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Making Art, Creating Infrastructure:
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by

Daniel Perkel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Information Management and Systems

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Van House, Chair
Professor Paul Duguid
Professor Jenna Burrell
Professor Laura Sterponi

Fall 2011

Making Art, Creating Infrastructure: deviantART and the Production of the Web

Abstract

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Daniel Perkel

Doctor of Philosophy in Information Management and Systems

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Nancy Van House, Chair

The development and widespread use of Internet technologies and platforms that are grouped under the labels "Web 2.0" and "social media" have led to celebratory accounts of their potential as tools to unleash human creativity. A "creativity consensus" has emerged that describes a vision of creative production via these new platforms as universal, democratic, communal, non-commercial, and revolutionary. The avant-garde of Web 2.0 creativity are said to be young, web-savvy media makers: a new generation that has embraced new technology and is upending old notions of creativity and related cultural practices. This dissertation challenges these views through an ethnographic investigation of deviantART, the self-described "world's largest online art community." The dissertation demonstrates how conflicting ideals of art, creativity, and the web, when put into practice, shaped the site as ideological and technical infrastructure for creative practice and the formation of members' creative identities. In their use of the site, participants in deviantART actively, and at times contentiously, engaged with historical tensions concerning both art and the web. The dissertation explores tensions emerging around three sets of concerns: (1) gaining artistic recognition through visibility, popularity, or quality; (2) demonstrating artistic "seriousness" in relation to ways of improving at art; and (3) controlling and circulating work through the concepts of property, "sharing," and "theft." The dissertation argues that rather than upending Romantic conceptions of art and creativity, the web uneasily accommodates multiple conflicting ideologies. Intersecting with tensions in art are tensions around the web and its overlapping corporate, commercial, and communal uses. deviantART brought together a diverse set of art worlds and creative practices via a seemingly conventional set of interfaces, features, and functionality. In turn, participants on the site helped manifest, reproduce, and transform these tensions in art practice and web use. These findings illustrate flaws in conventional accounts of creativity in a world with the web—accounts that fail to recognize the active, contested, and ongoing work underlying the mutual production of creative practice and the web.

For Roxanne, who captured my hand, head, and heart

Contents

Acknowledgments

The sociologist Howard Becker begins his seminal account of art worlds with the novelist Anthony Trollope's acknowledgment of a man who diligently brought the author coffee each morning. Becker uses this vignette as an entry point into seeing how authors' and artists' activities and creations are embedded in worlds of collective activity and social conventions—"art worlds." As Becker explains, the very definition of "artist" is a product of these worlds. During fieldwork, I encountered another definition, quite different, yet equally thought-provoking. While wandering around at a comic book convention observing the scene and looking for people to talk to, I picked up a postcard that stated simply: "An artist is someone who finishes things."

The acknowledgments in dissertations, papers, and books tell a story between these two definitions of the artist/author. Like the story of Trollope and his servant, acknowledgments provide a tiny window into the worlds that, in another place or time, could just as readily accept those same rewards and burdens. At the same time, they accept the rewards and the burdens of finishing something. Acknowledgments sometimes read like confessions but also like a deep sigh of relief, a weight the author can finally shake off as if no one knew that she or he had a wealth of help from numerous sources (which, of course, everyone did know all along). Yet, in place of one burden there is another: giving proper credit to people and organizations, naming some but not others, hoping not to forget anyone, but knowing that cuts have to be made.

There is a sizable world of people that could claim some piece of authorship and ownership in this dissertation, though I suspect all involved would readily deny or disavow their share (and some people may never know their place in my years of writing, such as the DJs at KCRW or the baristas at Philz Coffee).

I owe a significant debt of gratitude to those people who opened up their art worlds to me, whether for lengthy interviews, short conversations, or even a quick email. For various reasons, I will not name them individually, and I hope they can forgive me for this possible transgression. The members of deviantART—the site at the center of my investigation—taught me much about art and the Internet. I owe extra thanks to those who granted me permission to reproduce some of their work here (these are mentioned by name in the text). I also want to thank Angelo Sotira and Josh Wattles for their particular contributions. Bay Area Artists Unite deserve a special mention as well. This wonderful and incredibly generous group of people transformed this project in so many ways that are difficult to enumerate here. My time with them in the Artist Alleys provided me with invaluable insights and inspiration, not to mention joy and fun in the middle of a very difficult undertaking.

Peter Lyman introduced me to social research and showed me the way into an ethnographic project. He passed away before he could see me enter into this one, but even still, Peter's advice

Christo Sims, Janaki Srinivasan, Ryan Shaw, and Megan Finn have been those rare people who have been the best of colleagues and friends at the same time. I have been unable to put into words their part in this work.

This last sentence can be reiterated about Paul Duguid. This dissertation is partially a product of a four year tutorial that evolved into and out of mutual trust and respect. Numerous books and dissertations mention Paul's name in their acknowledgments. I have come to understand what their authors meant by what they said about him and the form of generosity they were acknowledging.

Finally, there is my wife Roxanne. She survived from beginning to end. Her love anchored me just enough to stay sane but also kept me in motion so that I would finish. The finishing of this dissertation is dedicated to her.

Introduction

In this dissertation, I examine how young artists use the web to distribute their work and in the process produce the web as infrastructure for creative practice. I contribute to academic debates about the nature of media production practices and creativity in relation to the changes in the contemporary media landscape associated with the term "Web 2.0" and "social media." Specifically, I analyze the ongoing use and transformation of a website called deviantART, self-described as "the world's largest online community of artists."[1] I argue that conflicting ideals of art, creativity, and the web, when put into practice, have shaped both the site as infrastructure and its members' socially recognized identities as "creators." To make this argument, I draw attention to how several long-standing tensions in artistic practice intersect with other tensions concerning the apparent nature of the web. With respect to art, these tensions relate to the grounds for artistic recognition; ways of improving and demonstrating artistic seriousness; and concerns over property and theft. With respect to the web, the tensions concern the web as a domain of corporate, commercial, and communal activity. As these tensions intersect, they give rise to new ones that help create deviantART as technical and ideological infrastructure. I investigated these issues through two years of ethnographic fieldwork on deviantART and other venues where artists gathered. My findings illustrate flaws in conventional accounts of creativity in a world with the web. These accounts fail to recognize the active, contested, and ongoing work that fashions the mutual production of creative practice and the web.

Two conferences that I attended a year into my fieldwork help to frame the contrast between the picture I paint in this dissertation and conventional wisdom. At these conferences, both held at the University of California, Berkeley, guest speakers and participants, scholars and practitioners, addressed important concerns at the intersection of digital media, the web, and creativity. The first was the "Free Culture Conference." The organizers advocated for a "free culture": "where all members are free to participate in its transmission and evolution, without artificial limits on who can participate or in what way."[2] Their mission was to use the "democratizing power of technology

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[1] http://www.deviantART.com

[2] http://www.freeculture.org, last accessed on June 7, 2010 (archived at: http://web.archive.org/web/20100609003714/http://freeculture.org/). The organizers were the Students for Free Culture (SFC), a group founded in 2003, which as of this writing has 40 chapters (30, when I attended the conference in Fall 2008). The *Wikipedia* article on SFC suggests that the organization's inspirational figure is the legal scholar Lawrence Lessig, who was a distinguished guest at the conference I attended (see: Wikipedia contributors. "Students for Free Culture." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. November 30, 2010. Web. July 6, 2011). In his book *Free Culture* Lessig (2004:8) defines the term by contrasting it with legally "controlled" or "regulated" culture as well as "permission culture." See also a longer discussion in Lessig 2002 (in particular pp.

and the Internet" to "slowly, but surely" end "injustice and oppression" by building and promoting a "bottom-up participatory structure to society and culture, rather than a top-down, closed proprietary structure."[3] As a part of this mission, a core objective was the promotion of "creativity and innovation."[4] The "Free Culture" conference featured a mix of scholars, activists, technologists, artists, and other practitioners discussing a range of topics brought together by this shared agenda.

Less than a month later, I attended another conference called "Takeovers and Makeovers," organized by a center on the UC Berkeley campus aimed at studying what was "new about each new media from a cross-disciplinary and global perspective."[5] Narrower in scope and featuring a more academic slant than the "Free Culture Conference," "Takeovers and Makeovers" brought together scholars from the humanities, arts, technology, and the law, as well as practitioners in these domains, to investigate "artistic appropriation, fair use, and copyright in the digital age."[6]

The conferences' themes overlapped in the areas of digital media, creativity, art, and copyright law, and some of the same scholars and practitioners were in attendance at both.[7] Although the issues emphasized by attendees differed between the two conferences, people at both argued or speculated that a new generation of artists and media producers, well versed in the new digital tools of the Internet and web, were developing new web-oriented cultural practices along with new concepts of creativity. These young creators were challenging older notions of creativity and many of the old institutions that regulated it. In short, there seemed to be a basic formula underlying these particular claims: New Technologies + New Generation → New Cultural Practices and Conceptions of Creativity.

Over the year prior to the conferences, I had spent many hours each week on deviantART, interviewing some of its members. The site exemplified the terms on the left side of the above formula. Anyone with access to the Internet could set up a profile of themselves, upload their

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11-12). SFC promoted the conference I attended as the first that was not a small regional conference, but organized as an organization-wide conference that was "large scale" with a "real budget" (roughly $10,000). See http://bcnm.berkeley.edu/blog/2008/10/free-culture-2008-international-conference-berkeley-ca-101108/, last accessed on June 7, 2010.

[3] http://www.freeculture.org/manifesto, last accessed on August 28, 2008 (archived at: http://web.archive.org/web/20080602075532/http://freeculture.org/manifesto/).

[4] "Creativity and innovation" were one of several core objectives in making a free culture. The other three objectives were "communication and free expression"; "public access to knowledge"; and "citizens' civil liberties." See http://www.freeculture.org, last accessed on June 7, 2010 (archived at: http://web.archive.org/web/20100609003714/http://freeculture.org/).

[5] Rather than sponsored by an organization based around political advocacy, "Takeovers and Makeovers" was organized by students of UC Berkeley's Center for New Media (BCNM) in conjunction with various academic departments spanning the arts, law and policy, rhetoric, film, and the humanities. The quote in the text was the particular framing when I attended the conference (archived at: http://web.archive.org/web/20080708191859/http://bcnm.berkeley.edu/about/). While this dissertation is partly in fulfillment of the Designated Emphasis in New Media issued by the BCNM, and I have been affiliated with the BCNM since I began graduate school, I was not involved in conceiving or organizing "Takeovers and Makeovers."

[6] http://bcnm.berkeley.edu/takeovers/, last accessed on June 7, 2010 (archived at: http://web.archive.org/web/20090304172811/http://bcnm.berkeley.edu//takeovers//).

[7] Some of the same people from the campus and outside organizations were in attendance at both. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were more critical voices at the academically-oriented "Takeovers and Makeovers" than at the activist-oriented "Free Culture Conference."

work, keep online journals, establish connections with others on the site, comment on each other's art and writing, and socialize through comment threads, forums, and chat rooms. The bulk of the site's members were relatively young, either teenagers or young adults still relatively early in their artistic "careers."[8]

Conclusions cannot be drawn as easily, however, with respect to the right side of the formula. Certainly, I had observed activities that felt new to me and even to some of the people with whom I had spoken. For example, several teenagers described how deviantART had helped to expand the audience for their work. Others found role models and even long-term mentors among deviantART's diversely experienced membership. I observed participants who had amassed hundreds, if not thousands, of fans, many of whom were regularly providing feedback. I frequently found myself comparing what I had seen and heard to recollections of my own experiences growing up in the 1980s and 1990s as a child and teenager passionate about drawing comics and even momentarily aspired to a career as an illustrator. I was amazed, sometimes even envious, at what these young artists could access through deviantART. The site—and the web more generally— provided these young artists with audiences they most likely would not have had otherwise. New technologies helped distribute artwork to these audiences in new ways and provided further means to continue to be reproduced and distributed.

Paradoxically, part of what felt so new to me about the ability to post work to the web was how these young members of the site were forced to confront challenges with which many previous generations of artists had grappled. For example, I noticed many who felt compelled to defend their decision to regularly post their drawings of characters from the *Harry Potter* series, Japanese anime/manga shows, and other books or shows from public attacks by other members who had claimed that these creators were simply seeking "popularity" instead of creating art for its own sake or for the passion and love for the endeavor. One fifteen-year-old girl told me how upset she was that she had seen her work, as well as the work of artists she admired, being repurposed, posted in new contexts to other websites, and in some cases used on commercial products without permission. Others wrestled with how much influence their newfound audiences should have on their work. New technologies had helped to create a situation in which new generations of artists were forced to confront old concerns and even adopt old positions. Seeing these old concerns surface repeatedly on deviantART and get addressed by many of its young members gave me reasons to question some of the conclusions, even the assumptions, of the formula New Technologies + New Generation → New Cultural Practices and Conceptions of Creativity.

The formula's conclusions and assumptions should not, however, be seen in a vacuum. In many respects they match conventional wisdom as well as many important scholars' views. The development and widespread use of Internet technologies and platforms, like deviantART, grouped under the labels "Web 2.0," "social media," "social software," and so forth, have led to both celebratory and critical accounts of their social and cultural implications. The debate concerns the nature and implications of "user-created" or "user-generated" content that people post online. Terms such as "co-creative labour" (Banks and Deuze 2009), "prosumption" (Beer and Burrows 2010), "pro-am" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004), and "produsage" (Bruns 2007, 2008) signal

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[8] Through the dissertation, I use the past tense in my descriptions of the site, emphasizing that my observations occurred in specific moments in time and that various aspects of the site and how people use it are likely to have changed since the writing of this dissertation.

changes to the relationship between people and organizations in how media is created, distributed, and used. Scholars who are particularly celebratory of these changes see them as evidence or heralds of "participatory culture" (Benkler 2006, Jenkins 2006, Shirky 2010) or "free culture" (Lessig 2004), organized around new forms of "social production" (Benkler 2006). In these accounts, new media have helped people unleash their creativity and generosity (Shirky 2010) in noncommercial, collaborative, community-based, and democratic ways.

Others look at user-created content and Web 2.0 through more critical lenses. Some embrace the revolutionary description of the changing media landscape but cast the implications as detrimental to traditional culture (Keen 2007). Others challenge the claims of newness and whether the abstract descriptions of Web 2.0 match empirical reality (e.g. Kruitbosch and Nack 2008, Scholz 2008, van Dijck 2009, Kreiss et al. 2010, Schäfer 2011). Critics raise concerns over the anti-democratic users of Web 2.0 platforms (e.g. Cammaerts 2008, Hindman 2009, Morozov 2011). Some point to a decrease in personal privacy coupled with an increased susceptibility to control and surveillance by governments and corporations (e.g. Jarett 2008, Zimmer 2008a, Zittrain 2008). Some critics point to the potential for corporations to exploit people through their "free labor" (Terranova 2004, Scholz 2008). Finally, several authors argue that the framing of Web 2.0 and accounts by its celebrators produce a false sense of homogeneity with respect to technologies, platforms, and the practices of users (Banks and Deuze 2009, Beer 2009, van Dijck 2009, Schäfer 2011).

In contrast to universalizing the web, recently scholars have provided empirical material that points to the diversity of ways of using the web in media production, distribution, and consumption, which in turn are tied to particular platforms, media type, industries, and practices. Examples include detailed analyses of class and digital production in the United States (Schradie 2011), the work of Swedish music fans (Baym and Burnett 2009), aspiring musicians' use of MySpace (Suhr 2009), uses of YouTube (Burgess and Green 2009, Lange 2007b, 2010, Vonderau and Snickars 2009), and photographers' uses of Flickr and other sites (Miller and Edwards 2007, Van House 2007, in press, Cook 2011, Cook and Teasley 2011).[9] This dissertation adds a new empirical case study to this emerging body of work.

Debates about Web 2.0, social media, and user-created content often concern people who are ostensibly the avant-garde in their use of new digital media: so-called "digital natives" (Prensky 2001, 2011) or the "net generation" (Tapscott 1998, 2009). The digital natives thesis posits that a new generation "born digital" (Palfrey and Gasser 2008) is using technology in radically different ways, producing new cultural sensibilities, and bringing about massive societal shifts. Over the past decade, scholars from a variety of fields have thoroughly debunked the technological and generational determinism implicated in broad claims. A growing number of studies of children, teenagers, and young adults reveal considerable differences in their experiences and their technological sophistication, making any claims for a universal "digital generation" untenable (e.g. Buckingham 2006, Herring 2008, Ito et al. 2010, Livingstone and Hesper 2007, Thomas 2011).[10]

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[9] See also Faulkner and Melican 2007, Luther and Bruckman 2008, Marshall and Shipman 2011, and Ploderer 2011.

[10] See also Bennett et al. 2008, Facer et al. 2003, Hargittai and Hinnant 2008, Hargittai 2010, Helsper and Eynon 2010, and Jones 2010. There have been, of course, many studies over the past five years of particular types of websites, such as social network sites and blogs. Here, I am focused on particular forms of content production

Yet, even scholars who have demonstrated the diversity in youth digital media use continue to point to a subset of young people actively engaged in content-creation activities as exemplars of the promise of Web 2.0, a new "Generation C" (Bruns 2008) fluent in "new media literacies" (Jenkins et al. 2006, Palfrey and Gasser 2011).

According to the logic of these arguments, if there were any group of people with whom to investigate claims made about Web 2.0 and user-created content, it would be these young "creators" using new web technologies in their media-production practices. However, as is the case with the relative lack of qualitative investigation of user-created content in general, there have also been few empirical studies of youth content production and distribution through new platforms. Over the past half-decade, revealing surveys have provided a high-level sense of the numbers of teenagers or young adults who post media online, the kinds of technologies they use, and how differences in use may relate to categories such as gender, race, education, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and age (e.g. Hargitttai and Walejko, Lenhart et al. 2010, Livingstone and Hesper 2008, OECD 2007).[11] But as surveys they do not provide much insight into how people go about doing what they do, what such activities mean to those engaged in them, and how these activities relate to the particular web technologies they use. These are all questions that must be considered in order to address the broader claims.

This dissertation aims to fill a part of this gap and in doing so question many of the claims made about Web 2.0 and the young producers who have incorporated the web into their content-creation activities. A better understanding of the new media landscape and peoples' participation in it requires grounding claims in the specifics of the technologies and platforms in question (van Dijck 2009, Schäfer 2011) as well as the young participants' activities (e.g. Ito et al. 2010).

When I embarked on this project, deviantART presented itself as an excellent case at the intersection of the phenomena in the debates that I have briefly summarized. I began with a long list of research questions: how did participation in deviantART matter in the careers of its "artists"? What were they doing on the site? How did the site facilitate or hinder learning "art"? In what ways were people connecting with one another, and what was the nature of the subsequent relationships? How was the site organized and structured? What kinds of features did deviantART offer to help people develop audiences? Were there identifiable patterns of social behavior or norms on deviantART? Did these norms relate to the site's features and, if so, in what ways?

As I continued to refine this study, I came to see my undertaking as an investigation of people, their identities as artists, their activities, and technology, all in relation to each other. This stance builds on a theoretical approach to *practice*, which helped me to consider the site and its members in a new way.

1.1   A practice approach to creative identities and infrastructure

By a *practice* approach, I mean one that combines two commitments. The first is a commitment to observe and analyze people's on-the-ground "practices": what they do and what they say (Schatzki

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rather than these sites of everyday conversation and communication.

[11] See also, Corrin et al. 2010, Dutton et al. 2009, Ewing and Thomas 2010, Kalmus et al. 2009, MPFS 2010, Ferri et al. 2009, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008, van den Beemt et al. 2010a, 2010b.

1996). The second is to adopt a theoretical approach to social life that sees these individuals' practices and social structures as mutually constitutive: each produces the other.[12] I am drawing primarily from Lave and Wenger's (1991) discussion of identity transformation in relation to their participation in communities of practice, or "the social worlds" of "practitioners" (29). From this perspective, people's practices and identities produce and are produced by the "social loci" in which historically and culturally situated practices occur (Duguid 2005, 2008).

My perspective also incorporates the concept of "social worlds" (Strauss 1978). As I develop further in chapter 3, such a perspective provides a theoretically useful complement to the notion of "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991) as a way of analyzing collective action, particularly that of artists (Becker 1982). Social worlds are "a set of common or joint activities or concerns, bound together by a network of communication" (Strauss 1982, citing Kling and Gerson 1978). These worlds consist of participants' activities, forms of membership, sites, technologies, and media (Strauss 1978). Strauss describes the concept of social worlds as a lens to analyze "the phenomenon of men participating in the construction of the structures which shape their lives" (1978:123), a point that resonates with some versions of practice theory, including Lave and Wenger's (1991), Dreir's (2007), and others (e.g. Giddens 1979).[13]

A practice perspective helps avoid reducing either identity or technology to social structure. It also helps avoid the pitfalls of constructivist approaches or those that ascribe too much agency to individuals. Such a perspective works against tendencies to generalize or universalize based on common appearances, for example features of websites. Rather, it asks why people make things common or appear to be so. A practice perspective is also attuned to questions of temporal and social context. It provides a way of thinking about a world in which youth—or anyone—are molded by the historical and the social, while at the same time they help produce the contexts in which they participate (rather than merely existing in them).

I use this practice perspective to elaborate two other concepts that I bring to bear on my fieldwork. The first is that of *creative practitioner*, or "identity-as-creator," an identity rooted in one's creative practice. Participation in creative worlds and recognition by other participants shape such an identity. This concept emphasizes the fact that being a creator is usefully seen as a product of a social process rather than a descriptive label for someone who makes things.[14]

The second concept is a socio-technical understanding of *infrastructure*. Infrastructure is not simply technology that exists in the background and enables activity; it also consists of the values, social conventions, and organizational systems of practice (Edwards 2003, Lievrouw and Livingstone

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[12] In Lave and Wenger's (1991) case, the use of practice in this latter sense is indebted to Marx's notion of Praxis as well as Bourdieu's (1977) use of the term to strike a balance between agency in structure with respect to historical forces (see also Duguid 2008).

[13] This is the key bridge between Strauss and some version of practice theory, despite the social world perspective's emergence out of symbolic interactionism, which some might see as quite different from practice theory (e.g. Ortner 1984). Nevertheless, there is no unified "practice theory" (Schatzki 1997), though Ortner (1984), Reckwitz (2002), Warde (2005), and Postil (2010) provides a synthesis of key elements as well as positioning them in relation to other broad categories of social theory. It as much an opposition to other theories as it is something internally coherent (see Hobart 2010). I further explain my approach in chapter 3.

