, "oh, I should post this?" - what were these?

Lets talk a bit more specifically about your interaction with Facebook over the three days of Design Camp – can you describe what you were posting? (Was this different from content you may have been sharing publically through Instagram and/or Twitter? Is there any particular reason you chose not to post it publically?)

What was your motivation for posting this particular content? (How did it make you feel to post this? Were you trying to elicit a certain response?)

What kind of responses were you getting from your friends about the content you were posting?

#designerexplorer

In the next set of questions I'm interested in finding out more about your own perceptions of the use of the #designerexplorer hashtag during the Design Camp. I want to know more about how you specifically used Twitter and Instagram during the design camp and what your experiences of interacting with other participants were.

Can you tell me a little bit about how you specifically used Instagram and/or Twitter while on the island?

- Did you use Instagram and/or Twitter?
- Did you actively look through the #designerexplorer posts whilst at camp?
- How you use the #hashtag? e.g. for your own reflections, or sharing with others? Who was your audience whilst you were posting using the #hashtag?
- I want to spend a bit of time talking about your use of hashtags, as you used quite an interesting collection alongside the #designerexplorer hashtag. Can you describe how you use hashtags when you post?
- Did you find that you were posting task-orientated or purposeful content?
- Did the fact that you were in the university context alter how you interacted with the social media? i.e. did you construct or alter the type of content you were posting?

Did you find that the way you used social media on the island differed from how you used it everyday? What about in other environments (time/place/activities)? In what ways was it similar and/or different?

Do you think you gained any particular insights about the Design Camp experience that others may not have because they were not using social media?

For the next few questions we will be discussing the content you posted using the #designerexplorer hashtag.

Can you tell me a little bit about the content you were posting?

How did you construct the content you were posting? Choosing filters/composition etc – was this a reaction to the brief, or do you feel that you were using a similar aesthetic style to your everyday use?

What provoked you to post the content you did?

Were there key moments that you can recall posting about? Why?

Can you recall any particularly interesting posts from other students/staff members?

Do you feel that by using the #designerexplorer hashtag enabled a different kind of engagement with the physical space/environment or Cockatoo Island? If yes, what was this?

For the next few questions we will be discussing your interaction with other #designerexplorer participants over the camp

Did you use Twitter or Instagram to communicate with anyone during the course of the camp?
Where these people known to you?

Did you communicate with anyone you did not know previously using Twitter or Instagram during the camp, this could include 'liking' someone's image or someone using the #designerexplorer hash tag adding you or you adding them (or vice versa)?

Did you find looking at the content being posted by students and staff helpful/interesting?
What in particular was the most helpful/interesting? Why was this meaningful for you?

Were there any instances where you can recall talking about and or looking through content posted by others to the #designerexplorer research project with others?

I'm interested in finding out a bit more about the social aspects of the project. Did you find that the social media motivated your activities in anyway?

- Did you want to share what you were doing with others?
- Did seeing other students activities provoke you in any way? How so?

Can you describe the type of content you saw being posted via the #hashtag over the course of the three days at camp?

Did you notice any particular changes in network behaviour over the course of the camp?

Did you notice any similarities between the content being posted?

Closing

Before we finish up, I'd like to ask you a few more general questions if that is OK?

Can you tell me anything that you thought was unique about the #designerexplorer project?
(i.e. the captive time element, environment/context-specific)

Have your experiences at camp changed your perceptions of how you use social media?
Why/why not? In what way/s?

Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