[14] I am not suggesting that labeling one who creates as a "creator" is wrong-headed in all circumstances. But a practice-based approach opens the door for a line of fruitful inquiry.

2006). These elements only become *infrastructural* in relation to a set of organized activities (Star and Ruhleder 1996). They are continuously produced in practice. The value of this concept of infrastructure to my study is in how it brings together questions of identity, social worlds, and practice together with material technologies and social norms (Star and Ruhleder 1996, Bowker and Star 1999). This view of infrastructure also points to the work required to turn things—material, symbolic, or discursive—into infrastructure or maintain them as such. It also highlights the ambiguity of technology in relation to practice as well as the tensions that constitute it or that it may help hide though not necessarily resolve.

1.2   Research questions and objectives

With this practice perspective in mind, I orient this dissertation around a pair of broad research questions that encapsulate those I mention above and that orient them in relation to each other: How does participation in deviantART shape young creators' socially recognized identities as creative practitioners? How does the process of recognition as creators contribute to the production of the site—by both members and designers—as infrastructure for creative practice? To rephrase: To what extent, in practice, are identities as creative practitioners and deviantART as infrastructure mutually constituted?

In addressing these questions, I aim to accomplish several objectives. The first is to provide "a more critical and contextually rich analysis of Web 2.0" (Beer 2009:991), a contribution to the growing body of qualitative research on young media makers' uses of the contemporary web and to use this material to interrogate some of the universalizing claims made about Web 2.0, creativity, and youth (which I develop in more detail below). deviantART shares much in common with others examples of Web 2.0 and social media platforms: its set of features; what its members are able to do with it; how they interact with one another; how it aggregates, organizes, and displays content and user activity; and, finally, the intersection of community ideals and commercial activity.[15] deviantART is, however, oriented around the concept "art." This results in seemingly familiar interfaces and concerns taking on a unique character that distinguishes deviantART from both general purpose social network sites, such as Facebook, and sites organized around a single type of media, such as YouTube or Flickr. I argue that deviantART is shaped by the ideological work of users and designers. I argue that if there is anything universal about the web, it is this conclusion rather than anything inherent in its nature.

My second objective has to do with the difficult terms "art" and "creativity."[16] deviantART brings together various people and practices under the umbrella of "art," a term that has a long history of tying together disparate sets of activities (see chapter 3). Similarly, "creative" and "creativity" are terms that can be used to capture quite different human capacities, ideals, and practices (Banaji et al. 2006, Hallam and Ingold 2007). Influential social psychologists have also sought to decenter the individual in the study of creativity (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Sociologists have long argued that artworks and the recognition of people as "artists" or "creators" are the products of people and organizations acting collectively—though not necessarily collaboratively—in "art worlds" (Becker 1982) or "fields" (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). In academic circles, these different approaches have

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[15] I re-introduce Web 2.0 below and detail these commonalities in chapter 2.

[16] These are, as Williams (1983) argues, historically related to one another.

helped undermine accounts of artists or creators as genius, an ideal inherited from Romantic thought originating around the turn of the 18th century in Europe.

The web has made such collective activity more explicit and visible to analysts and participants alike. Indeed, as I elaborate further in this chapter, many of the claims about Web 2.0 and its social implications rest on the belief that creativity is not just collective but also communal and collaborative rather than individual, and that creativity is democratic rather than exclusive (e.g. Benkler 2006, Jenkins, 2006, Lessig 2008, Shirky 2008, 2010). The web is rich with examples of people's "symbolic" (Willis et al. 1990), "vernacular" (Burgess 2007), and everyday creativity. In my study of deviantART, I observed important continuities of Romantic conceptions of art and creativity that persist and shape the site and the practices of its users and designers. This suggests that features of the contemporary web can be just as powerful for upholding such Romantic ideals of art and creativity as for undermining them.

My final objective concerns the fact that participants' assumptions of commonality with respect to both the nature of art and the nature of the web result in a unique set of dilemmas on deviantART. Staff and members contend with these dilemmas and in doing so shape the development of the site: its features, norms, conventions, and uses. As I argue in this dissertation, these features, conventions, and uses are related to, though not necessarily the same as, those found on the web at this historical moment. I hope that when people look back at this period, this detailed study of deviantART will demonstrate how many of the evolving conventions of the web were formed in practice or, if such conventions fail to materialize, how and why this might be the case.

1.3 The Web 2.0 creativity consensus and critics

Scholars and the broader public have used the terms "Web 2.0" and "social media" to correspond to a diverse set of changes in the media landscape due in part to the growing importance of the Internet, the web, and the co-evolving practices of using them.[17] Tim O'Reilly and colleagues identified several characteristics of "Web 2.0" applications when they coined the term.[18] First was the idea that websites could be feature-rich applications continually updated and modified in real time: "software-as-service."[19]

The second characteristic was the leveraging of user activity, framed as "participation," in the ongoing development of these applications in variety of ways. Web 2.0 applications were built

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[17] As I detail in this section, there is agreement neither upon definitions and applications for these terms—whether they are appropriate in the first place—nor upon the scope of the claims.

[18] Publisher Tim O'Reilly and colleagues coined the term "Web 2.0" in 2004 and used the term to outline what they saw as a common set of characteristics or "design patterns" to the web-related technologies and applications in businesses that had survived the "dot-com" crash in 2000 and/or had thrived in the interim (O'Reilly, Tim, "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," *OReilly.com*, September 30, 2005, last accessed June 15, 2011). While the label is often attributed to O'Reilly, O'Reilly credits Dale Doughtery, O'Reilly Media VP and *Make Magazine* publisher, with coming up with the label (O'Reilly, Tim, "Not 2.0?" *O'Reilly Radar*, August 5, 2005, http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2005/08/not-20.html, last accessed June 15, 2011).

[19] Rather than software as a downloadable application installed and managed by those using the computer(s) on which the software was installed.

around the content that users themselves produced, commonly referred to as *user-generated content* (UGC) or *user-created content* (UCC). Data about user activity were aggregated and re-used in ways important both to the businesses that owned the sites and to users themselves as feedback shaping their experiences. Schäfer (2011) usefully distinguishes "user-created content" as "explicit participation" from "user-created data" as "implicit participation."

Finally, this participation occurred in groups or "communities" organized by pre-existing social relationships or niche interests.[20] O'Reilly and later Jenkins (2006) referred to this group participation as "collective intelligence." Inspired by theorist Pierre Lévy (1997), Jenkins (2006:27) writes that "Collective intelligence refers to [the] ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members. What we cannot know or do on our own, we may now be able to do collectively."[21]

The concept of "social media" or "networked social media" points to similar characteristics. Cool (2008) defines "networked social media" as the "nexus of (1) user-generated content (aggregation/participation), (2) social design/social networking, and (3) computer-mediated community" (2008:16-17).[22] While some people (such as Cool) prefer one term or the other, in popular usage the terms often are used interchangeably when it comes to technology. They may refer to the specific platforms (e.g. blogs, social network sites, wikis, and virtual worlds). Or, they may refer to the particular functionality of those technologies (e.g. interfaces for commenting, posting status updates, linking with "friends," voting on content, "sharing" content across multiple platforms in a variety of ways, and so forth). When describing technology, the terms may refer to any or all of these characteristics eliding all other differences.

Both terms connote much more than a specific business model or set of technologies. Allen (2008) describes Web 2.0 as a "conceptual frame, a "convenient short-hand" for "ideas, behaviours, technologies, and ideals all at the same time." As Zimmer (2008b) puts it,

> Web 2.0 represents a blurring of the boundaries between Web users and producers, consumption and participation, authority and amateurism, play and work, data and the network, reality and virtuality. The rhetoric surrounding Web 2.0

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[20] Or what O'Reilly ("What is Web 2.0?…", 2005) and Anderson (2006) refer to as the "long tail" of content on the web. Editors on Wikipedia suggest that Anderson may have been drawing upon media scholar Clay Shirky's (2003) discussion of the relationship between power laws and the proliferation of blogs (see: Wikipedia contributors, "Long Tail," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Long_Tail&oldid=432819761, accessed June 16, 2011).

[21] While the notion of "collective intelligence" was central to O'Reilly's framing of Web 2.0 in 2005, he does not attribute his source of the term. Depending on the degree of coordination or collaboration by participants in these groups, collective intelligence seems similar to the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki 2004), the idea that large distributed groups may collectively reach a better outcome than experts or small deliberating groups (see also Sunstein 2006).

[22] Cool prefers the label "networked social media" because it avoids the marketing purpose of Web 2.0 and incorporates non-web technologies (such as email, mobile text messaging, and instant messaging). She stresses "networked" to emphasize that all media are "social." In addition to the characteristics that Cool associates with networked social media, the implications of "software-as-service" and the relationship between designers and users of these platforms that come with the "Web 2.0" are important aspects of the these sites, including deviantART. With less specificity, Barnes (2006) defines "social media" as "media that support social collaboration…. an umbrella concept that describes social software and social networking."

infrastructures presents certain cultural claims about media, identity, and technology. It suggests that everyone can and should use new Internet technologies to organize and share information, to interact within communities, and to express oneself. It promises to empower creativity, to democratize media production, and to celebrate the individual while also relishing the power of collaboration and social networks.[23]

Similarly, "social media" fuses technical descriptions with ideological connotations related to empowerment (Schäfer 2011). Thus, both terms are equally ideological and technical.

The language used to frame descriptions of the phenomena under examination partially reinforces ideological connotations. Shafer (2011:37) writes that the "positive connotations" of the label "social media" comes with the language of empowerment as well as the idea that such empowering activity is a "community experience…perceived as a social phenomenon rather than a commercial one." Raymond Williams (1983:76) points out that what distinguishes "community" as a term from terms used to describe "all other terms of social organization" is that community "seems never to be used unfavorably," thus giving it a "warmly persuasive" connotation. Or, as Bauman (2001) put it, the word "'feels good'" (quoted in Pentzold 2010).

Celebratory, at times utopian, claims about the contemporary web and user-generated content rest on arguments about the nature and significance of user-created content anchored in a set of "warmly persuasive" terms that "feel good." Along with community, these terms include participatory, social, collaboration, and, finally, creativity.

1.3.1 A creativity consensus

Inspired by Kreiss et al. (2011), I describe here a particular vision of creative production tied to Web 2.0 and social media as a "creativity consensus."[24] I draw primarily from key texts by several influential scholars who exemplify these perspectives: Henry Jenkins (2006), Clay Shirky (2008, 2010), and Yochai Benkler (2006). None of these authors explicitly mention Web 2.0 (with the exception of a passing reference in Jenkins et al. 2006), and only Shirky employs the term "social media."[25] Yet, there is a clear alignment between their arguments and the technical and ideological framing (van Dijck and Nieborg 2009).[26]

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[23] Similarly, Allen (2008) writes that beyond "approaches to the design and functionality of Web sites and the services they offer" or "a business model…using the Internet to put people and data together in meaningful exchange," Web 2.0 also refers to "services and activities that permit or create a new kind of media consumer who is more engaged, active, and a participating in the key business of the Internet: creating, maintaining and expanding the 'content' which is the basis for using the Internet in the first place…. [and] a political statement of a kind of libertarian capitalism… [with] politics…expressed in traditional democratic terms emphasizing freedom of choice and the empowerment of individuals….'democracy' as a state of affairs within the Internet itself. On this last point, see also Johns (2010), who traces aspects of the history of this rhetoric, but also notes the particularly recent close relationship between ideology and technology in claims made about the Internet and web (see specifically pp. 256-262). I return to this point in chapter 8.

[24] Kreiss et al. (2011) describe a "peer production consensus" that focuses on Benkler's (2006) theory of social production and to a lesser extent Jenkins' (2006) account of "convergence culture." There is clearly overlap with their framing of this consensus and the one I develop here.

[25] Of these books, only Shirky's were published after the term "social media" entered widespread use (and even

1.3.1.1 The democratization of media production and creativity, enabled by new technology

According to the creativity consensus, the web has democratized content production and distribution.[27] New technologies "lower barriers to participation and provide new channels for publicity and distribution" (Jenkins 2006:152). The web thus fosters "grassroots creativity" as "everyday people take advantage of new technologies" (Jenkins 2006:136). Similarly, Shirky (2008, 2010) argues that new Internet technologies have ushered in an "explosion of creative and generous behaviors" (2010:184) as people "are increasingly producing and sharing media" (2010:22). Technology provides the means by which everyone is becoming a content producer, thanks to "the Button Marked 'Publish'" (Shirky 2010:49). Finally, the technologies that undergird the new "networked information economy" help create a culture in which "all persons…help shape the world of ideas and symbols in which they live" (Benkler 2006), a realization of a vision of "semiotic democracy" (Fiske 1987, see also Zittrain 2008:92).[28]

Such activity is the expression of people's innate "creativity." The contemporary web has allowed everyday creativity to flourish. Jenkins (2006:152) suggests that technology allows people to act on their latent "creative impulses." Similarly, according to Benkler (2006), all people have an innate "will to create and communicate with each other" (52). In Benkler's account this latent creativity is the key resource allocated and transformed by new technologies in the networked information economy. New networked practices, Benkler argues, qualitatively transform the everyday "creative play" (2006:275) of fans and audiences, and "far outstrips anything" previously possible. By framing all user-created content activities as "creativity," this democratization of content production rests on a democratic vision of creativity. Or, as van Dijck and Nieborg (2009:860) put it, "all users are equally creative and are created equal."

Such a democratic vision of creativity does not come with the claim that all creative products are of equal quality. Jenkins, for example, suggests that the vast majority of the products that emerge from "grassroots creativity" might be "gosh-awful bad" (2006:136), but that given the greater quantity of creative products, there will be a corresponding distribution in their quality, as well as more opportunities for improvement through feedback. Similarly, Shirky describes gaps in quality in the content people post to the web, but the "real gap is between doing nothing and doing something" (2010:18). Referencing a wildly popular Internet meme, Shirky (2010:18) writes, "the stupidest possible creative act is still a creative act."

Jenkins' and Benkler's major works were published just as "Web 2.0" was popularized). Still, for various reasons, they may have been specifically avoiding the term.

[26] As van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) demonstrate, there are clear parallels between what they describe as "Web 2.0 business manifestos" and Jenkins' Convergence Culture, parallels that I see equally extendable to the writings of Benkler and Shirky (as well as texts they have influenced, such as Bruns 2008 and Lessig 2008). With regard to "business manifestos," van Dijck and Nieborg take aim at Tapscott and Williams' *Wikinomics* (2007) and Leadbetter's *We-think* (2008). Van Dijck and Neiborg suggest that these books are a part of the tradition of the marriage between communalism, capitalism, and new technology Turner (2006) traces. While I agree with the authors that there are parallels, with Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*, I do not think they apply to more recent writings by Jenkins, such as Green and Jenkins (2009). Separately, Kreiss et al. (2011) identify several similar claims in their discussion and critique of the "peer production consensus."

[27] This is a view shared by many others as well (e.g. Becker 2002).

[28] Similarly, hybrid terms such as "prosumer" (Toffler 1980, Beer and Burrows 2010) and "produser" (Bruns, 2007, 2008) reflect the role of "consumers" and "users" as media producers.

1.3.1.2 Creative production is social and collective and anchored in "community"

Not only do new technologies "make more people more creative more often" (Shneiderman 2002), but also such creativity is the product of social and collective acts, anchored in community. Benkler (2006) describes the production of "information" goods, which include symbolic, digital content, as "social production." In doing so, he notes that people act collectively and collaboratively, even in situations in which they are not aware of the fact that they are doing so (see also Kreiss et al. 2011 on this point). Shirky (2010:119) argues that "social production" is an "increase in our ability to create things together, to pool our free time and particular talents into something useful" and this in turn "is one of the new opportunities of the age, one that changes the behaviors of people who take advantage of it."[29] For this reason Shirky (2008:83-84) calls attention to the fact that UGC is a "group phenomenon" rather than an individual one, "not a personal theory of creative capabilities but a social theory of media relations."

Shirky (2008, 2010) argues that new technologies supply the resources for creative production tied to people's communication, community-building, sharing, and self-organizing. Shirky (2010) carefully and repeatedly links technology-enabled "creativity" to "generosity" and "sharing."[30] Social media make community formation and sustainability easier than before, and then those tools enable those communities to be forces for transformative action, as they allow people first to share with each other, then to collaborate, and finally to act collectively (Shirky 2008, particularly chapter 2). Even when creativity is not explicitly communal, the web allows people to harness "collective intelligence" as they go about their creative activities (Jenkins 2006). Finally, Jenkins' (2006) account of the contemporary media landscape rests in part on a vision of grassroots creativity greatly enhanced by community formation online.

The link between creativity and community is central to several senses of the concept of "participatory culture." As I elaborate later in this chapter, the emphasis on this term is primarily on "participatory," with the complex term "culture" remaining taken-for-granted. Extending a tradition of audience research in cultural studies, Jenkins (1992) demonstrates that television fans are "active audiences" not only in the way they view and interpret media texts but also in their production of fan texts in various media forms that in turn can undermine the presumed authority of people institutionally positioned as "producers" (e.g. studio workers). Thus, they help constitute a participatory culture. In *Convergence Culture* Jenkins (2006:290) defines participatory culture as one in which "fans and consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content."[31]

Jenkins et al. (2006:7) provide a different definition that shifts the concept to refer to a particular type of social formation with precise characteristics:

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[29] Shirky draws explicitly on Benkler when using the term "social production."

[30] For example, Shirky argues "we are increasingly producing and sharing media" (2010:22), an "explosion of creative and generous behaviors" (2010:184).

[31] Jenkins' and other early uses of the phrase "participatory culture" in the context of media studies (e.g. Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992) left this term as a rather unspecified concept to describe the collective, productive activities of people positioned by media industries as media "consumers." See, however, Sakolsky (1989) for a theoretically rich use of the term grounded in Marxist theory. Sakolsky, like later users of the concept, relates participatory culture to creativity occurring outside of the workplace.

- "low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement";
- "strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others";
- "informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices";
- members' belief that "their contributions matter";
- members' feeling of "some degree of social connection with one another" or caring about "what other people think about what they have created."

The first point refers to how technology enables participation. The remaining four points provide a warm sense of "culture" that sits easily with a warm sense of community. The authors emphasize social relationships that bolster individual action and the psychological well-being of people who are members of such participatory cultures (Kreiss et al. 2011).

1.3.1.3 Non-commercial motivations and a nonmarket endeavor: a part of "participatory culture"

The social-psychological aspects to Jenkins et al.'s (2006) particular definition of participatory culture relates to a third theme found in celebratory claims: the noncommercial motivation of content producers as well as noncommercial nature of the broader endeavors framed by Benkler and Shirky as "participatory culture."

A widely cited OECD report lists "creation outside of professional routines and practises" as one of three core characteristics of the phenomenon (2007:8).[32] Rather than money, the OECD (2007:8) reported motivations such as "achieving a certain level of fame, notoriety, or prestige." The creativity consensus also stresses non-monetary motivations for people's creative production. Benkler (2006) and Shirky (2010) distinguish "intrinsic" from "extrinsic" motivation. Intrinsic motivations are those formed "from within the person, such as pleasure or satisfaction," while "extrinsic motivations are imposed…from the outside," including rewards and punishments (Benkler 2006:94).[33] The aforementioned OECD examples fit the latter. However, both Benkler and Shirky shift their arguments to an opposition of "market" and "nonmarket" motivations and rewards (or "money" and "social-psychological rewards") that are "dependent on culture and context" (Benkler 2006:97).[34] How well aligned or conflicted the two are is also situationally dependent (2006:97), but in all cases, "the two are not fungible or cumulative" (2006:96).

As individual motivations and rewards are non-commercial, the nature of the broader endeavor is as well. This non-commercial quality in turn informs both Benkler's and Shirky's descriptions of "participatory culture." Benkler's account of the social, collaborative, and nonmarket production of information goods is "radically decentralized," displacing (but not replacing) the "centralized, market-oriented production" that dominated the 20th century. Therefore, in Benkler's model, the

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[32] Though to be fair, the report is also careful that UCC is "hard to define and based on criteria which are likely to evolve in time."

[33] Benkler, as well as Shirky, draws upon psychologist Edward Deci's seminal framing of motivations along these two distinct types.

[34] Shirky (2010) reduces the non-commercial motivation to "love" (of the endeavor) and the rewards as "autonomy" and "competence" (2010:70-78).

two forms of production are conceptually distinct.[35] Similarly, Shirky (2008:84) argues that not only is UGC "social," it is an "amateur" phenomenon "with no professionals in sight."

According to Benkler, social production allows greater participation in the production of cultural products and affects how people interact with each other through them. "The process of cultural production" is "more participatory and transparent" (Benkler 2006:275). "Culture is more participatory" (ibid.) in that more people can transform the products of popular culture, or "remix them" into "shareable goods" (Benkler 2004, see also Lessig 2008). The process is more transparent in that the web provides new opportunities for people to self-consciously reflect upon culture in a way that is publicly accessible at an unprecedented scale (Benkler 2006:293). Given this apparent state of affairs, Benkler, like Lessig (2004, 2008), advocates for change in the intellectual property regime that can accommodate the social benefits of participatory culture.

Shirky suggests that the term "participatory culture" should not be necessary but has become so due to the split between "folk culture" and "commercial culture" in the 20th century. The 21st century, he argues, has featured a revitalization of a participatory culture rooted in everyday folk culture and in everyday, noncommercial creativity. Jenkins (2006) produces a nearly identical historical narrative (one shared by Benkler as well). Web 2.0 (or even "Web 1.0") did not make participatory culture possible, as his own earlier studies of fan production illustrate (Jenkins 1992). Rather,

> Though this new participatory culture has its roots in practices that have occurred just below the radar of the media industry throughout the twentieth century [what he describes as "folk culture"], the Web has pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity into the foreground (Jenkins 2006:133).[36]

What Jenkins then describes as "convergence culture" is when "participatory culture" collides with "commercial culture."

1.3.1.4   A revolutionary moment

The shared historical narrative illustrates that all of these claims see contemporary changes in the media landscape through disruptive, revolutionary lenses. In their accounts, the last decade or so has ushered in revolutionary changes with respect to the recent past, though the revolution, they also suggest, is conservative in relation to the more distant past. Jenkins describes the shift in the least revolutionary terms. His own prior research suggests slower changes, and unsurprisingly he argues that the revolutionary resurgence of grassroots creativity "probably started with the photocopier and desktop publishing; perhaps it started with the videocassette revolution…. But this creative revolution has so far culminated with the Web" (2006:136).[37]

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[35] Similarly, and drawing in part on Benkler, Lessig (2008) describes three different economies: a "sharing" one, a "commercial" one, and a hybrid." Lessig's account seems to be a self-acknowledged repackaging of the anthropological distinction between "gift" and "commercial" exchange (drawing particularly on the work of Lewis Hyde).

[36] See also Jenkins 2009 for a lengthier discussion of historical precedents in the context of amateur video. Johns 2009 provides a lengthier treatment of many of the same practices in his history of "piracy" (see also Johns 2010).

[37] While Jenkins, Benkler, and Shirky share a similar historicization of the submergence and resurgence of folk culture as participatory culture, of the three it is primarily Jenkins who suggests that such activities have had broader social implications in pre-Internet and web days than a simple reduction to "folk culture" suggests.

Of the three, Shirky depicts the break as the most disruptive. He argues that the current historical moment marks the "largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race" (2008:106). The "architecture of participation" (Shirky 2008:17 quoting O'Reilly "What is Web 2.0?") is "epochal" in the way it allows groups of amateurs to leverage their existing positive motivations into positive outcomes—a "tectonic shift" (2008:21).

1.3.2   Critical perspectives of Web 2.0 and the creativity consensus

Over the past several years, many authors have critically examined both general claims made about Web 2.0 technologies and what I have labeled the creative consensus. These critical perspectives hinge on observations made about web users' content production activities. These critiques do not map neatly onto the themes of the creativity consensus; I touch on each of them in reverse order.[38]

1.3.2.1   Revisiting claims of newness

Broadly speaking, critics challenge claims of newness on two dimensions. The first is technological. In the immediate aftermath of the coining of the term "Web 2.0" in 2004-2005, even within technology and business circles there was considerable debate over whether "Web 2.0" actually reflected anything new from the supposedly "previous" versions of the web and the Internet more broadly (Allen 2008).[39] Tim Berners-Lee, credited with developing several of the key technological innovations that constituted the web, dismissed "Web 2.0" as "jargon" (quoted in Cool 2008:16); others criticized the term as "vacuous marketing hype."[40] Scholz (2008) demonstrates that many of the platforms for content production and distribution—social network sites, wikis, and blogs, to name a few—originated in the era of "Web 1.0" or even earlier (see also boyd and Ellison 2007).[41]

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[38] Beyond the scope of this dissertation is one of the most prominent and public debates about the implications of Web 2.0 and social media: the relationship between new these new media and political democracy. Jenkins, Benkler, Shirky, and others all suggest that the democratization of content production has a direct relationship to liberal democracy. The rise of so-called "citizen journalism" and popular accounts of social upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa from 2009-2011 have been used to bolster claims that Web 2.0 and social media technologies are either inherently open and democratic or are primarily tools for democratic political action. Such arguments have been challenged (e.g. Hindman 2009, Morozov 2011). Sunstein (2001) argues that the advent of politically oriented news sites and blogs have led to "information cocoons" in which people pay attention only to those to whom they already agree and thus may be a counter to healthy democratic discourse (though he sees democratic potential elsewhere; see Sunstein 2006). Cammaerts (2008) similarly points out the various ways that blogging may lead to participation in some cases; there are numerous ways in which blogs can be used for anti-democratic purposes, both by actors seeking to colonize, censor, or appropriate people's voices and by blog authors themselves who work to silence one another or espouse anti-democratic values.

[39] Unlike software development releases, there had not been a notion of "versions" of the Internet or the web prior to the coining of "Web 2.0."

[40] Tim Bray, quoted in O'Reilly, "Not 2.0?" 2005.

[41] Though Scholz (2008) does note that user-created classification that could be easily shared, "folksonomies" did seem new in comparison to the other examples he mentions. O'Reilly ("What is Web 2.0?") himself noted that critics of the term as "Web 2.0" may well be right in terms of technologies, but that "the big picture" has demonstrated a traceable shift that results from the way software is delivered (via the Internet as a service, rather than product), user-generated content (both users' media and the related aggregated metadata), the resulting "collective intelligence," and the business models that leverage some or all of these aspects. In 2007 O'Reilly noted that "Web 2.0 was a pretty crappy name for what's happening (Microsoft's name, Live Software, is probably the best term I've

More important to my argument are critiques of ideological newness. Those who saw a possible return to the utopian, communalist, and democratic ideals of early Internet designers and users (Turner 2006) embraced the rhetoric of Web 2.0 (Allen 2008). Framing Internet and web use as "participatory" has a long-standing history in the development of the Internet and web (Schäfer 2011). Thus, Web 2.0 signaled a new opportunity to reframe an old position.

However, Schäfer (2011) does argue that there is something new in the contemporary reframing: the popularization of participation in content production within communities rather than merely access to others through the web. The "ideal of distributed creativity" has a long history (Johns 2010). This history has helped establish the Internet and web as developments in which "moral commitments and practices," that correspond to ideals of participation and democratization, "now *seem* inextricable from the technologies" (Johns 2010:257, emphasis mine).

A related set of critiques concerns the newness of the ideal of democratized creativity. While Shirky suggest that "The Button marked 'Publish'" (2010:49) has helped transform ordinary people from passive recipients of media to active producers, there is a long tradition in media scholarship that has looked at "active audiences" (van Dijck 2009).[42] According to those operating in this tradition, the viewing habits of media "consumers" prior to the Internet were generally more active and engaged than conventional wisdom presumed.[43] In fact, the active work of consumers was essential to the creation of a product's meaning and value. Becker (1982), Willet (2009), Jenkins (1992, 2009), and many others have pointed out that "ordinary folks" have produced things that could be called "creative work" and even "art" with relatively inexpensive, professional-quality tools—such as home movie and Kodak cameras—for much of the 20th century (the same could be said about pencils, ink, paints, brushes, and canvases going back even further). It is here that Jenkins' framing of the impact of the web is markedly different from Benkler's and Shirky's. As he puts it, "The Web has made visible the hidden compromises that enabled participatory culture to coexist throughout much of the twentieth century" (Jenkins 2006:137). I return to the notion of hidden compromises through the dissertation in relation to the production of infrastructure and revisit the web's surfacing of "folk culture"—"everyday creativity"—when I turn to questions of identity and practice.

1.3.2.2   Questioning the separation and easy alignment of "commons and commerce"

While hybrid terms such as "prosumer" (Toffler 1981, Beer and Burrows 2010) and "produser" (Bruns, 2007, 2008) evoke the role of "consumers" and "users" as media producers, the fact that consumers have long been content producers points to a need to further interrogate the purported relationship between these roles. Web 2.0 is said to reflect a blurring of the distinction between amateur and professional, but the continuing distinctions among non-market and market motivations, rewards, and spheres raises questions about such claims.

Several scholars have illuminated problems with the commercial-noncommercial distinctions of the creativity consensus. First, there are fallacies of labeling the motivations that Benkler (2006)

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seen)… Web 2.0 is not about front-end technologies. It's precisely about back-end, and it's about meaning and intelligence in the back–end" (quoted in Scholz 2008).

[42] See reviews in Livingstone 1993 and Morley 1993.

[43] This of course, includes Jenkins' body of work on fan culture.

groups under "social production" and the production of user-created content as nonmarket or noncommercial (e.g. Banks and Deuze 2009, van Dijck and Nieborg 2009, Kreiss et al. 2011, Scholz 2008). Studies of MySpace Music (Suhr 2009) and YouTube (Burgess and Green 2009) indicate the presence of content backed by financial motivations and rewards (whether posted by corporate entities or freelance creators).

Even if not all contributed content comes with a financial motivation or reward, content creators are often relying on distribution platforms (as well as production tools) governed by commercial entities. In other words, such activity is operating in a largely commercial economic sphere rather than a conceptually distinct sphere of nonmarket activity (Goldberg 2010).[44] As Goldberg (2010:747) contends, "participation is a commercial act. Every instance of participation involves a transfer of data which has been economized."

The Web 2.0 creativity consensus relies on an old distinction, one that points back to the problem of "culture" in the phrase "participatory culture." Based on Habermas' history of the transformation of the public sphere, Goldberg (2010) traces the separation of the commercial and non-commercial spheres to the early 19th century (see also Calhoun 1992). Williams (1960, 1983) points to the same historical period but argues instead for a shift in the use of the term "culture," a shift that took place around the same time as shifts in notions of democracy and art.[45] The modern sense of "culture," he notes, emerged partly from Romantic thought. The term was for the first time placed in opposition to economic and commercial activity. It also began to be used to specifically refer to the newly unified realm of "art" (Woodmansee 1994b).[46] Thus, the creativity consensus uses a Romantic sense of culture to help undermine a Romantic conception of art. Yet, at the same time the notion of culture in the phrase "participatory culture" slips from a general form of social organization to an affiliation with particular symbolic products, even if not accepted as works of art.

It is not only is the distinction between commercial and noncommercial spheres problematic; so is the easy alignment between "commons and commerce" (van Dijck and Nieborg 2009:865) and that between communities' and corporate interests. Corporate participants in these sites of activity—whether media companies or people who manage the technology platforms—hope to make money on creators' and users' efforts. User-created content is thus a form of "free labor" (Terranova 2000) that corporations can and do appropriate and exploit (Jarett 2008, Schäfer 2011, Scholz 2008, Silver 2008).[47]

When the notion of "participatory culture" is used synonymously with "folk culture" to refer to a separate sphere of activity as "commercial culture," it is easy to overlook these aspects of everyday content production. Indeed, as Jenkins argues in *Convergence Culture* (2006), "participatory culture"—defined by him as situations in which "fans and consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (2006:290)—help produce the

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[44] Lessig's notion of "hybrid economy" (2008) tries to get at this point.

[45] Along with industry and class.

[46] I develop this point further in chapter 3.

[47] This was a problem that Terranova identified with the possibilities of the Internet even prior to the coining of Web 2.0 or social media. The platforms associated with these terms, so the argument goes, have helped exacerbate the problem (Jarett 2008, Scholz 2008, Banks and Deuze 2009).

convergence of commercial and noncommercial activity and the mutual appropriation of those engaged in both through the same sites and the same forms of media.[48] The possible implications of this fact is lost in Jenkins et al.'s (2006) transformed definition of participatory culture (see above), which more precisely defines the term but does so without any implied references or relationships to commercial media production.

In framing the central debate as the contrast between people concerned with exploitation and those celebrating participatory culture, Banks and Deuze (2009) are skeptical of the broad claims proposed by what I call the creativity consensus. Yet, they also argue "co-creative relationships [between "consumers" and "producers"]…cannot easily be reduced to one of simple manipulation" by media companies. They correctly point out that even critics such as Terranova (2000, 2004) and Jarett (2008) call attention to the ways in which users "pleasurably embrace" the activities in which they engage (Banks and Deuze 2009:424, citing Terranova 2004:216). "Mutual benefit" is possible, Banks and Deuze suggest (2009:426), but it takes a great deal of active work by all participants involved to make it so (also emphasized by Green and Jenkins 2009). Similarly, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argue that in an era marked increasingly by "prosumption," one cannot easily make nor dismiss claims of exploitation. What these authors imply, then, is a need to study the on-the-ground practices of consumers and producers, a point I return to shortly.

1.3.2.3   Attending to user-designer relations and questions of control

A rigorous analysis of the broader social and economic implications of changes to media industries and labor arrangements is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[49] However, considering these issues points to a third area of critiques of Web 2.0 and the creativity consensus. There is a general lack of attention to user-designer relationships and their different interests as it concerns the ongoing evolution of technology platforms (rather than only the analogous "consumer-producer" divide). Thinking about these relationships facilitates a focus on questions of control and agency in changes to sites as well as their stability.

Networked digital media may be equally disciplining and liberating of people's actions and creative production (Beer 2009, Jarett 2009, Pang 2009). User data, or "implicit participation' (Schaffer 2011), exposes people to an unwitting loss of privacy. Such data can expose users to personal risks and can be packaged and sold to third parties, such as advertisers and marketers (Zimmer 2008a).

Finally, because the technology of websites in the Web 2.0 model is delivered as a service rather than downloadable software, people may have given up too much control. Zittrain (2008) celebrates the personal computer and digital networks that connect them as fostering technical and artistic "generativity" and concedes that Web 2.0 technologies may further enhance the creative and artistic possibilities of users (as Benkler suggests). But, this advancement comes at a high social cost. In delivering "software-as-service" that is continuously operated by and tethered to companies

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[48] For a more rigorous account, see Schafer's (2011) framing of the situation as an "extended culture industry" in which corporations extend into consumers' activities and consumers extend themselves into corporate processes.

[49] Though I acknowledge, following Banks and Deuze (2009) and Hesmondhlagh (2007), the importance of such an effort.

and institutions, creative producers have relinquished control of the media and platforms they use in ways that are detrimental in the long run.[50]

1.3.2.4 Examining platform and technology specificity

There are two more critiques of Web 2.0, the creativity consensus, and even some of these critics. Claims and critiques of the contemporary media landscape should ground them in analysis of the specifics of platforms and user practices rather using such broad strokes. To do so, the concepts of *infrastructure* and *creative practitioners* prove helpful.

Concerns over corporate interests and control are tied to analyses of the underlying technical architecture of different platforms. Celebrators and critics of Web 2.0 vary in how much power they ascribe to technology and in their susceptibility to accusations of technological determinism. Yet, as some suggest, adherents of the creativity consensus tend to take various aspects of web technologies for granted.

> Although technology is assigned an important role, many discussions insufficiently analyse the extent to which technology influences emerging media practices. Technology is perceived as somehow magically enabling users to participate in collective production, especially in the discourse on participatory culture. Perceiving technology as having appeared out of thin air leads to a moral framing of participatory culture, which results in analyses dwelling excessively on 'good' or 'bad' consequences (Schäfer 2011:24).

Similarly, Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009:870) rightly point out that "the hidden 'magic' of Web 2.0 technologies remains conspicuously unquestioned by all promoters, whether business gurus or cultural experts. Echoing a principle of science and technology studies (STS), Schäfer (2011:24) argues that "Technology cannot be treated as a neutral black box." He suggests that more attention be paid to the fact that "The specific qualities of the technology stimulate or avert certain uses and thus influence the way technologies are used and implemented by consumers in society. These features affect both the design and user appropriation."

These critics all point out that what is happening beyond the interface or explicit user activity is important.[51] Although I agree, I also argue that there is still much to be gained by taking a more careful and critical look at even the visible interfaces of the web. A more critical stance is important because it is discussions of what happens at the interface that drive many claims of Web 2.0 and social media. Van Dijck (2009:45) notes that in celebratory accounts of the new media, there has been "neglect of the substantial role a site's interface plays in maneuvering individual users and communities." For example, YouTube's ranking algorithms and promotional tactics greatly shape user experience, but are opaque to users and objects of manipulation tactics. Burgess and Green (2009:41) correctly point out that the popularity metrics on YouTube

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[50] Here Zittrain applies Lessig's (1999) formulation of code as law. For a similar critique of "software-as-service" see the free software proponent Richard Stallman's "Who does that server really serve?", *GNU.org*, http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/who-does-that-server-really-serve.html, last updated September 20, 2011, last accessed November 21, 2011.

[51] Along these lines several authors have analyzed the relationship between algorithms, data, and power (see Beer 2009, Goldberg 2010).

> …are not representations of reality, but technologies of re-presentation. Because they communicate to the audience what counts as popular on YouTube, these metrics also take an active role in creating the reality of what is popular on YouTube: they are not only descriptive; they are also performative.

In my analysis not only are such interfaces "performative" but also they are used as resources for various people to make normative and moral arguments about "how the web works." The value of this approach is that it allows me to take head-on some of the claims made about the nature of creativity online, claims which themselves are based on explicit forms of participation through seemingly standard and conventional interfaces. In other words, while it is important to look at the dynamics operating less visibly in the background, I do not want to cede the foreground at the interface.[52]

Using a practice-informed, socio-technical concept of *infrastructure* helps in constructing my argument. As a relational concept the question that arises is how tools, social conventions, values, and norms are made "to work" and to disappear into the background—to become *infrastructural* to the practices of people and social worlds. As I explain in chapter 3, infrastructure helps align different worlds, conventions, and values that may exist in tension with one another.

1.3.2.5   Investigating practices: conflict and identity

This section presents the second part of a practice-based critique of Web 2.0 and debates around the creativity consensus. Although there is insufficient attention paid to the specificities of various technologies and platforms, there is also a dearth of detail in accounts of the practices of people using them. This lack of data is important given the breadth of the claims made. There are two consequences of this second deficiency.

The first concerns the scant discussion of conflicting interests and outright conflict among the people who use these platforms. The categorization of people as users, consumers, producers, and so forth can homogenize their interests, as do generational claims with respect to people's activities (see below).[53] The continual emphasis on the social, collaborative, and, most importantly, community-oriented depictions of everyday creativity underscores the lack of attention to conflict. The deep tie between the rhetoric of Web 2.0 and the language of "community" and "collaboration" in discussions of user-generated content does a great deal of ideological work to set up particular oppositions and overlook others. Benkler (2006) barely addresses questions of conflict, limiting the topic to discussions of competing interests around intellectual property and other policy concerns. Focusing on people "organizing without organizations," Shirky (2008) relegates questions of conflict to a few provocative stories of protest movements, ordinary people rallying to overcome injustice, and user protests against actions or changes to platforms made by their corporate owners. Jenkins (2006) better draws readers' attention to the conflicted nature of the new media landscape but is primarily interested in the conflict between fans and big media companies. Green and Jenkins (2009), who develop Jenkins' arguments further along these lines, still argue for a need to align the two "moral economies" (drawing on the historian E.P.

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[52] As Alan Liu (2004:158-173) demonstrates with respect to the importance of the standardization of graphical user interfaces in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the diffusion of corporate culture into everyday life, interfaces should be central objects of an analysis.

[53] This is a fault I do not entirely escape in this dissertation

Thompson) of consumers and industry. Nowhere is there a sense of deep divisions among fans themselves or even among other "ordinary" users, who may in some cases align themselves with companies against other "ordinary" people.[54] Users may even differ over what the key terms of the discussion—creativity, culture, community, sharing, and so forth—mean or should mean in relation to their own practices.

Paying attention to the details of practice means being aware of the possibility of discord, difference, and even outright conflict, despite the prevalence of the language of "community." For example, Burgess and Green (2009) detail the framing of a certain subset of YouTube users as part of the "YouTube community" (or "YouTubers") but also point to these participants' divergent and conflicting reactions to various issues on the site.[55] Observing frictions not simply as the opposition of consumers and producers, or even platform users and designers, but as opposition among users as well, allows Burgess and Green (2009) to anchor their findings in the co-existence of commercial and non-commercial motivations and activities on the site. Also paying attention to everyday practice, Baym and Burnett (2009:442) show how some Swedish fans of independent music actively and self-consciously "balance…tensions between empowerment and exploitation." These fans' activities come with different rewards as well as anxiety and stress. Suhr (2009) analyzes the activities of musicians on MySpace and observes conflicts between those seeking exposure and those already popular. This raises familiar questions about the value of going "mainstream" and the marketing goals of people already established in the mainstream music industry, and helps produce a "crisis of value" on MySpace.

The analysis and findings of Baym and Burnett (2009) and Suhr (2009) also point to the second consequence of a lack of detailed accounts of user practice: the need for research that pays more attention to questions of identity and forms of agency developed in these practices and constituted through the use of new platforms (Banks and Deuze 2009, van Dijck 2009). I argue that doing so will also raise questions about the use of the term "creativity," particularly with respect to its apparent democratization.

The creativity consensus validly draws attention to the rich examples of "vernacular creativity" (Burgess 2007) and "symbolic creativity" (Willis 1990) evident on the web. While these particular concepts do not refer to exactly the same thing, like Jenkins' (2006) notion of "grassroots creativity" they connote a democratic view of "everyday creativity," one that contrasts with an elite view that ties creativity more closely to notions of genius. Such everyday creativity is manifest in the photographs people post to sites like Flickr (Burgess 2007, Cook et al. 2009, Van House 2007, 2011), videos on YouTube (Burgess and Green 2009, Vonderau and Snickars 2009), the customization of MySpace profiles (Perkel 2008), and so forth. I am not going to argue that such democratic views of creativity are incorrect or misguided. Indeed, they have been quite helpful in drawing attention to the social significance of various forms of people's activity (such as the compelling examples discussed by Jenkins and Shirky).

However, as Ito et al. (2010, in particular chapter 6) point out in their study of teenagers' and young adults' use of digital media, there are also people whose use of the web has helped them self-

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[54] This is also a feature of Lessig's writing on the need to change copyright law through the lens of arguments that often pit individual Davids against corporate Goliaths (see Lessig 2004, 2008).

[55] Such as well-establish media celebrities' use of the site and other controversies.

consciously develop identities rooted in their creative practices. I refer to these people self-consciously fashioning identities as creators, who seek to be socially recognized for the media they produce, as *creative practitioners*. Thus, rather than approach the web with a particular definition of creativity in hand, taking a practice perspective asks the question of how creative practitioners themselves shape the discourse and practices associated with creativity. The empirical question to be answered is whether and how the use of the web by creative practitioners may look in comparison to those whose identities are more closely tied to other aspects of their everyday lives and whose "creative" products are by-products of those activities.

In combination, the lack of detailed attention to specific technologies and practices results in many universalizing claims about Web 2.0 by celebrators as well as critics. Such claims are an old problem in research on the Internet (and media in general). As Banks and Deuze (2009), van Dijck (2009), and Schäfer (2011) imply, there is a renewed need to "disaggregate" Web 2.0, just as Hine (2000) argued over a decade ago in response to the first decade of Internet studies. The practice perspective necessitates attention to both technology and user practices tied to identity. It also means examining how these two aspects help produce each other. The notions of *infrastructure* and *creative practitioners* are my theoretical support for doing so.

1.4   A new generation of youth creators?

Adopting a practice perspective—one that attends simultaneously to the specificity of technology and practices through the lenses of infrastructure and the identity of creative practitioner—will also guide my approach to examining the activities of people purported to be at the forefront of the use of contemporary digital media: a new generation of content creators. The debates about the nature and implications of Web 2.0 have dovetailed with another set of claims and arguments about those who have grown up with digital technology. Silver (2008), who is otherwise deeply skeptical about the claims made about Web 2.0 and social media, argues that there is "hope" in a new "writable generation":

> A generation of young people who think of media as something they read and something they write…. a generation of content creators, a generation of young people who with the help of Web 2.0 tools know how to create content, how to share content, and how to converse about content…. This is a new generation with new writeable behaviors and it's hard not to be hopeful about that.

Such hopes echo claims of a "net generation" (Tapscott 1998), "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), and people "born digital" (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). What these perspectives have in common is the argument that a new generation of the population has grown up immersed in a world of digital technology and that the combination of the two is either resulting in radical changes or the need for such changes to keep up.[56] The argument for a digital generation is a combination of technological *and* generational determinism.

Scholars have debunked these claims both theoretically and empirically. A number of studies of children, teenagers, and young adults reveal considerable differences in their experiences and their

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[56] In the case of Prensky (2001), the differences between digital natives and immigrants are neurological as well as "social."

technological sophistication (Bennett et al. 2008, Bennett and Maton 2011, Buckingham and Willet 2006, Facer et al. 2003, Hargittai and Walejko 2008, Hargittai and Hinnant 2008, Hargittai 2010, Helsper and Eynon 2010, Ito et al. 2010, Jenkins 2007, Jones et al. 2010, Livingstone and Helsper 2007, Selwyn 2009, Thomas 2011).[57] Claims for a universal digital generation are untenable. Yet, as Bennett and Maton (2011) and Jones (2011) point out, the notion of a digital generation remains a powerful and persistent force. Bennett and Maton (2011:175) attribute such persistence to several factors, one of which they refer to as a "certainty-complacency spiral."[58] The "certainty-complacency" spiral refers to situations in which "belief and commonsense perceptions replace evidence and rigorous research." The "sheer weight of repetition" coupled with "complacent, uncritical acceptance" reinforces the spiral.

There is a form of technological certainty in Shirky's celebration of social media. Like critics of the "digital natives" perspective, Shirky (2010:121) writes that claims of "innate generational difference" are "one of the weakest notions in the entire pop culture canon."[59] "Generational differences," Shirky argues, should be read as "environmental differences" (2010:123) rather than psychological ones (in contrast to Prensky 2001, 2011). Social media are simply a part of the world that young people inhabit; they are the key "environmental" factor that Shirky takes into consideration. Today's youth, he argues, take these new technologies for granted. They do so not because they are particularly more knowledgeable or prone to be "digitally wise" (see also Livingstone 2010) but because their very naiveté makes them more prone to not see things in established ways, as their older counterparts do (2008:303-4). In other words, "generations do differ, but less because people differ but because opportunities do" (2010:121). Those opportunities "are enabled by technology but built by people" (101). Therefore, despite the research that questions any broad theory of generational difference, whether psychological or "environmental," Shirky remains convinced.

Technological rather generational certainty also persists in recent attempts by digital natives proponents to modify earlier claims. Prensky (2011) notes that the term "native" was intended to be a loose metaphor and that demographics will soon make generational differences obsolete. Rather, there are people who exhibit "digital wisdom"—"homo sapiens digital"—and those who do not (Prensky 2011). "Digital enhancements" produce the wisdom that "transcend[s] the generational divide" (Prensky 2011:20). Individual and societal success relies on becoming digitally wise. Therefore, while Prensky avoids the idea of generational certainty, the technological certainty and a softer form of determinism persists (Jones 2011).

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[57] This is the argument that ties together most of the chapters in Thomas 2011. Buckingham (2007) and Selwyn (2003) argue that the bulk of generational claims that concern the media are caught up in efforts to define a commercial market for the distribution of products or media content.

[58] The other two factors they describe are moral panics and historical amnesia. A moral panic is "a form of public discourse that arises when a group is portrayed as representing a challenge to accepted norms and values in a society" (Bennett and Maton 2011:173). Buckingham (2000) has demonstrated there are historical patterns of moral panics related to the use of media. That such panics are often either forgotten or are marked by claims of radical breaks from the past speaks to Bennet and Maton's (2011) concern of historical amnesia. Claims of a net generation obscures the history of similar claims of a techno-generational rupture made in previous times as well as the history of the domain about which such claims were made.

[59] Here, Shirky seems to be offering his own critique of Prensky's original digital natives thesis.

Palfrey and Gasser's (2011) reconsideration—but continued justification—of their particular use of the term "digital native" is a hybrid of Shirky's and Prensky's recent arguments. Like Shirky, they are concerned with environment. But unlike Shirky and like Prensky, they narrow their claims to a specific segment of the youth population.[60] Some young people, they argue, "are born *into* a digital *world*" (2011:189, original emphasis). Digital natives are a "population, and not a generation, of young people who use technology in relatively advanced ways" (2011:188). While Palfrey and Gasser note that there are differences even among this group, they argue that there "may be an emerging global culture of young people using technology in similarly sophisticated ways" (190).[61] They identify four characteristics of this "sophisticated" population, two of which are participating in social network sites to express identity and creating media rather than only consuming it, "the one that makes academics the most excited" (Palfrey and Gasser 2011:194).[62] Like the scholars in the creativity consensus, they imply a hierarchy of creativity, with coding software, maintaining blogs, creating personal web pages, remixing media, or posting original work as more creative and posting status updates and commenting on other users' social network site profiles or blogs as less creative, yet still important (2011:194-195).

Palfrey and Gasser, in turn rely on Jenkins et al.'s (2006) influential notion of "new media literacies" as a set of "social skills and cultural competencies" required to engage in technologically enabled participatory cultures. Some have achieved these literacies and others have not, creating a "participation gap" (Jenkins et al. 2006). Some are part of a "Generation C" (Bruns 2007, 2008), where the "C" stands for "content creation," sometimes extended to "creativity" (Kalmus 2007).[63] The C applies to other important skills as well. Generation C is marked by being "critical, collaborative, creative, and communicative" (Bruns 2007:104) in their engagement with technologies. This generation contributes to the "'the ongoing demise of many beliefs, rituals, formal requirements, and laws modern societies have held dear'" (Bruns 2007:104, citing a 2004 Trendwatching article).[64] The identification of new media literacies and Generation C rest on the creation of differences between digitally savvy content creators and those who are not, differences tied to particular uses of technology.[65]

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[60] Palfrey and Gasser demonstrate considerable knowledge of the previously cited empirical research that debunks claims about a digital generation.

[61] Some of these are based on their own cross-cultural studies. Palfrey and Gasser's views are quite similar to those of Howard Gardner and colleagues who write, "Are all youth digital natives? Simply put, no. Though we frame digital natives as a generation 'born digital,' not all youth are digital natives. Digital natives share a common global culture that is defined not by age, strictly, but by certain attributes and experiences related to how they interact with information technologies, information itself, one another, and other people and institutions. Those who were not 'born digital' can be just as connected, if not more so, than their younger counterparts. And not everyone born since, say, 1982, happens to be a digital native. Part of the challenge of this research is to understand the dynamics of who exactly is, and who is not, a digital native, and what that means" (quoted in Jenkins 2007).

[62] The other two are task switching and expecting that all media should be available to them digitally.

[63] Bruns takes the label itself from the marketing organization Trendwatching. Generation C is marked by "creative engagement in content development."

[64] "Generation C", *Trendwatching*, first published in 2004, http://trendwatching.com/trends/GENERATION_C.htm, last accessed November 20, 2011.

[65] Both Bruns and Jenkins et al. are admirably concerned about the inequalities such differences might create. As Bruns (2007:6) puts it, "It is self-evident that a strongly divergent distribution of such capacities across society would today already have markedly negative consequences, as it would mean inter alia that opinion and debate in

Identifying an adept subset of young Internet-savvy media producers also marks much of the international survey work on teenagers' and young adults' use of the web.[66] These surveys do a lot of work to undermine claims made by the original "digital generation" thesis by demonstrating the diversity of young people's engagement with media. Yet, in demarcating a particular set of youth as exemplars of a "Generation C" or "new media literacies," they also imply a hierarchy in which people who are active content creators and distributors are at or near the top. Even if not all youth are "digital natives" or even members of "Generation C," there is still an ideal of a particular kind of young person: someone actively engaged in digital media, a critical content creator as well as consumer.

Given these arguments, analyzing youth content creators' practices should provide considerable insight into the debates about Web 2.0 and creativity. However, there have been few empirical studies of youth content creators using these platforms. Surveys have provided high level overviews of different forms of content-creation activities by teenagers and young adults who purportedly make up the digital generation (see appendix A). But, the surveys do not provide much depth into how these people go about doing what they do, what such activities mean to these creators, and how these activities relate to the particular web technologies they use—all questions that need to be addressed to address the broader claims.[67]

Buckingham et al. argue (2005) there is a dearth of research on how young people create and distribute media, particularly outside of school or after-school programs.[68] Over the past five years, several authors have taken the lead in addressing this gap. Black (2008, 2009) provides a rich account of three teenage fan-fiction writers and their use of FanFiction.net.[69] She shows how her informants' understanding of themselves as authors is tied to particular ways in which they use FanFiction.net's various features for framing their own work. Their audiences' particular uses of features for commenting and feedback also help to produce this sense of authorship. Scheidt (2006) and Stern (2008) argue that young writers wrestle with dilemmas that come with posting their writing online, such as the extent to which they desire feedback from others and frustrations when their efforts are not validated by others. Lange (2007b, 2010) explores related questions of identity and "technical affiliation" with respect to video creators' attempts to control the extent of their publicity on YouTube. For example, some participants in her study manipulated YouTube's tagging system to make some videos less discoverable and thus "publicly private" (Lange 2007b). Monroy-Hernández and colleagues (Monroy-Hernández and Hill 2010, Monroy-Hernández et al. 2011) analyze how the young participants in the Scratch programming community react to different features for remixing and crediting sources of their work.

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citizen journalism and the wider blogosphere, knowledge in the Wikipedia, software available as open source, and creative work in collaborative environments, would reflect the knowledge, interests, needs, values, and beliefs of only a narrow sub-section of overall society."

[66] See for example BITKOM 2011, Corrin et al. 2010, Dutton et al. 2009, Ewing and Thomas 2010, Hargittai and Walejko 2008, Hargittai and Hinnant 2008, Hargittai 2010, Kalmus et al. 2009, Lenhart et al. 2010, Livingstone and Hesper 2008, MPFS 2010, OECD 2007, Ferri et al. 2009, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008, van den Beemt et al. 2010a, 2010b.

[67] Not relating the numbers to practices leads to accounts in which statistics are used to support and argue against claims about youth, Web 2.0, and "participatory culture."

[68] In contrast there are numerous studies of creative production in school or after-school programs.

[69] http://www.fanfiction.net

Ito et al. (2010) synthesize multiple ethnographic case studies and illuminate some of the broader issues facing young creators online. The contemporary web, they argue, provides multiple pathways for young people as they create and distribute media. On the one hand, they describe "everyday media production" such as sharing digital photographs and videos with friends and family and customizing profiles on social network sites (Ito et al. 2010:251-261). On the other hand, they also describe the social dynamics of participation in activities and in websites that support people's pursuit of a more dedicated hobby, even a career, in some form of media production—what I describe above as creative practitioners. Ito et al. also note that the boundary between the two "is difficult to define" (290). Yet, the transitions from casual, everyday media production to the serious, intense pursuit of interests takes place as young creators address various concerns, including the desire for visibility, the construction of particular forms of status and recognition within content-creation groups, efforts to cultivate audiences, the link between specialization and collaboration in certain practices, and the diversity of youths' "aspirational trajectories."

The studies mentioned thus far raise important questions and provide starting points for analyzing the complexity of creative practitioners' use of Web 2.0 and social media. They highlight both the diversity of technologies and practices within case studies and common sets of considerations across them: the uses of particular technologies to engage people with shared creative interests; the navigation of social and ethical norms; concerns over publicity, status, and reputation; and finally, the development of a sense of mastery and craft in relation to particular standards of quality.

While the authors discussed are attuned to the specificities of particular platforms and media production practices, one important limitation of their work is that most take the technologies and sites discussed as given and unchanging, rather than considering that these creators are engaging with platforms that are developing over time. Whether due to their particular research questions, the scope of their projects, or their method (often interview based), the studies described above often present platforms and technologies in snapshots (though policy changes are sometimes foregrounded). This ahistorical view contributes to the "environmental" aspect of Shirky's (2010) arguments about today's youth. It produces a sense of stability of technical features and social conventions. This stability should not be taken for granted. Thinking about the technological "environment" as socio-technical infrastructure provides an alternative, more productive framing.

1.5   Outline of the dissertation

The next chapter presents a more detailed introduction to deviantART. I describe some of the site's features and outline its organizational structure as governed by deviantART, Inc, the for-profit company that has operated the site for the past decade. Both its features for networking around user-created content and the confluence of commercial and community ideals align deviantART with various understandings of Web 2.0 and social media.

In chapter 3, I further develop the concepts of *creative practitioner* and *infrastructure* through the lens of a practice perspective. I describe how, in theory, identities and social worlds are mutually constitutive and provide various concepts that highlight aspects of deviantART. I also discuss how individual artistic recognition is collectively produced in art worlds, focusing on the importance of distribution systems and resources. Finally, I argue that infrastructure brings together multiple social worlds of practice, is produced through existing tensions, and produces new ones. Such tensions provide a central point of focus for this dissertation.

Chapter 4 presents my research design and methods. Taking an ethnographic approach, I spent two years as a participant-observer on deviantART as well as in several other venues where members of the site hung out, socialized, and sold their work. This multi-sited approach (Marcus 1998) helped me to better understand practices and the debates on the site. Producing an ethnography of infrastructure (Star 1999), I focused on how members sought to position deviantART as infrastructure for different kinds of practices that were in tension with one another.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, I organize my empirical findings around three different sets of tensions. In each chapter, I look at how deviantART's designers and members positioned the site for different aspects of creative practice. I look at participants' diverse understandings of a "serious" creative practitioner, understandings shaped in relation to specific features of the site. Each chapter uses this material to address debates about the nature of creativity and the web.

In chapter 5, I examine the grounds for artistic recognition between visibility, "popularity," and quality. These concerns surfaced in members' attempts to "get noticed" via networking, the site's "popularity algorithm," and the site's awards. They also were salient in members' interpretations of the meaning and importance of the site's "popularity" metrics. The features in question relate to broader discussions of the democratization of recognition and the "wisdom of the crowds" (Surowiecki 2005).

In chapter 6, I turn to a second set of tensions that relate to members' attempts to position deviantART as infrastructure for improving and learning. I study dilemmas that arise within the context of two ways of improving. The first is the problematic notion of "critique" as a form of direct feedback. The second is the use of member-created resources known as "tutorials." These cases point to participants' creation of a binary between improving and marketing, even as the site's ongoing development reaffirmed their inseparability. With respect to broader debates about the web, arguments in this chapter complicate the ideals of "Learning 2.0" (Brown and Adler 2008), the extension of Web 2.0 ideals to education.

Finally in chapter 7, I examine a third set of tensions that are central to conversations about the nature of creativity in the era of Web 2.0. These are between "sharing" and "theft" as members of deviantART sought to control the circulation of their artwork. I look at the launch of deviantART's "Share Tools" and the contentious reactions that followed. Given that modern notions of authorship emerged out of debates regarding authored work as "property," this chapter covers material of considerable importance for participants. They also have import in relation to the broader rhetoric of "sharing" on the web and divisive debates about intellectual property.

I conclude the dissertation in chapter 8 by bringing together the main themes and examples from the previous three chapters in light of my research questions regarding the mutual production of identities as creative practitioners and deviantART as infrastructure. I revisit the creativity consensus and offer my own critique. At the same time, I offer suggestions for what might be new about art worlds with the web. Finally, I suggest future lines of inquiry in relation to broader debates about creativity in today's "information society."

With varying degrees of intentionality and awareness, participants in deviantART engaged with long-standing tensions in artistic practice that intersected with different ideals about the nature of the Internet and web. Participants produced the site as infrastructure for creative practice through their different uses of the site's features, the design of these features, and attempts to create a shared set of conventions and norms. I show how in practice the web is a differentiated medium. It

is one continually built through tensions, despite the reappearance of similar sets of features or technologies. The ongoing evolution of the web as infrastructure is shaped as much by conflicting moral, ethical, and ideological dilemmas as it is by technological changes. The debates among site participants and the broader academic debates about contemporary media platforms for creative production reflect a conflation of technological and ideological ideals of how art and technology do work and how they should work. Celebratory accounts of the web and the practices of participants in deviantART are both infrastructural practices attempting to conventionalize, standardize, and therefore naturalize a variety of heterogeneous uses of the web.

A Sketch of deviantART

In this chapter I provide an introductory description of deviantART and establish context for the material and arguments in the chapters that follow. I address two questions. The first is how does deviantART work? This is a question that a researcher might typically ask of a medium or a technology. The second question is how is deviantART organized? This question might be asked of a place or an organization. I came to see these questions and their answers as distinct yet inseparably linked.

I begin with an overview of the site. I then provide a brief description of several of the site's features and interfaces. Next, I describe the social organization of the site: its corporate structure, the way it organizes its members, and ways its members organize themselves. Also in these sections, I provide an introduction to "community" on deviantART. I conclude by introducing a set of tensions around deviantART as corporation, community, and *art* community that I carry through the chapters that follow. The history of the Internet and web has featured a tension between the appropriation of networking technologies for commercial and for communal uses (Cool 2008, Johns 2009, Turner 2006). deviantART was infrastructure that brings this tension together with others related to ideals of artistic practice.[1]

2.1   An establishing shot

deviantART.com was founded in 2000 and run by a for-profit company by the same name (hereafter "deviantART, Inc."). The "deviant" in the site's name relates with deviantART's origins as a site closely linked to people who customized the look and feel of various computer applications and thus "deviated" from original designs (see below). As part of site branding, members were referred to as *deviants* and their submissions as *deviations*. deviantART was free to join, though a

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[1] There is one important caveat. deviantART was constantly changing. The site changed through membership growth and the sheer quantity of materials added by its members and site staff, including new profiles, artwork, journal entries, news articles, forum threads, and comments on all of these. In this sense, the site was "co-created" (Banks and Deuze 2009) or "prodused" (Bruns 2007, 2008) by its staff and its members. In addition, the site changed as deviantART, Inc. periodically launched new "versions" of the site. These changes had significant consequences for the site's appearance, how its content was organized, and how some of its features worked. deviantART, Inc. also launched new features in between these major revisions, some of which were minor additions to the site, while others were major changes in functionality even if not labeled as a new "version" of the site. The version of deviantART a new member joined at a given moment in time might be quite different from the site someone else had joined earlier or later. A particular configuration of the site conditioned the way I experienced deviantART going forward, and presumably, other members had similar experiences.

small minority of its members opted to subscribe and become "Premium Members" (or "Subscribers"), which came with additional benefits (I return to these later in the chapter). When I began this project in the Fall of 2007, the front page of deviantART encouraged visitors to join the "largest art community in the world."[2] This reference to size might have referred to several key statistics.[3] At that time, the site boasted over six million members worldwide, with nearly 40 million pieces of uploaded artwork. The site had approximately 24 million unique visitors per month. As I was concluding fieldwork two years later, the site celebrated its 100-millionth submission. In mid 2010, the site's staff claimed over 14 million members, 35 million unique visitors per month, 67 million daily pageviews, and 1.5 million daily comments. These kinds of numbers helped position deviantART as the 122nd most trafficked website in the world.

The site was also "large" in the variety of submissions, embracing a broadly inclusive and pluralistic notion of art. deviantART accepted almost any form, genre, and style of visual media, covering any subject matter. The site displayed photography, painting, illustration, video, animation, comics, graphic design, user interface design, fashion, customization for software, prose, poetry, and even fonts or other digital media to be included within other work (referred to as "resources"). Some of this work was created using digital cameras, tablets, computers, and software to create purely digital products, while other work was made using physical media and then scanned or photographed. Within and across each of these media, the styles and subject matter also varied considerably.

One staff member told me that deviantART, Inc., "never try to never engage in the question of what is art" (fieldnotes). The site's extensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) equated art with personal expression in answering the question "what is deviantART?":

> deviantART is an online art community for artists and art lovers to interact in a variety of ways, ranging from the submission of art to conversations on a number of topics. In its purest form, deviantART is a means for expressing yourself in a variety of ways.[4]

As I argue throughout this dissertation, however, the question of who is an artist and what is acceptable artistic practice was often central in members' debates, even when not explicit.[5]

In the diversity of acceptable work as well as its emphasis on "art," deviantART differed from sites that specialized in particular styles and subjects (e.g. fan sites or comics sites), sites oriented towards particular media (e.g. as YouTube or Flickr), as well as general purpose social network sites (e.g. Facebook). There were, of course, many other art-oriented sites, though many of those specialized in a particular medium. The members of deviantART whom I interviewed typically

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[2] While this particular phrase is no longer on the site, it is still one of the ways that the CEO, Angelo Sotira, describes deviantART (Sotira, Angelo, interview by Eric J. Lawrence, *Guest DJ Project*, KCRW, August 9, 2011. http://www.kcrw.com/music/programs/gd/gd110810angelo_sotira. Last accessed August 9, 2011).

[3] See Appendix E for sources of statistics listed in this paragraph and a note on site on demographics.

[4] deviantART FAQ 116/117: "What is deviantART?" Hereafter, I abbreviate these references as "FAQ."

[5] Despite the site's "official" broad notion of art, there were limits. For example, while deviantART did allow some forms of nudity—as long as it was categorized correctly and labeled as "mature content"—it did remove work that the people who managed its policies deemed pornographic. Also, the site management removed anything that they felt could be construed as sexually suggestive depicting minors. It also drew some fine distinctions when it came to the incorporation of copyrighted material into other work, a concern I address in chapter 7.

were members of several other sites as well. From a content perspective, it was deviantART's diversity and lack of specialty in any one genre or medium that distinguished it from these other sites.

2.2 Laying things out: key features and functionality

deviantART incorporated a variety of features and functionality now commonly associated with Web 2.0 or social media. Here, I provide a brief tour of these features. Later chapters offer a deeper analysis of the different uses and interpretations of many of the site's key features.

Similar to social network sites, members' activity was associated with a *userpage* and profile through which they crafted presentations of themselves. Profiles on deviantART acted as textual and visual representations individual members. The profile provided a window into his or her activity on the site (figure 2.1). Like profiles on other sites, those on deviantART could be loosely thought of as members' "textual performance of self" (Liu 2007, drawing from Sundén 2003 and Goffman 1959). Hogan (2010) suggests that such profiles might be better thought of as gallery exhibitions rather than performances: people submit material to a third party that then re-distributes it in a manner such that submitter and eventual audiences do not interact synchronously. While members could choose to hide some data about themselves—their age, gender, real names, and some of the data about their activity—their userpages and the content they posted were public in the sense that anyone with a web browser could view them.[6] All content accessible through a member's userpage to other members was also widely public in this manner.[7] As public exhibitions, profiles, and userpages helped deviantART function as a distribution system for representations of its members as well as their artwork.

A central issue in scholarship on the web and Internet (e.g. Donath 1999, Castells 2001) concerns whether people represent themselves "accurately," that is to say with an "identity" in line with how they might be perceived offline. In my view, using the words of a long-time member I met, "people were who they said they were" (fieldnotes). It was unusual for people to be intentionally misleading when they chose to reveal certain pieces of information. There were several reasons for this authenticity, including being recognized consistently over time on deviantART, establishing a reputation, and maintaining a consistent identity and brand across various sites.

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[6] These pages, as well as almost all other pages on the site, were indexed by Google as well.

[7] One exception to this was content that had been classified as "mature content." A second exception came into being near the end of my fieldwork following deviantART's "Share Wars" (see chapter 7). One result of the Share Wars was that members could classify some of their work as viewable only to other members.
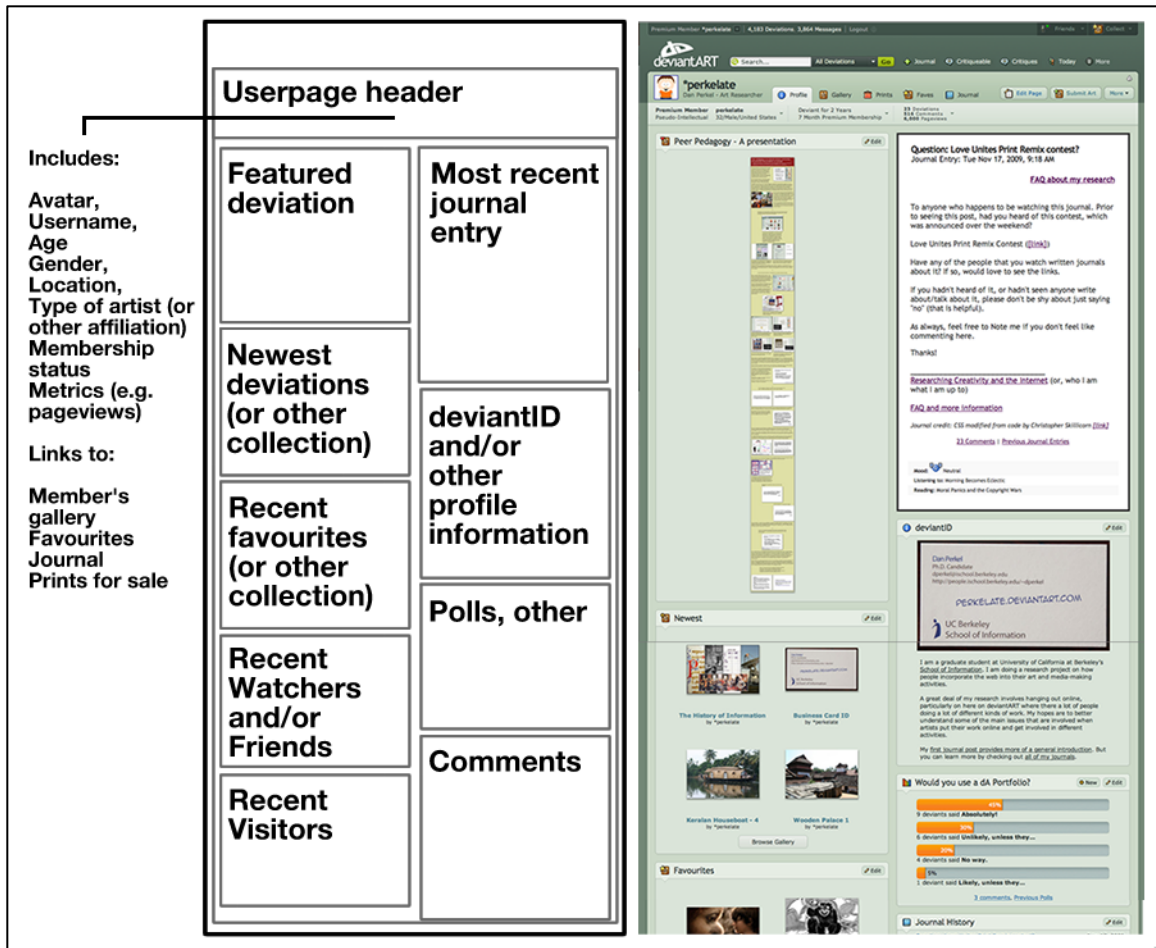
Figure 2.1: Elements of a deviantART userpage and profile

The diagram on the left provides the elements of a prototypical deviantART userpage. The image on the right provides a view, at a glance, of my own userpage (screenshot from February 25, 2009)

Nevertheless, various users had several reasons to change certain facts about themselves. Some were under 13, younger than deviantART's policies allowed, but pretended to be older. I heard stories of people who claimed to have been younger than they were to make themselves seem more technically proficient for their age.[8] I also learned of people who either pretended to be other genders or who were intentionally ambiguous.[9] Finally, there were cases in which people created multiple accounts. I came across several older teenagers who had changed their accounts over time because they thought that they had outgrown their old account. They wanted to change their usernames, shed "Watchers" (the people who signed up to follow their work) who they felt no longer paid attention, or dissociate their recent work from their older work.[10]

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[8] I never met anyone who claimed to have done this

[9] In one case, the person had no problem presenting herself as a woman in her writing and photographs of herself, despite having indicated that she was a male.

[10] With respect to multiple accounts, it was also common for people who submitted some of their photography as "stock" (photographs to be used as resources by others) in a separate account than their other work. This was

Profiles were portals to members' activity on the site and the content they posted. The profile linked to a member's personal gallery that contained the artwork—or, *deviations*—that he or she submitted. Individual deviations were housed on *deviation pages* (figure 2.2). Below the work was a space for "Artist's Comments." Members of the site used this open-ended area to introduce and describe the work in any manner they chose.
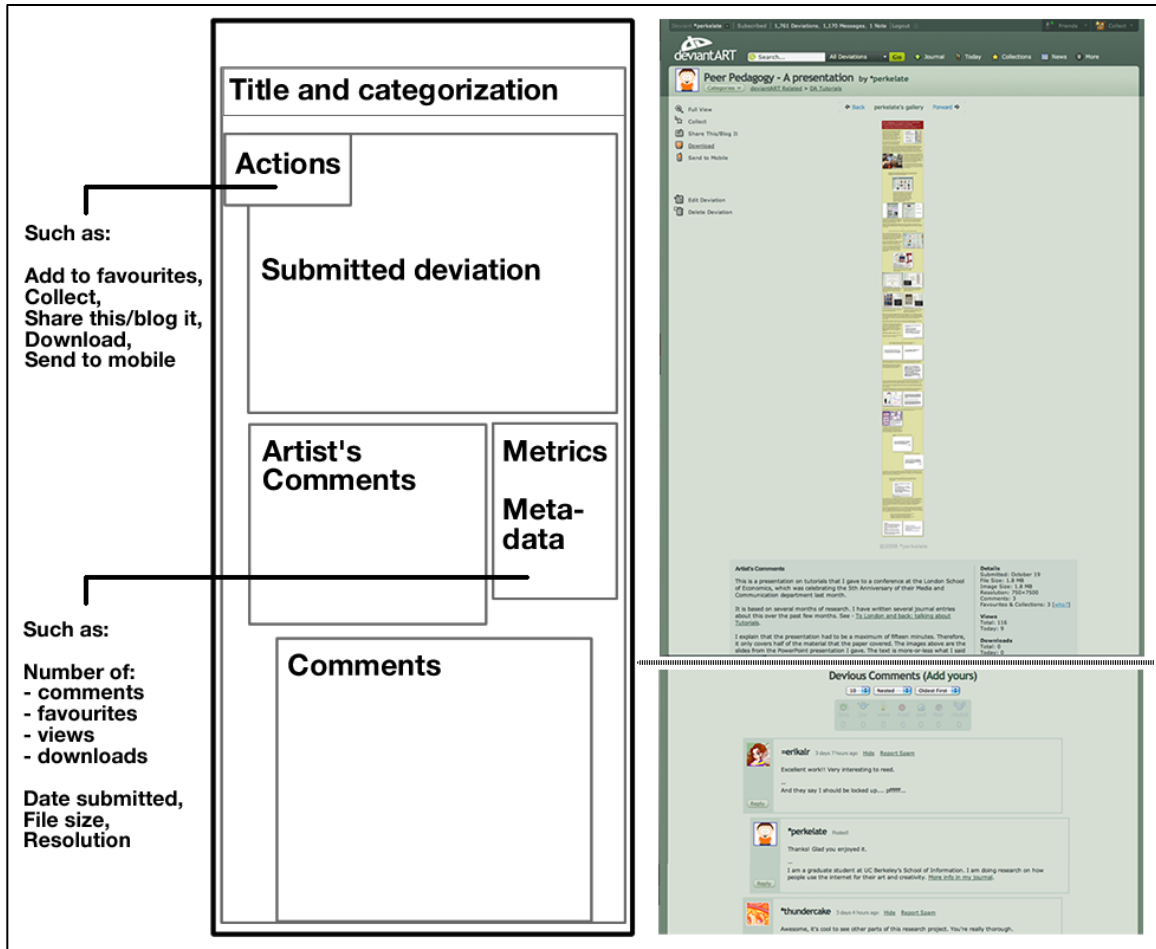
Figure 2.2: Elements of a deviantART deviation page

The diagram on the left provides the elements of prototypical deviantART deviation page. The image on the right provides a view, at a glance, of one of my submissions (screenshot from October 23, 2008).

The ability to receive feedback on work was one of the benefits deviantART, Inc. advertised to its members, and, more generally, one of the more frequently touted values of posting work online (e.g. Black 2008, Ito et al. 2010, Jenkins 2006). deviantART provided a number of means by which other members could provide this feedback.[11] They could leave comments and then engage

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generally to clear up confusion as to what kind of work was what, as well as create a brand for themselves as a stock producer.

[11] Visitors to the site who were not members could see all of this activity but only left traces through the count of the number of times the work had been viewed.

in further conversation; these conversations appeared below the work. Members could also add work to their gallery of *favourites* (or *favourite* the work).[12] As a result of visitor actions and feedback, deviantART displayed automatically generated metrics about the work.

Aside from posting artwork, writing in journals was an important aspect of using the site.[13] Journals, like blogs, were an open-ended narrative of text followed by comments from others. The topics of discussion in journals were wide-ranging. Some people talked about themselves and the mundane details of their everyday lives. Others provided descriptions of their art-related activities, such as the different projects they were working on, what events they might be attending, what equipment they were using, and so forth. Members also used their journals to make announcements about various projects, contests, and site activities. They solicited feedback and sought—and sometimes received—social, emotional, and even financial support through their journals. Journals provided means to sell commissions and raise money for other causes. Finally, journals were also important means to raise awareness of a concern and rally one's Watchers in support of political positions that concerned the site, art, or society in general.[14]

Site members could sign up to follow the different forms of content others posted to the site through a function called *Watching*. "Watched" content appeared in a member's *Message Center* (much like a newsfeed). Keeping up could be quite a challenge as one's Watchlist grew over time. Even though the person being watched would be notified in his or her Message Center when acquiring a new Watcher, it was not clear whether and when those Watchers were actually paying attention. Some people I observed had hundreds or thousands of Watchers and only heard from a fraction of them on a regular basis. A lack of response from Watchers could lead to anxiety and frustration. If one had many Watchers, however, too many responses could lead to feeling overwhelmed.[15]

Besides aggregating "watched" content, the Message Center was every member's personal communication hub on the site. It aggregated announcements from site staff, all comments, and notifications of received favourites or new Watchers. Members could also send private *Notes* to one another, which functioned like private messages or email.

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[12] I use the British spelling as it is used in the site's interfaces. A sizeable minority of employees were based in the UK and this might explain the British spelling. In quotations throughout the dissertation, however, I use the spelling that people used in their writing on the site or in written interviews with me.

[13] The extensive nature of deviantART journal-writing made deviantART seem at times more similar to a dedicated journal site like LiveJournal than to other sites such as Flickr, YouTube, or even Facebook.

[14] Another feature of deviantART that was associated with the journals, but was only available to Premium Members were user polls. A poll would have a question or a statement and a list of answer choices. While not the open-ended space that journals offered, polls were actually used in very similar ways. Members of the site used them to get feedback or ideas, or to raise awareness of particular issues or concerns. Then, like journals, there was room for comments and further discussion on the topic.

[15] I observed some confusion between deviantART's "Watching" and "Friending" on other sites (e.g. MySpace or Facebook). deviantART titled the page for managing the list that most described as their "Watchlist" as the "Friends list." But this page also allowed someone to specify whether or not this person was actually a "friend." Premium Members had the option to display these Friends in a separate area on their userpages (the names of Watchers appeared on everyone's userpages). But for the vast majority of members who did not pay for subscriptions, there was no noticeable difference in functionality whether they checked or unchecked the box indicating "friend." To compare with Facebook, watching is more analogous to becoming a "fan" of a group, business, or cause. I talked to several people who didn't understand what this "Friends" checkbox meant.

deviantART provided several other spaces where members interacted with each other. There was a news section where members and staff posted articles that presumably they hoped would be seen site-wide or at least by an audience broader than those who were already watching their activity. Any member could create a news article and post it to the site, and there was overlap in the uses of news and journals. Indeed, I observed news articles that had originated as journal entries and were then re-posted as news, sometimes at the urging of that member's Watchers. Like journal entries, news articles were structured as an open-ended space followed by comments. Also like journal entries, they covered a wide variety of topics. deviantART's staff and members used them to announce and inform other people of various site activities, such as contests, events, and new functionality. Another important use of the news section was to create thematic newsletters— "features"—that presented the work of other artists.

There was also a special section for "editorials," where some deviantART members would express their views on a particular topic, often an art-related concern or a concern about some aspect of using deviantART. Through these editorials, the news section was an important space where members tried to explicitly assert various norms and guidelines for behavior, with the hope that they would reach a wider audience.[16] Unlike journals, members could favourite news articles which would result in their appearing on the favourite-er's userpages, thus making them more susceptible to being seen.

deviantART's extensive *forums* and *chatrooms* provided other venues for site-wide discussion. Forums covered a wide variety of topics, such as deviantART related issues, gallery-specific issues, the "art scene" more broadly, complaints and suggestions, projects, social life, and jobs. There were dozens of top level categories, and within each forum there were hundreds, thousands, even hundreds of thousands of threads. deviantART also hosted dozens of chatrooms. Unlike forums, chatrooms were for synchronous group conversation. Any member could create a chatroom and set up particular guidelines and parameters for what went on within it (though deviantART's staff would monitor activity in all rooms). There was no way to "lurk" in a chatroom, though it was not unusual to see members who were listed as being in the room but did not engage in any chatting (thus making unclear the level of their attention to the room).[17]

I conclude this overview by briefly describing how deviantART presented and organized the work members posted. When members uploaded a submission, the site's interface forced them to

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[16] While members sometimes argued about whether something belonged as news, I found that most news articles I read seemed to follow the guidance of the FAQ on the topic. The "rule of thumb" was that news, unlike journals, was not supposed to be about individual members. Rather news should be "informational…of value to the community at large." The key question one should ask when posting, the FAQ concluded, was "Does it pertain to a larger audience or is it better suited to the people who watch your journals and art?" (FAQ #687 "What is news and what is not news?").

[17] Once inside a chatroom, a member's presence was announced in the main text area and his name was listed to the right of the room as a participant. Both forums and chatrooms were described as distinct places within deviantART. I was told that forums had their own culture and that there were regular "forum-ers." Many of the people I talked to described never going "there" nor wanting to, while other described having been regulars in the past but had "left." Some members described never going to chatrooms and not even being aware of their existence despite prominent navigation links. People I spoke to would describe "hanging out" in the chatrooms as they did at times with the forums.

categorize it. The user interface presented the categories as an elaborate hierarchical tree. The site's categorization changed over time, and its scheme was rather complex. Different "levels" of what was presented to users did not necessarily group together items of a similar kind; in other words, some categories overlapped while others did not (see figure 2.3).[18]
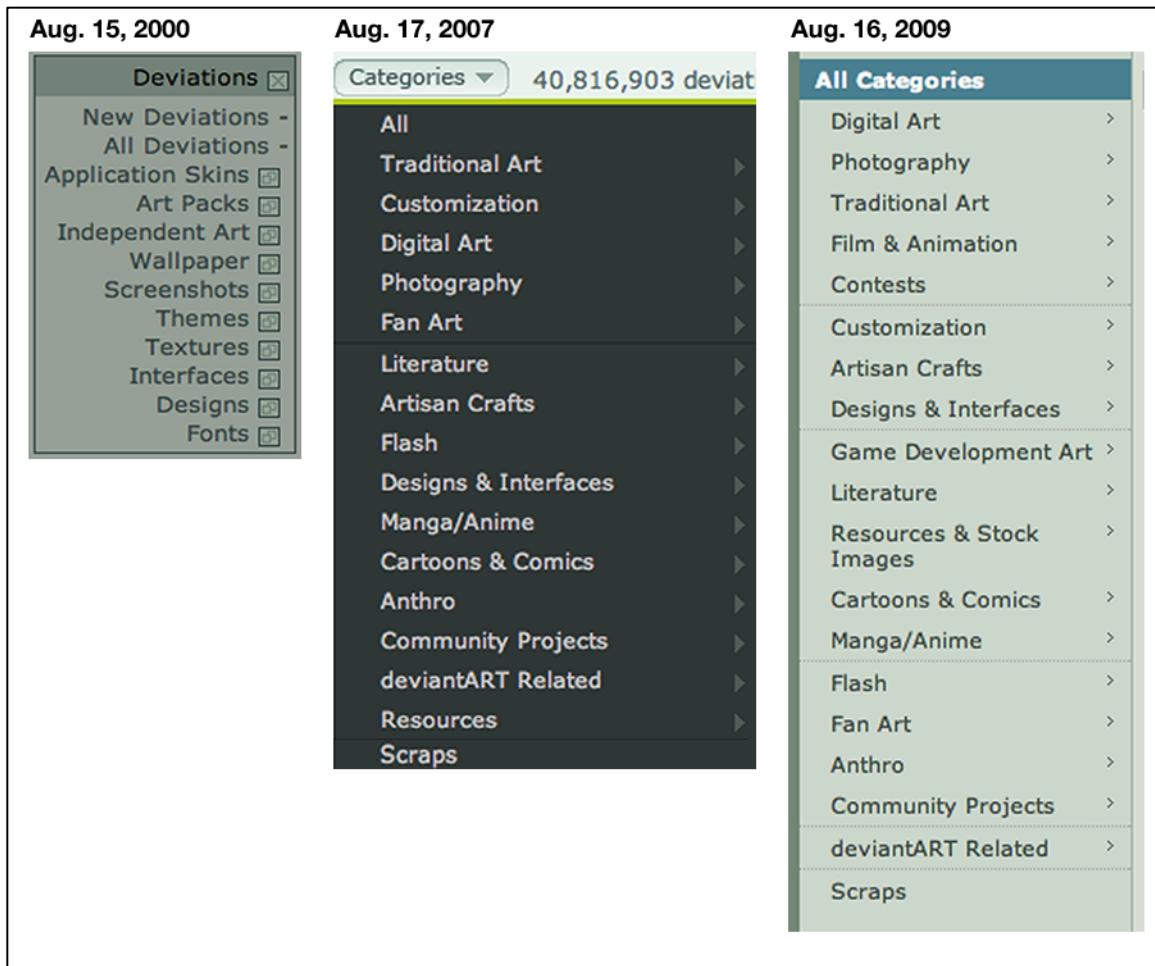
Figure 2.3: deviantART's top-level categories or "Galleries"

The earliest top-level categories, as compared to later ones, reveals the extent to which deviantART evolved from a site primarily focused on technology-related submissions to a site that accepted almost every genre, style, and medium of visual content.

deviantART's members and staff presented these categories as the site's "Galleries." The content of these galleries was displayed in a two dimensional matrix of thumbnails of the work (figure 2.4).[19]

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[18] Some categories described an artistic form, as "Photography," "Film and Animation," "Cartoons and Comics," "Artisan Crafts" or "Sculpture." The broad categories of "Digital Art" and "Traditional Art" described the medium through which these forms were expressed. Categories such as "Flash" concerned the tools with which a piece was created. There were also categories such as "Stock" (Stock Photography), "Resources" (things to be used in other work), "Designs and Interfaces," and "Game Development Art," that were oriented towards a work's functional purpose.

[19] There was also a section of the site that presented different galleries as "channels." When I joined, the front page

How many images appeared on a page depended on membership status. Visitors and non-paying members could see 24 thumbnails on the screen at any time and would have to click to new pages to see more. Premium Members could see up to 120 items without having to click to a new page (they could see fewer if they chose).
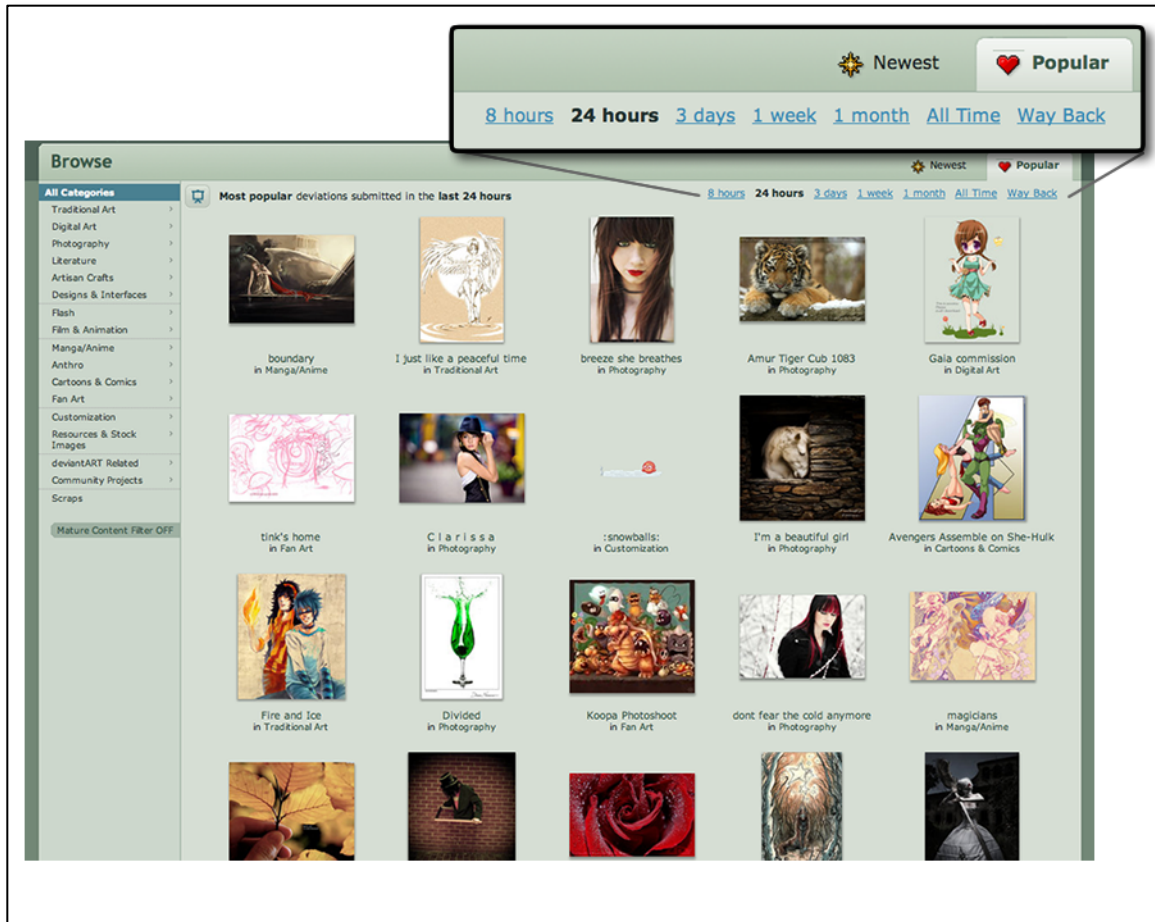
Figure 2.4: deviantART's browsing interface

Users could use the categories on the left to traverse into various galleries. The thumbnail views of the images could then be sorted by "Newest" or "Popular," which could further be modified by a time dimension. For most of my fieldwork, deviantART's homepage (or front page) was this browsing interface.

The galleries served a navigational purpose, and there were two ways of sorting these items. One was simply by time submitted. The other way was by *popularity*. Work deemed "most popular" would appear at the top left, the least popular the bottom right.[20] The site did not, however,

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of the site was organized as channels rather than the matrix I describe here. The view I describe here was put in a "browse" section of the site. With the launch of v6 in 2008, the browse section became the front page and the main way of viewing work, while the channels became a special section of the site.

[20] Users of the site could filter this view by different time periods so that they could see the most popular at different time intervals. Options included popular over the past eight hours, that day, the previous three days, the past week, the past month, or all time.

present a visual indication of what "popular" meant. The popularity of deviations was driven by an algorithm based entirely on accumulated favourites until early 2008, when deviantART staff added other factors. Thus, the algorithm treated favourites much like a news aggregator (e.g. Digg, Redditt, or Slashdot) treated votes for content. I return to discussions of "popularity" and this algorithm in chapter 5.

Finally, I want to mention deviantART's "Today" page. The Today page aggregated much of the activity across the site, organized by time or "popularity." Among other items, the Today page presented the journals that had received the most comments that day, the most recent comments posted to deviations, the most active forum threads, the members who had received the most *pageviews* that day (visits to their profiles), and the newest members that day. The Today page revealed different senses of what it meant for a piece of content to be "popular," based on different kinds of interactions with the site (see chapter 5). In the first phase of the study, the Today page provided me important entry points into a variety of discussions on the site (see chapter 4).

The features I have described here may seem commonplace online today, those used to facilitate the kinds of interactions associated with the label "Web 2.0" or "social media." Through these features, deviantART functioned as a distribution system for artists, their work, and their commentary. It also provided ways for people to interact with each other and with content. The site mediated relationships among artists and audiences, which included other members as well as visitors to the site. The software powering the site organized activity in various ways through algorithms and transformed much of this activity into new content (data and metadata). These "explicit" and "implicit" forms of user-generated content are hallmarks of Web 2.0 (see chapter 1; Schäfer 2011). In chapters 5, 6, and 7, I argue that once viewed in the context of site participants' different notions of "artistic" practice, similarities between deviantART's interfaces and other Web 2.0 interfaces proved to be partial at best.

2.3   Providing shape: corporation, organization, and community

I now turn to the site's social, rather than functional, organization. This discussion requires first understanding more about the history and business behind the site. In the sections that follow I discuss other ways that members were organized and organized themselves.

2.3.1   Origin stories

During the course of my fieldwork and writing, deviantART celebrated four birthdays. The official launch day was August 7, 2000, an inauspicious moment to be starting a new web-based business. United States stock markets had peaked earlier that year, and the dot-com bubble was bursting.

deviantART emerged out of Dimension Music, a dot-com era music company that was also on the verge of collapsing, though its collapse was not necessarily apparent to deviantART's founders at the time. These founders included Angelo Sotira, who ran Dimension Music (or DMusic). DMusic was one of a number of companies in the late 1990s that sought to create lucrative new business models based on the distribution of MP3s.[21] In many ways Sotira was a poster-child of

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[21] Napster is perhaps the most famous of these.

the era: a teenage geek-turned-entrepreneur who had received backing from major entertainment industry players and had been featured in a variety of magazines and news broadcasts.[22]

By the year 2000, several businesses had formed around the distribution of the desktop software that played MP3s and other music files (such as WinAmp or the Sonique Music Player). Many of the most popular music players allowed users to customize the look and feel, or the "skin," of the software. Several websites offered people the ability to upload and download user-created skins. One of the stories that Sotira has told about the origins of deviantART is that when hanging out in a music-related Internet chatroom, a skin creator uploaded a link to a digital photograph of a painting.[23] Sotira said that he had never seen anything like it, and it certainly did not fit on a site specifically for skins (interview). This memory, Sotira said, shaped his understanding of the possible future of an alternate kind of site when other people proposed a new site that would accept any form of visual media (interview).

These others were deviantART co-founders Scott Jarkoff and Matthew Stephens. Jarkoff, a developer who had run his own music site, and Stephens, a teenage artist who spent time in music-related chatrooms, developed the initial version of deviantART including its name and branding. In a post to the site in 2002, Jarkoff recounted that he was concerned with developing a unique "brand" for the new site. He initially wanted to name the site "deviate.com" as skins were a way of deviating from the original interface of the digital music player. But as the domain was already in use, they eventually settled on deviantART. Members of the site would be referred to as *deviants*. Art submissions would be known as *deviations*. It was also at this time that the color palette of the site, often referred to as "deviant green," was chosen. This collection of symbols—terms and colors—became the foundation for a brand and community identity.[24]

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[22] In 1999, DMusic was purchased by the Artists Management Group run by Michael Ovitz. Sotira then went to work for Ovitz and continued to run the network with new financial backing. Ovitz was a partner and form leader of the Creative Artists Agency and a former top executive at Disney. The purchase of DMusic by Ovitz thrusted Sotira into the media spotlight. Sotira was featured on Wired.com June 1999 in an article about teenagers who had founded Internet companies, one of whom was Sotira (see Oakes, Chris, "Founder and CEO, Age 15 — Cool," *Wired.com*, June 26, 1999, http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/1999/06/20427, last accessed September 28, 2010). *Seventeen Magazine* profiled Sotira later that year. The following year, even after the stock market peaked in April and signs of a downturn were coming, *BusinessWeek Online* published a story on "Teen Internet Moguls" that described Sotira and others as "a small but growing army of teenaged entrepreneurs…making a bundle online by turning what began as hobbies into money-making ventures" (Sharpe et al. "Teen Internet Moguls Web-savvy kids are turning their fun and games into million-dollar businesses," *BusinessWeek Online*, May 29, 2000, http://www.businessweek.com/2000/00_22/b3683144.htm, last accessed September 28, 2010). Similarly, in June the *CBS Evening News* featured a short vignette of Sotira as an exemplar of the geeky teenager turned millionaire, perhaps the quintessential example of achieving mainstream recognition outside of geek, music, and media business circles ("Teens Making Millions as Owners of Internet Companies," June 22, 2000).

[23] Sotira told me this story in an interview. I have also seen him post it in deviantART news articles regarding the site's history. He also told a version to *Entrepreneur Magazine* (Wang, Jennifer, "The Deviant Experience: How Angelo Sotira turned 14 million independent artists into a groundbreaking social network," January 25, 2011, http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/217859).

[24] According to Sotira, funding for DMusic "dried out" as "Ovitz was beginning to have a very hard time as people could very publicly read in the papers at that moment. … My relationship with that organization started to deteriorate as they distanced themselves from the Internet space" (interview). The history of how deviantART was "rescued" is murky and controversial; it became a source of justification for ownership of the site in a public rift amongst its founders that played out on the site in 2005. The role of Sotira and the site's other founders has been

2.3.2   Corporate structure, sources of revenue, and "vertical" relationships

deviantART's headquarters, or "HQ" as staff members referred to it, was located in Hollywood, California in a tall, nondescript office building near Los Angeles' main tourist attractions. Its offices housed a majority of the company's 60 to 70 paid staff members. HQ featured a mix of open-plan seating and offices, a conference room with a translucent red wall that could slide open, exposed pipes and wires, and, of course, many computers and flat-panel screens. Its most distinct features to me were the flat-screen monitors displaying art from the website, the art prints of various styles hanging on the walls, toys and other deviantART-branded "gear," and views of the famous "Hollywood" sign from several of the office windows.

A staff member described the company as "a virtual organization": many of the paid staff and almost all of the volunteer staff did not work out of HQ and were scattered around the world (fieldnote).[25] The "virtualness" of the site's organization was an aspect of the company from its founding. deviantART's servers were physically located in Sotira's house in the early years of the site, where he and several others worked and lived (also in Hollywood). The other founders and early staff members lived elsewhere around the world. According to a couple of news articles that co-founder Jarkoff posted to the site, there were between 13 and 17 people working on the site in the early years, almost all of whom had "day jobs" in "real life," with their work on deviantART as an important side project, though that was what they would like to be doing as a full-time job.[26] In this sense, the collective project of deviantART was much like the creation of art (Menger 1999).

The site had various organizational units that one might find in any small technology company: communications, advertising, marketing, creative, operations, and technical development (both back-end and user interface). It also had a group that managed the site's retail business. Like many contemporary organizations with a website as a key part of its business, there was also a unit that managed "the community," including "community operations" and "community relations."[27] Between 70 and 80 volunteer staff members supported paid staff members in these community-management roles.[28]

The company was privately held and, according to Sotira, profitable since its inception (interview).[29] deviantART earned income from several sources. The primary revenue stream was

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disputed. The story that Sotira told me and has posted online, and that seems to be the "official" story as of this writing, is that while others were running the day-to-day operations of deviantART, Sotira was keeping the lights on by securing small investments, maintaining the hardware that kept the site running, and developing the site's business model. When I began this research in 2007, the public dispute over the site's origins and ownership still lingered, yet by this time Sotira was in charge and the site was growing.

[25] With respect to the paid staff, these other places included other parts of the United States, the UK, Puerto Rico, Canada, the country of Georgia, and others.

[26] According to the second of these two articles, Sotira was the only one who worked on it full time.

[27] When I joined, "Community Operations" had been "Community Development," while "Community Relations" had been "Artist Relations." These changed in a re-organization in the middle of 2008.

[28] These numbers come from counts I did on various pages that listed the volunteers as well as in several posts to the site by the staff members who managed the volunteers.

[29] A recent article reported that the site's had $10 million in revenue in 2010 (Graham, Jefferson, "DeviantArt gives artists online path to stardom; Site gets more traffic than world's major museums 2011" *USA Today*, June 1, 2011, pp.2B). deviantART's only source of outside investment since its early days was in 2007 when it received a $3.5

advertising (Sotira, interview).[30] deviantART displayed ads in various places on the site that were seen by both non-members and members who had not paid for subscriptions. Some of these ads were paid for by outside companies and organizations, but deviantART also had a service called "adCast," which allowed deviantART members to purchase ads on the site. As a business supported by advertising, the language of "views" and "traffic" permeated the site, particularly in discussions about seeking exposure (see chapter 5).

Subscriptions accounted for another revenue stream, one that differentiated deviantART from many other prominent social network sites at the time.[31] For subscriptions deviantART charged $29.95 yearly, $7.95 quarterly, and $4.95 monthly. By early 2011, five percent of deviantART members were subscribers, a 35% increase since the inception of the 2008 global economic recession, which had cut into the site's advertising revenues.[32] In exchange for purchasing a subscription, Premium Members did not see advertisements on the site. One page that promoted the benefits of subscribing said that not seeing ads was browsing "the true deviantART." What was, in fact, the "true" deviantART reflected a deeper tension on the site between the "true" natures of art: art as commercial practice and art as distinct from commerce. I return to this issue below and in chapters that follow.

Other benefits of membership were access to more features and functionality. Premium Members could see more thumbnails of deviations on a single screen and had many more ways in which they could customize their journals and profiles. Some of deviantART's new features that launched while I was doing fieldwork, such as its new userpages, revamped portfolio tools, and the Critique Feature (see chapter 6), were only available to Premium Members.

The final source of income was deviantART's retail store. deviantART provided members with a mechanism to submit works to be sold as prints through the Prints Shop, and then it took a percentage of the sales.[33] The company also sold its own deviantART-branded merchandise that it called "deviantWEAR."[34]

deviantART also created marketing partnerships, often in the form of contests. These official contests would encourage deviantART members to submit entries of another company's branding or marketing efforts in return for a variety of prizes.[35] On the one hand, holding contests in

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million investment from DivX, a video compression and software company. In the first years after its founding, Sotira received a small cash infusion from a personal contact who later joined the company (interview).

[30] See also Wang, "The Deviant Experience," 2011.

[31] The way that deviantART positioned different members by their willingness to pay for a particular set of software products services and also not have to see advertising is not an unusual business model. However, it did distinguish deviantART from many of the prominent social network sites such as Facebook, which only had one category of "member" (which was free). Some sites, like Flickr, had "pro" accounts, which provided members with more storage, but my impression that the distinctions between a pro members and others was not as qualitatively different as it could be on deviantART.

[32] Wang, "The Deviant Experience," 2011.

[33] A June 2011 article published in the *USA Today* indicated 50-50 revenue split (Graham, "DeviantArt gives artists online path to stardom," 2011) .

[34] deviantWEAR consisted of artists bags, t-shirts, and toys, among other thing.

[35] The Toyota sponsored "Skin a Scion" contest in 2007 encouraged members to submit entries depicting any model of a Toyota Scion in any environment and the winner would receive a car or cash equivalent. In 2008, the video game

support of a brand is a long-standing technique in advertising. On the other hand, these kinds of contests were part of a larger trend over the past decade to source ideas, concepts, and even fully produced ads from creators on the web (somewhat disparate activities lumped together under the term "crowd-sourcing").

deviantART, Inc. resembled many other online advertising-supported businesses including major social network sites. But to Sotira, deviantART was distinct from many other sites in being "a vertical"—focused on business in a particular area (interview). To Sotira, deviantART's place as a vertical was closely connected to the kinds of social relationships he argued the site fostered:

> Facebook is a technology that allows you to reflect back on yourself. The people that you know in real life.… deviantART is the exact opposite. It's a place where you know nobody, and is a place where you go and meet people that are based on your common interests.… Whereas I think that Facebook is an enhancement of your existing life—and a very good one at that.… I thought of things like Facebook and Friendster and MySpace well before they were built, and Flickr for that matter, but I didn't want to build those things. My destiny was to build more of a network like deviantART that's a very deep vertical. I've tried to articulate how a vertical should be built. It's a model that works elsewhere. And I believe it's the model that other people will follow, in terms of how to build a vertical. I think that these verticals are really, really important for human beings, to reach and unleash their full potential. (interview)

There are several points in this statement to which I want to draw attention. Sotira's use of the term "vertical" reflects two different concepts that speak to the marriage between deviantART as corporation and deviantART as a site for "art." First, deviantART was a business organized around a particular market segment providing services at different stages of the process of production, distribution, and consumption. Second, that segment was art as a unified field. In this sense, deviantART embodies a contemporary take on a very old mix of practices. Art as a unified idea is a product of Romantic thought that developed in relation to commercial interests (see chapter 3). I draw attention to these different issues here to foreshadow their importance in the chapters to come.

Third, deviantART was not just a model for other businesses and websites; it was also a model of "unleashing full potential." Sotira described the site as the outcome of his efforts to fulfill his "destiny" and live up to his own potential. In doing so, he projected the site and himself as original and pioneering. Like a unified notion of art, these points reflect strains of Romanticism: "art" comes from within the creator, and originality is a central value (see chapter 3). deviantART at its best should provide a place for its members to strive to match these ideals of art.

The final point is less about business and art and more about Sotira's vision of online relationships when organized around a "vertical." The distinction between the Internet (or web) and "real life" is a long-standing theme in literature on Internet sociality (e.g. Turkle 1995), and recent debates

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publisher Square Enix sponsored a contest that asked deviantART members to create background art and characters for a popular game series. There were many others. In these contests, and others, one of the key prizes the site offered was the potential to have one's work judged and critiqued by artists and experts in the field of commercial art production.

about whether people's "Friends" online are different or the same as those in other contexts is a part of that theme (e.g. boyd and Ellison 2007). The literature reflects a tension between the promise (or peril) of trying to escape place-based relationships in favor of online relationships and whether one type is more real than the other.[36] Recently Ito et al. (2010) describe "genres of participation" with new media, contrasting "friendship-driven" and "interest-driven" practices rather than specific technologies. Sotira is implicitly making the argument that deviantART, as a site organized around "common interests," was about people operating in an "interest-driven" mode. It did seem to me that the bulk of people first "met" each other through the site. There were, however, deviantART members who did know each other "in real life," some knowing each other before joining deviantART. Others I spoke with had met each other on other sites and joined deviantART together; their relationship on deviantART thus "mirrored" an existing one. The same could be said about members who were fans of artists before joining the site and continued as fans in their use of it. I am less concerned, however, with which vision of relationships online is a more accurate depiction of empirical reality. Rather, what is important is that Sotira's idealization of deviantART maps to a vision of the web as providing an alternative to traditional paths of becoming an artist and an alternative art world for its members.

2.3.3   Community management

While deviantART was a for-profit corporation built around "art" as a "vertical," it described itself in the language of *community*. For a time, visitors to the front page were encouraged to join the "largest art community in the world!," one that had been serving "the art and skin community" since it had been founded. In posts to the site reflecting on some of the site's origins, co-founder Scott Jarkoff couched the site in an unspecified set of ideals for a "vision for this 'utopia' of *the* art and skin community" (emphasis mine). The deviantART FAQ, on the topic of "What is deviantART?" referred to itself as "an online art community" where "artists and art lovers interact in a variety of ways."[37] As these quotes indicate, deviantART's staff described it as both its own self-contained community (or community of communities) and a special place serving a broader community of artists.

Such language was not unusual. Notions of "online communities" and "computer communities" can be traced back to the time when the systems that would become the Internet were first being developed (Licklider and Taylor 1968, Pentzold 2010). These and similar concepts have been in the common parlance in academic and other scholarly work for at least two decades (Rheingold 1993, Castells 2001, Kollack and Smith 1998, Wilson and Peterson 2002, Turner 2006, Haythornthwaite 2007, Cool 2008, Pentzold 2010).[38] The terminology spread in the 1990s. Web business and other organizations since then have used the term loosely to describe their members and customers. Community is a key component of the vision of Web 2.0 and social media as well as the creativity consensus' views of user-generated content (see chapter 1). While Google and Facebook both use the term sometimes in corporate blogs, it seems unlikely that users of those services would see themselves as part of a "Facebook" or a "Google" community. In contrast, the relatively small core group of "Wikipedians" do speak of themselves as a community, though in a

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[36] Castells (2001) provides an early review of these debates, and they have since continued.

[37] FAQ 116/117: "What is deviantART?"

[38] Cool's (2008) succinct review of the concept is particularly helpful (see 19-25).

particular way (Pentzold 2010). YouTube also has a subset of "YouTubers" who seem to affiliate themselves with the "community" that YouTube's staff apply to all YouTube members in their discussion of community guidelines (Burgess and Green 2009).

Nevertheless, scholars have also long noted the uneasy relationship between accounts of online activity and the term "community." The latter term underwent much scrutiny and debate long before the question arose as to whether "online" communities were possible (see, for example, Cohen 1985, Wilson and Peterson 2002). As Castells (2001) notes, debates about online communities reproduced older sociological debates about the relationship between community and urbanism. The term is "warmly persuasive" (Williams 1983), infused with positive meaning in everyday life but also "drenched with ambiguity with regard to its scale, scope, and application" (Duguid 2003, see also Pentzold 2010).[39]

My purpose here is not to evaluate whether deviantART was or was not "really" a community or even multiple communities, a long-standing feature of research debates on online communities (Bruckman 2006). Rather, I wish to highlight here what I observed as a conscious effort by the site management to foster community (below, I discuss members' perspectives). Sotira described how he learned of the possibilities for finding community over digital networks back when he was a teenager playing games with others over Bulletin Board Systems (or BBSs).[40] According to Sotira, deviantART's news section and the aggregation of "news" in its Message Center were some of the features that derived from these early experiences (interview).[41]

Sotira and other staff I observed consistently referred to engaging with and listening to "the community." The site's Director of Community Operations emphasized that she and others on deviantART did not view the site as "just like any other social network"; to her, community was a key differentiator.[42]

Site staff relied on various volunteers in their efforts to foster community. The Director of Community Relations ran a team largely comprised of volunteers from the site who managed the site's galleries.[43] Descriptions of the role of this group said that it was to "strengthen the community" and to "represent the needs and wants of the community." These *Gallery Moderators* (*GMs*) had generally been active members of the site before taking on these new responsibilities. The GMs were chosen for their experience and demonstrated willingness to contribute to what

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[39] It may be telling that Duguid wrote this in one of 500 contributions to the four-volume Encyclopedia of Community that also featured a Master Bibliography containing roughly 4,800 references to the term in scholarly books and articles (Christensen and Levinson 2003).

[40] A Bulletin Board System describes a computer system that allowed people with a home computer, modem, and phone line to dial up a computer owned by someone else and engage in a range of activities such as sending and receiving messages, exchanging files, chat, or play games. BBSs go back to the 1970s and according to the *BBS: The documentary* (Scott 2005) there were thousands if not hundreds of thousands of active BBSs in the United States.

[41] He wrote up short news articles on what was going on in the groups he played with, such as who new members were, what happened in various games, and other relevant information. In a sense, Sotira was helping to create in practice a process that produces what Anderson (1991) has famously referred to as "imagined communities."

[42] Hooley, Fiona, interview with *MediaSnackers*, "Media Snackers Podcast #136: The largest online art community," *MediaSnackers*, April 20, 2009, http://mediasnackers.com/2009/04/ms-podcast136/, last accessed November 19, 2011).

[43] As noted earlier, during the first year of fieldwork, this group was "Artist Relations."

staff apparently saw as the community-building aspects of the site. They offered themselves to other members as resources who could be approached to answer questions about art and about the goings on of deviantART. They wrote regular newsletters that promoted gallery-wide and site-wide activities including events and contests, whether they were "official" events sponsored by deviantART the corporation or events produced by other members.

One of the listed guidelines and responsibilities for a GM was "being a community voice." They functioned as leaders and representatives of the site's membership. While most of the staff was theoretically accessible to all members through the site, both members and the site's paid staff positioned GMs as the members who could play a mediating role in resolving conflicts or taking suggestions on how to improve the quality of deviantART. GMs also had the responsibility and privilege of choosing the site's Daily Deviations, works of art featured on deviantART's front page. GMs' role as award-granter in a competitive environment was in tension with their role as community representative and leader (see chapter 5).

To summarize, the GMs's organizational mission to foster community operated on two levels. They cultivated a sense that there were different communities within deviantART associated with deviantART's categorization system and the broader practices of its members (e.g. "the fan art community on deviantART" or "the photography community on deviantART"). They also had the job of helping to bring together the artists who submitted art to different galleries to try to establish deviantART as a coherent whole community.

The other department associated with community was the Community Operations team. This group included the Copyright and Etiquette Administration (paid staff members that helped set and enforce deviantART's policies), the Help Desk, and the Customer Service group. Members of this department also maintained deviantART's extensive Frequently Asked Questions, which functioned as community standards and guidelines. This small paid staff was joined by another set of volunteers known as the *Message Network Administrators*, or *MN@*s. The main role of the MN@s was to moderate—at times police—discussions in the forums in the chat rooms.[44] They were often active participants in these spaces. Like GMs, MN@s also had a role in mediating disputes among members and between members and staff at the same time as being a community voice.

GMs and MN@s were officially designated positions whose organizational mission was to foster community. The site also created a title and position for members who were rewarded for contributions to the community—Seniors. The number of Seniors on the site increased from perhaps 600 in late 2007 to over 1000 in late 2010.[45] In 2008 the Director of Community

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[44] The FAQ put it this way: "Message Network Administrators are a team of volunteers who assist in making sure that the chat network and forums are a safe and fun environment. This involves monitoring and moderating in chatrooms, locking up inappropriate forum threads and providing a calendar of interactive and entertaining events in our community."

[45] An account on the site called "seniorlist," which maintained a list of those who had become Seniors, noted that there were just over 600 Seniors in October 2007. About a year later, the Director of Community Operations's news articles put out that there were over 800 Seniors, and through these articles I learned that she would select roughly twenty to thirty each time she announced a new group. As of this writing, seniorlist includes the names of well over 1,000 members as Seniors. While deviantART's paid and volunteer staff grew slowly over the course of my fieldwork, the number of Seniors continued to increase as the number of members increased.

Operations began to post regular news articles in which she described what it took to be a Senior and who the new Seniors were:

> So what does it take to become a Senior? That's a question many have asked and have never really been able to get a straight answer on. Some have gained Seniority as a thank you for their time spent as a Volunteer [GMs, MN@s, and paid staff members became Seniors when they "retired"], or to recognise their contribution to a particular project or collaborative action. Some have gained Seniority because of their community spirit, providing help and assistance to many other deviants and taking time out to promote the work of others in the community.

> Some people have received Seniority because of their artistic endevours [sic], having a positive influence on their peers by sharing resources, providing constructive criticism, and by being a voice that stands out above the many others who deviate to be recognised in the crowd.

In other words, a Senior was a type of leader and role model, either in the way he or she directly helped other people on the site or in the way he or she helped the site as a whole through active engagement in improving the quality of the site. Seniors did not always agree with the policies and positions set out by the site staff, and I did not get the sense that there were expectations that they would. In any case, being a Senior was about making a contribution to others' pursuits, which is what deviantART as a "community" was supposed to embody. These leaders then were people who hopefully would continue to promote the ideals of community to others.

Unlike being a GM, MN@, or paid staff member, being a Senior did not confer any additional abilities on what one could do on the site, though this was a question that remained vague from the perspective of other members. Nor did being a Senior entitle Seniors to free Premium Membership to the site. Nevertheless, being a Senior was a meaningful status to those who were conferred the title.[46]

2.3.4   Membership status and authority

Paid staff, volunteers, Seniors, and Premium Members were some of the official categories with which the site divided people up into different categories. Having different categories of membership types is not unique to deviantART. The software that powers many web-based forums, for example, provides ways of giving different forum members titles arbitrarily or based on their number of posts and comments. That deviantART's membership categories also point to different levels of access and privileges on the site is also not unusual. For example, Wikipedia has a number of "user access levels" that grant some members the ability to use the platform in ways that others cannot (Cool 2008).[47] But, unlike many other social network and content-creation sites, deviantART made one's status on the site visible by appending a prefix to members' usernames.

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[46] Several long-time members of the site whom I watched and corresponded with became Seniors during the course of my fieldwork and they all expressed excitement about it; all didn't really know precisely why they had been chosen.

[47] See "Wikipedia:User access levels", http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:User_access_levels&oldid=418729624, last accessed on March 16, 2011.

These prefixes distinguished their membership categories, much like a badge or marker on a uniform. Table 2.1 provides a list of the primary membership categories and their prefixes that I encountered during my fieldwork.[48]

Symbol	Membership category
$	Paid staff member (employees of deviantART, Inc.)
^	Gallery Manager/Moderator (GM)
@	Message Network Administrator (MN@)
`	Senior
*	Premium Member/Subscriber
~	Non-paying member
=	Beta-tester
!	Banned or closed account

Table 2.1: Common username prefixes

deviantART automatically attached to usernames prefixes corresponding to the account status of the user. For example, when I first joined, my username always appeared as ~perkelate. When I became a Premium Member, it appeared as *perkelate. Had I been a GM or paid staff member, it would have read ^perkelate or $perkelate.

Cool (2008:18) argues that providing explicitly demarcated user status levels supports the formation of community. Throughout my fieldwork, however, I found it difficult to know what to make of these visible symbols and the importance that members ascribed to them. The display of these user levels may have implicitly reinforced a sense of coherence to deviantART, but not everyone paid them much attention. While I observed situations in which people did notice and explicitly reference the symbols as markers of status and importance, it was clear that some people had no idea what the differences in these symbols meant.[49]

For other people, the symbols did not necessarily sit well with a "warmly persuasive" sense of community. When the Director of Community Development (as the position had been called at that point) "retired" from deviantART's staff, he opted to be the only member on the site without any symbol in front of his name. He described a conversation that he had had with Sotira about the problems that these symbols had caused over his years on the site. Referring to the symbols as a "pain in the ass," he highlighted various problematic situations, such as the following: when paid or

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[48] There were several others that were quite rare or discontinued. I do not include these here.

[49] A site-wide poll put out in the fall of 2008, only several months after the points I quoted above, revealed that a sizable plurality of those who responded didn't know what the symbols meant. Within the first fifteen days of the poll, roughly 36% of those responding (about 18,000) people chose the "…what they heck ARE those symbols next to names??" answer choice (a plurality). While writing this section in 2010, I noticed that this number had jumped to roughly 43,000 people (or 40% of those responding).

In addition, I talked to some who did not distinguish between categories like paid staff and volunteers, referring to all of them as staff or "admins" (a term used on other sites, particularly web forums). I knew one member who had been on the site for a while, had decided to pay for a membership and sign up to be a beta-tester, and didn't really understand why he had a different prefix to his name than others.

volunteer staff retired and people would "assume the worst" and send deviantART "hate mail"; when those staff would wonder why they did or did not receive the rare "alumni" symbol; or, the difference between being Senior and being on staff. He also alluded to the distinction between member and Premium Member as an "odd 'class' system" that was made even more "odd" when Premium Members who became Beta Testers, "just by checking a box," felt they were "superior" to others. Indeed, occasionally I observed members complain about the distinctions among members, particularly along the paid-unpaid division—a complaint that was tied to a sense that deviantART was a site that should foster a sense of equality. This complaint revealed one assumption about what "community" should imply (see chapter 5). Such a complaint could be particularly acute when the difference in privilege was seen as closely aligned with a presumed ideal of artistic practice as was the case when deviantART rolled out a Premium-Member only feature for enabling "critique" (see chapter 6).

I do not want to overemphasize these symbols as distinguishing status without mentioning that there were other forms of status on the site not attached to these symbols at all. For example, being seen as "popular" on deviantART, as measured by the number of pageviews or Watchers, gave some people status and a certain amount of authority (a controversial topic, see chapter 5). According to one Senior member with whom I spoke, the two sources of authority on deviantART were being on staff or being popular (fieldnotes). Some members, however, were deemed high status by others because of reputations and status they already had for other reasons, such as artists who were well known and popular in particular social worlds of artistic practice that intersected with deviantART.

2.3.5   Member-driven organization

Finally, it is important to point out that while deviantART organized its members into various categories based on their relationship to the company or community management, members also organized themselves in various ways.[50] Most prominently there were groups (sometimes referred to as "clubs") around particular interests and activities. With no feature for "groups" specifically implemented until late 2009, members of the site created new accounts with dedicated userpages that represented them.[51] As anyone could create chatrooms, they were also a key site where persistent groups formed, though members would come and go.

These clubs and groups varied tremendously in their type, size, and scope. Some groups were like art collectives, a group of artists engaged in a similar project or type of project. Others were based around particular media fandoms. There were clubs such as ArtistsHospital and dA-Mentors that provided different forms of help. I also encountered clubs that formed around contests and competitions, such as RoninUltramix, which ran the Samurai's Dueler's League, a series of

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[50] And both paid and volunteer staff members also created or joined other organizations on the site.

[51] Shortly before the launch of the Groups feature, one staff member estimated that there were perhaps 30,000 such clubs that Groups were designed to replace (fieldnotes). As of this writing, there may be more than 75,000 groups (Wang, "The Deviant Experience," 2011). The development of deviantART's Groups was going on during fieldwork and launched as I was writing.

The appropriation of accounts designed to represent individuals is a common feature of social network sites. MySpace and Facebook, like deviantART, eventually created pages for "Groups." Facebook (and even more recently Google+) also added "Pages" intended to represent organizations or public figures.

tournaments in which artists created comics that featured battles among their characters. Some groups, such as Bay Area Artists Unite (see chapter 4), formed in some other context and then used deviantART as one of several ways to enhance its activity. There were also groups that came together around causes, such as broad political and social causes (e.g. ArtistsForCharity), or those that came together to help combat alleged policy violations on the site (e.g. PolicyRapistNoMore or the Anti-Editing-Club).[52]

These groups had different degrees of organizational structure. Depending on their size and scope, some of these groups had multiple administrators and officers and formed a small hierarchical organization. Others had only one person who was the founder and ran the club, with membership being far more loosely defined as anyone who visited and participated in an event. In these examples there were certainly leaders in the groups, people recognized as the main organizers of activities and events, but there was less organization in terms of defined roles and responsibilities. deviantART was heterarchical: a site where multiple hierarchies formed and developed (Bruns 2008). Some of these hierarchies were fluid, while others were relatively stable.

Groups of deviantART members met offline as well. These occasions, in which an in-person meeting was organized specifically around people affiliated with deviantART, were dubbed *devMeets*. But, members of deviantART, such as the aforementioned Bay Area Artists Unite, also met up for reasons not directly tied to their shared membership in the site. I also attended conventions where artists met up, networked, and sold their work. In these conventions, I met many attendees and artists who were members of deviantART, and it seemed that these meetings helped localize the site to particular places or types of media production. I return to these other field sites in chapter 4.

2.4 Filling in color: deviantART between corporation, community, and art

I conclude this chapter by introducing an important set of tensions that I return to throughout the dissertation. deviantART's staff supported a vision that ideals of community could be reconciled with deviantART's corporate goals if the site were managed correctly. In August 2000, several weeks after the site launched, co-founder Scott Jarkoff noted on the then-public list of changes to the site that he had added links to other websites where members could submit their work—all under the heading of "community"—as an "attempt to show the people that we, unlike the OTHER sites, DO care about community and are not some big corporate asshole, which is absolutely one hundred percent the truth."[53]

In several conversations with Sotira and other staff members, I learned that deviantART could have grown even faster than it did and could have been far more lucrative a business than it was, but that keeping deviantART a "community" demanded otherwise. A community that grew too quickly would have significant social problems:

> For ten years we have intentionally kept deviantART small and the overall arc of

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[52] I discuss groups organized to combat "art theft" in chapter 7.

[53] Archived at http://web.archive.org/web/20001202035400/www.deviantart.com/changelog.php, accessed on September 30, 2007.

the deviantART community is substantially greater.… For ten years we had to build the community, we had to scale the community, we had to keep the connection between members, the civility between members, high. We had to keep an eye on who was coming in and population growth and we had to restrict what happened on MySpace, right? Which was just this angle of straight up traffic [he makes an arm motion across his body from low to high representing growth]. Very very bad for running a city to just have incoming population of a million people per month (interview).

In other words, according to Sotira, deviantART could have been a far more lucrative business, perhaps even as lucrative as other social network sites.[54] While I was at HQ, another staff member echoed these thoughts: "We could have made a lot of money a while ago. We don't want to be MySpace. Angelo [Sotira] certainly doesn't want to be MySpace, with the ads that say 'Look at me! Look at me! Buy me! Buy me!'" (fieldnote).

It is important to note that this hope to reconcile corporation and community in Internet-related organizations is also a key feature of Web 2.0 (as discussed in chapter 1) and even earlier web and Internet-related business. Cool's (2008) account of San Francisco start-up Cyberorganic in the 1990s illustrates how a reconciliation of utopian community and technocratic entrepreneurial visions was a marriage of ideals that drove the development of the Web.[55] Furthermore, even the tensions between corporation and community have long been recognized. While WELL member and journalist Howard Rheingold is best known for articulating the ideals of virtual community, in a debate on the WELL he also articulated an early warning about the threats that corporate interests would bring to community ideals (Johns 2009:486).[56] It is a tension that has resurfaced in contemporary debates about Web 2.0 and was prominent on deviantART.

Here, I want to touch on the language of "community" from the perspective of members rather than staff. Like "YouTubers" (Burgess and Green 2009), there were users of deviantART who specifically identified as members of a deviantART-oriented community. Those who saw deviantART as a community and themselves as part of it tended to use the vocabulary associated with the site: "deviants" to refer to members, "deviations" for artwork, "devMeets" for in-person meet ups, and so forth. They joined GMs and staff in aligning particular galleries as sub-communities. Many members also saw themselves as using the various features that deviantART provided to engage in community-building activities such as planning events and collaborative initiatives, rallying support for various causes and charities, and providing support for each other. The key values of community in this sense were those of "working together" (as one person put it) and "helping each other" (see chapter 6).

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[54] Of course there is always the possibility that this was a way of explaining a failure to be MySpace or Facebook before there was either site. There is no way I can know what he "really" thought on this point. But what is compelling is the terms by which he explained his current vision.

[55] Note, however, in Cyberorganic's case, the attempt to marry corporate and community ideals did not succeed in the long term.

[56] The WELL stands for the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, one of the famous early examples of the use of networked computing technology to socialize, particularly including those that were not computer professionals or researchers. See Rheingold (2003), Turner (2006) and Johns (2009) for different accounts of the WELL.

But, perhaps most prominently, when members deployed a community-oriented discourse, they did so as a way of contrasting what they saw as problems with the site with the utopia it had been in the past or could be in the future. They deployed the rhetoric of community, particularly during discussions over values and ideas of what participation in deviantART was all about. A theme that I return to in later chapters is that community was a term used both descriptively and normatively: invoking it was to reference and help enforce particular values. Those values, however, were not necessarily consistent with each other. Moreover, they were not necessarily consistent with the values of art or with corporate goals.

One point that came up in discussions about the site was that deviantART had somehow lost its status as a "community." I frequently observed long-time members of the site noting that deviantART's "community" had declined because of the site's growth. Some members blamed these declines on the actions of the staff, in spite of Sotira's aspirations to align corporate and community interests. For example, when deviantART, Inc. released controversial features (see the Share Wars in chapter 7) or when it released features only for Premium Members (such as the Critique Feature in chapter 6), many complained that the site staff had valued money and profit over community, thus distinguishing the two.

At the same time other members did not blame the site's management and instead criticized ways that other members used the site. Some felt that many members' focus on "popularity" and "pageviews" was an attack against "the community" (chapter 5). Some, including the staff, described the perceived decline of constructive, helpful feedback as a threat to the community (chapter 6). Some members thought that deviantART's emphasis on marketing rather than improvement signaled the decline of the community (chapter 6).

What these examples also help demonstrate is that deviantART's members and its staff were trying to be not just "a community" but a community of *artists*. The introduction of art into this mix complicates the tension between corporation and community. I noted that deviantART, Inc. took a rather broad view of art, accepting visual works in almost any form. This openness aligned with deviantART's profit-seeking goals but also was an ideal of inclusivity, which for some was a characteristic of community. Yet, it was clear that many of the site's members worked to retain elements of exclusivity in their efforts to establish deviantART as distinct from sites like Facebook and MySpace not simply because of the nature of its commercial activity—as Sotira and others put it—but because of sensibilities regarding the nature of artistic practice. For example, one member created a "stamp," a deviation that looked like a postage stamp that could be placed in journals and news articles; it read "deviantART *NOT* deviantSPACE."[57] The stamp and her comments expressed frustration with photographs submitted to deviantART that she felt were not really art and belonged on MySpace or other sites.[58] The stamp echoed similar news articles and opinions of interviewees frustrated and worried about deviantART turning into MySpace.

There was a final way in which notions of community and art were in tension with one another. On the one hand, some people described to me how "the community" shaped their direction. For

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[57] A stamp is a type of work that people on the site made specifically for others to embed and circulate in their journals to raise awareness of, promote, or support various causes, issues, groups, members, or activities.

[58] As she put it in her Artist Comments: "i think most people are in agreeance that most if not all of the camwhores/emo teenagers/chainmailers/whiny bloggers/other shady sort of myspace types should go home. if that's the kind of stuff you like, so be it, but let's not forget that this is a site for ART; not shitty webcam galleries."

example, a teenager described her first framing of the site as a place "to find paint shop pro brushes." Then she said,

> It wasn't until I got into photo manips [manipulations] that I bothered getting involved in the community. Even then, I was just posting and replying. Getting more and more in to it. My involvement with art, as I liked art more, I realized there was more to the community than brushes, so much to discover and it just fed me the ideas, jealousy, idolization and everything else I needed for me to make my mind up that this was something I was going to do (interview).

Here "community" seems to be more than just a synonym for "site" or "group of people." Becoming more involved in a community of social relationships was acknowledged as important in driving this member's desire to continue to make and distribute her work. This view corresponds somewhat to the Web 2.0 creativity consensus view of community-based production, but it is not simply based on values of sharing and generosity (as Shirky [2008, 2010] puts it). Also important is the contrast between artistic production as motivated and inspired by community and art as emerging from within the artist as an individual activity. As I argue in this dissertation, members and staff sought to uphold the individuality of artists even while simultaneously maintaining ideals of community. In a post, one member described this concern by articulating the effort to "stand out but stand together."

Cohen (1985) argues that communities are formed, re-formed, and maintained by the active work of their members in the creation of symbolic boundaries. A boundary does not simply discern difference but "incorporates and encloses difference" (1985:74). Thus "community" can hide internal differentiation concerning how individuals and groups supply different meanings and interpretations to shared symbols (1985:16). This distinction becomes a crucial part of my analysis in the chapters that follow.

2.5   Final touches

deviantART's tagline was "Where ART meets APPLICATION."[59] As I show, this was not an easy meeting. With respect to its technical features as well as tensions between corporation, commercial activity, and community, deviantART was emblematic of Web 2.0. Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, these features and tensions take on a unique character when viewed through the lenses provided by tensions in art. The confluence of these tensions—between corporation and community, between commercial activity and art, and even between community and art community—all operating within one website drove the production of the site and intersect with the issues I examine in chapters 5, 6, and 7. Tensions between what it means to be engaged in artistic activity, the acceptability of commercial activity (by deviantART, Inc. and site members), and norms of community behavior resurface throughout this dissertation. They shaped and were shaped by the work that went into producing deviantART as infrastructure for artistic recognition and members' identities as creative practitioners. I next visit the key theoretical concepts that helped me to build from this initial description of deviantART.

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[59] As in software application or web application.

Creative practitioners and infrastructure: a practice approach

In the previous chapter I sketched out deviantART's major features and how the site is organized. In this chapter I outline theory that helps draw a different picture of the site and the web. I start with an approach to understanding *practice* that brings together complementary versions of *practice theory* (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) with a theory of *social worlds* (Strauss 1978). This approach led to me develop my inquiry as a relational project. I then elaborate the central concepts that function as the two objects of the relationship in question. The first of these is what I have introduced as a *creative practitioner*, an identity rooted in one's "creative" practice. Given deviantART's emphasis on "art" and the general positioning of its members as "artists," for the purposes of this project, I draw from concepts and ideas from the sociology of art (Becker 1982, Bourdieu 1993, 1996, Heinich 2009). The second concept is a particular notion of *infrastructure* taken from science and technology studies and information studies (Bowker and Star 1999, Star and Ruhleder 1996). I use it to bring together concerns over the relationship between practice and social worlds, identity, and technology.[1]

3.1 A practice perspective

In scholarship, *practice* is an ambiguous term. Often it is a synonym for people's activities—what they do in everyday life. There is also a more specialized meaning that refers to particular theories that "address the production and reproduction of specific ways of engaging with the world" (Wenger 1998:13).[2] While there is no unified "practice theory," Ortner (1984), Reckwitz (2002), Warde (2005), and Postil (2010) provide syntheses of key elements of such an approach and compare it to other broad categories of social theory.[3] A common thread is an attempt to transcend the agency-structure dualism in social theory: theories that start with the agency of

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[1] These theories provide sensitizing concepts that "suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer 1954:7). Similarly, regarding his use of a "practice perspective," Wenger (1998:9) writes, "A perspective is not a recipe; it does not tell you just what to do. Rather, it acts as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect, and how to approach problems." While I began the study with some of the concepts presented here in mind, the way I present them here is informed by putting them in conversation with the material from fieldwork.

[2] Wenger (1998:13) adds that practice theories are "concerned with everyday activity and real-life settings, but with an emphasis on the social systems of shared resources by which groups organize and coordinate their activities, mutual relationships, and interpretations of the world."

[3] Schatzki (1997:284) notes, "Since the nature of practice and the analysis of actions and social phenomena vary greatly among these theorists, the term practice theory designates at best a family of accounts." Practice theory is as much defined by an opposition to other social theory as it is something internally coherent (Hobart 2010).

individuals versus those that see social structure determining individual action. In theories of practice, individuals' practices (in the first sense of the term) are constituted in part by their agency and in part by the historical, sociocultural character of the worlds they inhabit. As a relational approach, practices also help *constitute* what is experienced as agency and structure.

Dreir (2007:22) provides a useful summary of "the basic contentions of a theory of practice":

> A social world exists because of participants' unending and diverse work of reproducing and changing it;

> Human activity is the dynamic middle in which the subject and the social world are connected in such a way that both are re-produced and changed;

> Social structure does not exist independently of social practice.

In this section, I discuss the ways in which a practice approach, supplemented by a "social world perspective" (Strauss 1978), describes the worlds in which people engage, the relationships between these worlds and identities, technologies of practice, and questions concerning change over time.

3.1.1   Communities of practice and social worlds

Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a theoretical account of the mutual transformation of people's identities and the worlds that structure social life—"communities of practice." The authors describe communities of practice as "social worlds" of "practitioners" (29): a "set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (42). They admit that their formulation of these worlds is underdeveloped: "the concept of 'community of practice' is left largely as an intuitive notion, which serves a purpose here but which requires a more rigorous treatment" (1991:42). In response to this call Wenger (1998) emphasizes the "mutual engagement" between participants who may be quite diverse and the development between them of a "common repertoire" as part of a "joint enterprise." Wenger focuses on the attempt to create shared meaning among participants (I return to several of these specifics below).[4]

Cox (2004:527-528) suggests that ambiguities in the concept of community of practice have produced "significant divergences in their most basic conceptualization" of the underlying terms.[5] Cox notes that Wenger et al. (2002) define a community of practice as "'Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis'" (in Cox 2004:534). Cox correctly asserts that this definition is both a "vaguer" definition than the one found in Wenger 1998 and altogether a "genuinely different concept" (2004:534). In contrast to Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) reduce "practice" to concerns, problems, and passions with little sense of either its historical character or participants' ongoing role in reshaping practice as a collective activity. "Community" presents another problem, given its "warmly persuasive" connotations (Williams 1983) and

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[4] Communities of practice, to Wenger, are "the prime context in which [people] can work out common sense through mutual engagement" (Wenger 1998:47).

[5] Cox's analysis comes from a review of four seminal texts in the development of the concept: Lave and Wenger 1991, Brown and Duguid 1991, Wenger 1998, and Wenger et al. 2002. See also Duguid 2008 and Lave 2008 for critical comments on how the term has been taken up in the past two decades.

diversity in scholarly and everyday use.[6] In an attempt to clarify and stress the term "practice" and avoid the baggage of "community," Duguid (2005b:109) positions a community of practice as the "social locus in which a practice is sustained and reproduced over time."[7]

Nevertheless, the use of the term "community" may be a distraction given Lave and Wenger's own lack of specificity.[8] A theoretical conception of *social worlds* (Strauss 1978) is a useful complement to communities of practice and enhances an understanding of the "social locus" Duguid describes.[9] Social worlds are "a set of common or joint activities or concerns, bound together by a network of communication" (Strauss 1982, citing Kling and Gerson 1978).[10] On its face such a definition is similar to the "communities of practice" definition offered by Wenger et al. (2002). However, certain important details reveal important commonalities between Strauss (1978, 1980, 1982), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998).[11] Strauss emphasizes that a social world cannot be reduced to a "network of communication" or discourse alone. Rather, these worlds consist of participants' activities, forms of membership, sites, technologies, and media (Strauss 1978). His account of social worlds shares with Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), Duguid (2005b, 2008), and Lave (2008) a concern with the historical nature and ongoing production of the activities and social formations (e.g. a world's boundaries) under investigation. Strauss, along with Becker (1982), also provides a complementary view of the transformation of identity and technology. Finally, the concepts of communities of practice and social worlds both emphasize tensions as inherent in the ongoing transformation of the world in relation to participants' participation.[12]

3.1.2   Boundaries, legitimation, participation, and reification

Social worlds form around at least one activity. Strauss and those he draws from typically define them by example and point to worlds that form around art, sports, lifestyles, occupational

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[6] See earlier discussions in both chapters 1 and 2.

[7] Scollon (2001) uses the term "nexus of practice" as an alternative.

[8] Wenger (1998) acknowledges the problems with the term "community" but tries to steer readers in a direction that removes its "warmly persuasive" character. With hindsight in my favor, it seems that he was trying to fight connotations that are too deeply embedded in everyday life.

[9] The label "world" avoids some of conceptual baggage of "community" (see also Takhteyev forthcoming). When Lave and Wenger (1991:29) refer to communities of practice as "social worlds" of "practitioners," they seem to be using "social worlds" in a colloquial sense rather than a theoretical sense.

[10] Unruh (1980) and Clarke and Star (2007) provide histories of the development of the concept. Later, I will argue that social worlds are held together by their infrastructures, which is neither a network of communication nor a set of common technologies.

[11] As I explain below, despite important commonalities, I do not think that the concepts are always interchangeable, though Bowker and Star (1999) and related texts view do view them as equivalent in their discussion of infrastructure.

[12] Below, I return to differences between the two concepts. In appendix D, I respond to a possible theoretical objection that is based on the compatibility of each concept's underlying theories of social life—theories of practice and symbolic interactionism.

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categories, hobbies, and even industries.[13] Social worlds may contain other social worlds—"sub-social worlds" (Strauss 1982, 1984). Similarly, they are often subsumed by other social worlds.[14]

Social worlds are amorphous, and it is difficult to pin down their boundaries (Strauss 1978). These boundaries are produced and re-produced in the course of activity, just as Wenger (1998) notes about communities of practice. The boundaries may be symbolic, material, or both. The boundaries of some social worlds are more formal than those of others, as in the case of occupational categories with institutionalized standards of entry or those with highly regulated sites of activity.[15] Becker (Becker and Pessin 2003) suggests that while participants argue over boundaries, for analysts of these worlds, a boundary is a tool that is essential for analytic purposes though not something that simply "exists" in the world. In other words, social analysts as part of their practice create and argue over boundaries just as participants do (though perhaps not the same boundaries).

Setting, defending, and challenging boundaries are ways that participants legitimate their activity. Strauss (1982) describes several "legitimation processes" that play a role in battles over authenticity. Authenticity here "pertains to the quality of action, as well as to judgments of which acts are more essential" to a world (Strauss 1978:123). These battles concern questions of "genuineness and purity, real and fake,…propriety and impropriety,…morality and immorality, and legality and illegality" (Strauss 1982:172-173).

These legitimation processes and other social world concerns are "debated, negotiated, fought out, [and] forced" in *arenas* where "members of various…social worlds stake differential claims, seek differential ends, engage in contests, and make or break alliances in order to do the things they wish to do" (Strauss 1978:124-125). Arenas are "composed of multiple worlds organized ecologically around issues of mutual concern and commitment to action" (Clarke and Star 2007:113). To Strauss, formal organizations and mass media are examples of arenas where these issues and commitments come together. Arenas are also sites where social worlds are subject to continual processes of *segmentation*, the formation of sub-worlds, and *intersection*—the meeting of worlds. The segmenting and intersection of social worlds helps fuel legitimation processes. Technological, spatial, and organizational changes play important roles as well.

Questions of legitimation are important in my discussion of deviantART in later chapters. Participants use various features to debate, negotiate, and produce tensions related to art practice and the use of the site. In doing so, they turn deviantART into an arena where several forms of legitimation processes play out. Strauss (1982) describes several kinds of legitimation processes that produce new worlds and affirm boundaries between others. Participants make claims of worth,

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[13] For example, studies of the "computer world" (Kling and Gerson's 1978) and "art worlds" (Becker's 1982, Fine 2004). Clarke and Star (2007) point to numerous examples related to the field of science and technology studies.

[14] For example, one might think broadly of the social world produced out of the activity of playing American football and see how this world contains many other "sub-social worlds" such as college, high school, or pee-wee football. These worlds are themselves part of other worlds, either professionally or regionally organized (the world of "college athletics," the world of high school sports in Odessa, Texas, etc.). The media play important parts in keeping these worlds together; so do social networks of participants and various institutions. Participating in these worlds are other worlds that may include worlds of players, coaches, medical staff, fans, agents, bookies, journalists, food vendors, and many others. People in these worlds participate in others as well.

[15] See further discussion of this point as it relates to identity below and in fn. 21.

claims about the value of their practice. According to Strauss, participants objectify their own activities and create a collective sense of a practice that is different than other practices and a sense that there is a collective "we" engaged in it. Claims of worth are accompanied by "distancing" between one form of activity and another. Others *not* engaged directly in the activity under discussion might be the ones to question or make claims in support of *or* against its worth.[16] "Theorizing," another legitimation process, is a feature of claiming worth and distancing. By "theorizing," Strauss refers to the claims that people make about how their worlds "work" and elaborations of what kinds of activities or positions are acceptable (even though participants themselves may not refer to them as "theories"). As such, theorizing provides the "ideological basis for defense and attack" (Strauss 1982:176). As Fine (2004:37) puts it,

> Social worlds depend on ideological formulations…. Further, these ideologies are often known through practice, rather than in theory. Ideology is often linked to a set of core images and emotional responses. Ideologies, in practice, are less fully developed theories than they are guides to understanding.

According to Strauss (1982), such theorizing consists of the ongoing development of collective memory and history that legitimates the activity.

Finally, legitimation involves setting and embodying standards, and then evaluating the activities of different people in reference to those standards. Strauss argues that standards emerge and become formalized as they are recognized, negotiated, or fought over. People make them explicit through teaching and coaching, producing "exemplifications and models" that can act as "reaffirmations of best ways to carry out the world's activities" (Strauss 1982:181). Markers of legitimacy vary and may come in the form of awards, degrees, reviews, and so forth.

Legitimation processes in social worlds overlap with Wenger's (1998) notion of *participation* and *reification* in communities of practice. *Participation* refers to "the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises" (55). This experience can be "conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative" (56). *Reification* refers to "the process of giving form to our own experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness.'" (58). Importantly, "reification…is not merely giving expression to existing meanings, but in fact creating the conditions for new meanings" (68). In Wenger's account, participants' theorizing and reflection about their own activities are part of both participation and reification. Wenger says that theorizing produces meaning that help constitute a community of practice, just as Strauss argues that such theories "legitimate" a social world activity and thus help constitute a social world. Theories are reified objects of reflection produced through mutual engagement. Other examples of reification important for my discussion of deviantART are policies, institutional roles of authority, documents and arguments therein, metrics, designs, and technologies (91). Legitimation processes, participation, and reification help participants establish boundaries between social worlds and forge discursive and material links between them.

These theoretical currents inform my project. The boundaries of deviantART are varied and amorphous. In one respect, the site has a clear boundary established by its URL. Posting art or

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[16] Establishing distance between two forms of activity does not necessarily delegitimize either of the activities, though efforts to delegitimize always come with an effort to distance.

engaging with others through the site's interfaces requires joining, though joining is free, relatively easy, and open to everyone. At the same time, as the site's content is widely public and accessible, "participants" in the site include many people who are not members at all yet who may view art, download it, visit user pages, read conversations, and so forth. Some of this activity is measurable and detectable, even feeding back into the design of the visible interfaces of the site. As noted in chapter 2, the site's boundaries extend into other sites as well, such as conventions where deviantART members find each other, swap usernames, and give each other business cards with deviantART URLs, and where deviantART, Inc. has sponsored events. deviantART Inc., with multiple offices around the world (some of which are the homes of staff members) are, of course, another location of deviantART.

The concepts that I introduce above help me make sense of some of deviantART's features and uses. deviantART's journals, forums, news articles, chatrooms, and comments are sites where various legitimation processes play out. They are used to make claims of worth (or counter claims), to theorize about the nature of an activity, to distance from other activities, and to set standards. Issues include concerns of the "right" ways to use deviantART and the "right" ways to practice art. In Wenger's terms, these artifacts are evidence of "participation" and examples of "reification." They are documents that stand for positions on topics that can be circulated, commented upon, and reflected upon. They are sites of engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger 1998). They literally produce deviantART as a website and help produce the worlds of art and deviantART.

3.1.3   Identity as social process

Rather than view identity as (a) a collection of personality traits, (b) an internalization of some broader cultural identity, or (c) a feature determined by fluid subject-positions that change from moment to moment, practice and social world perspectives see identity as something that forms and is transformed through ongoing social and historical practice.[17] According to Wenger (1998:145-146), identity is

> A pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other…. Talking about identity in social terms is not denying individuality but viewing the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practice of specific communities. It is therefore a mistaken dichotomy to wonder whether the unit of analysis of identity should be the community or the person. The focus must be on the process of their mutual constitution.

Lave and Wenger (1991) equate identity transformation with *learning* and describe both as *legitimate peripheral participation*.[18] Legitimate peripheral participation (or LPP) describes changes to people's participation along a trajectory as they move from "newcomer" to "old-timer" in a community of practice (or social world). As newcomers participate and this participation is treated by other practitioners as a position of "legitimate peripherality" (Lave and Wenger 1991:36), their

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[17] Holland et al. 1998 and Strauss 1997[1959] present thorough discussions of the alternative views listed here.

[18] To Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is not the acquisition of knowledge or cognitive transformations that occur "in the head" (see also Wenger 1998). Similarly, Strauss (1997[1959]:94) describes learning as "not merely acquiring more and more knowledge, but as becoming transformed."

contributions become valued (or, legitimated). Newcomers achieve a "deeper sense of value" that has to do with "becoming part of the community" and eventually, "an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner" (Lave and Wenger 1991:111).[19]

Though people may have an outcome in mind, their constructing of such an identity is not a fully intentional process. Lave and Wenger (1998:54) consider intentionality "as an ongoing flow of reflective monitoring in the context of engagement…organized around trajectories of participation." It is in this becoming a "reflective practitioner" (Schön 1983) that a particular identity is formed in relation to a community of practice.[20]

Wenger (1998) describes an identity as a "layer of events of participation and reification by which…experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (1998:151). He outlines three different "modes of belonging" or forms of participation (Wenger 1998:173-187). Participants *engage* in the negotiation of meaning. They *imagine* the connections across space and time between their own experiences and those of others. Finally, they *align*, or coordinate, their own practices to fit in the world they engage with and imagine. Then, the "reification of participation," like Lave and Wenger's (1991) point about reflection, brings identity "into focus" (Wenger 1998:151).

Naming and classification reify commitments associated with an identity (Strauss 1997[1959]). Classifications direct actions and create value (see also Bowker and Star 1999) and shape people's perceptions of themselves. According to Strauss (1997[1959]:42) identities are formed as people take up new commitments, or endeavors, "continued action of enterprise, having to do with striving after certain values that the individual esteems." This action in turn means *being identified* with those commitments. All aspects of these commitments, including the recognition and display of progress and success, are "widely shared" (43).[21]

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[19] Lave (1993:6) describes this process as "changing participation" and "changing understanding in practice." Lave (2008) laments that she and Wenger use the words "full" and "mastery" in earlier work. These words, Lave suggests, can and have lead to a sense that communities of practice have a precise series of stages towards "full participation" and that communities of practice simply replicate themselves as newcomers reprise the activities of old-timers. In Lave (2011) it seems that "mature practice" is a term to replace "mastery" or "full participation."

[20] Holland et. al. (1998) go even further in their discussion of how the self forms in practice in relation to cultural or "figured" worlds. Dreir's (2007) richly theoretical account of patients of therapy do as well. Like these later works, Lave and Wenger (1991), and in particular Lave (see Lave 1988) are concerned with psychological theories of learning (see also Lave 2011). For my purposes, which do not go into questions of psychology, Lave and Wenger's points on identity are sufficient, though I draw from Wenger (1998) and Strauss (1997[1959]) as well.

[21] In some cases of participation and identify formation in social worlds, there are "status passages" (Strauss 1997[1959]:103) that demarcate different "stages" of a particular progression (similar to Wenger's [1998:156] notion of "paradigmatic trajectories"). Some worlds have institutionally or organizationally established "stages," but others may not (see also fn. 15). As Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, stages, if they exist at all, may only be created prospectively or retrospectively in the course of action and interaction. In many of Strauss' examples, identities and commitments are linked to occupational groups, but he is clear that families, locales, and other groups, where "membership" and "endeavor" are less formally structured, fit as well (1997[1959]:43). However, questions concerning what it means to become a member and the degrees of formality involved are useful to keep in mind. These questions highlight distinctions between identifying oneself and being identified as a participant in different groups. For example, becoming and being a doctor is different than becoming and being a stamp collector, though both are identities shaped through participation in social worlds. In some cases, one can make identity claims simply by participating rather than proceeding through a clear, institutionalized pathway. For example, what it means to become a football player or doctor is quite different than what it means to become an artist or journalist. The

As a website and arena where questions over legitimacy and authenticity play out, participation in deviantART provides ways in which members make various claims about their own identities and that of "artists" as a category. Following Wenger (1998), they imagine the nature of art and art worlds, align their activities with others, and engage with others in meaning-making. deviantART's category system provides names to members' practices and allows members to classify themselves and each other. There are also various markers of recognition that deviantART's members have made "turning points" (Strauss 1997[1957]) in their careers, such as being awarded Daily Deviations or reaching other milestones. In addition, deviantART provides various organizational identity markers and pathways, such as promotion to "Seniors," being accepted as Gallery Managers or Message Network Administrators, or even being hired to be a staff member (see chapter 2).

3.1.4 Tensions and the mutual constitution of identities and worlds

Identities and worlds are mutually constituted. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain how by focusing on the tensions between newcomers and old-timers—two poles on a spectrum of participation. The tension between these poles accounts for a dynamic of continuity and change. Some worlds may be inviting and open to new participants. Or, there may be efforts to keep people on the periphery, sometimes legitimate efforts from the perspective of more established participants (Lave and Wenger 1991).[22] Peripherality can be empowering or disempowering, a situation that Lave and Wenger (1991:37) describe as the "ambiguity of peripherality."

The continuity-change dynamic is not straightforward. Newcomers are "caught in a dilemma":

> On the one hand, they need to engage in the existing practice, which has developed over time: to understand it, to participate in it, and to become full members of the community in which it exists. On the other hand, they have a stake in its development as they begin to establish their own identity in its future. (Lave and Wenger, 1991:115)

Some newcomers may stress change to secure a place for themselves. This is not always the case, however. Wenger (1998:157) astutely observes that newcomers

> Must gain some access—vicarious as it may be—to the history they want to contribute to; they must make it part of their own identities. As a result, newcomers are not necessarily more progressive than old-timers; they do not necessarily seek to change the practice more than established members do. They have an investment in continuity because it connects them to a history of which they are not a part. Their very fragility and their efforts to include some of that history in their own identity may push them toward seeking continuity. (Wenger 1998:157)

Meanwhile, old-timers are also caught in dilemmas. Some old-timers may wish to keep newcomers at the periphery to secure their own positions. Yet, old-timers always need newcomers

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former examples involves a highly regulated and typical career path, the latter examples less so.

[22] Similarly, Unruh (1979) notes that active participants within social worlds may work to keep "strangers" (a type of social world participant in his model) in such a position.

for the practice to survive and for a community of practice (or social world) to sustain itself over time. Some old-timers may seek to attract newcomers also to secure their positions of power and push for change rather than continuity. According to Wenger (1998:157), old-timers "may want to invest themselves in the future not so much to continue it as to give it new wings. They might thus welcome the new potentials afforded by new generations who are less hostage to the past." This discussion of the relationship between newcomers and old-timers justifies questioning some of the claims made about new generations as drivers of changing conceptions of creativity and related practices (chapter 1). In their practice, newcomers are perhaps just as likely as old-timers (and perhaps more) to draw on old ideas even if they engage with new technology.

Lave (2008) suggests that there are issues beyond the newcomer-old-timer tension worth considering: "we should have insisted that communities of practice do not exist in isolation from each other and should be examined in their relations" (296n5). Where communities of practice overlap, there are likely to be points of tension driving the mutually transformative processes of identity and world. This was precisely Strauss' point in his discussion of the intersections of social worlds and conflicts in arenas. In his discussion of social world intersections, Strauss (1982:137) describes "invading, defending, allying, cooperating, competing, borrowing, migrating from and into, fusing" as "intersecting processes." Therefore, not only are social worlds in tension internally, there are points of tension as well where social worlds overlap.

The outcomes of these tensions of continuity and displacement and intersecting processes cannot be known in advance. They may or may not lead to segmentation or mergers between worlds. Tensions may be resolved, and the activity of the world may change. In any event identities, practices, and social worlds all change over time in relation to each other.

3.1.5 Technology in practice

The final aspect of a practice perspective I wish to discuss concerns technology. According to Lave and Wenger (1991:101), the "technologies of practice" embody part of the history of a practice and carry with them a cultural heritage. Strauss argues that experts in the activities of a social world are also experts in the technologies of that world (1982:180). Becker (1982) notes that many of the conventions that support the coordination and interaction among participants in a social world are embodied in technologies. In all of these accounts, technologies are transparent in two ways. They are "transparent" in the sense that using them involves some form of practical understanding of them (Lave and Wenger 1991:101). They are also transparent in the way that they fade into the background as the activities of using them come into the foreground. But, when people, in practice, consider technologies' significance—for example, at moments of theorizing and reification—these artifacts can return to the foreground (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998).

Technologies neither are the result of autonomous development outside of social life nor do they have deterministic impacts (Van House 2003). Over time different groups of people and institutions shape the paths of technology development. But, these groups of people do not just include the organizations and people positioned as technology "designers," otherwise the notion that technology is "socially constructed" would be a rather vacuous statement (Woolgar 1991). Rather those who take up technologies and use them as part of their everyday practice are also instrumental in shaping their ongoing development.

Different groups of users play active roles in shaping technologies as they are put into practice (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003).[23] According to Suchman (2007:278), "rather than fixed objects that prescribe their use, artifacts—particularly computationally based devices—comprise a medium or starting place elaborated in use." That is, technologies come with "interpretive flexibility" in practice (Bijker 1995, Pinch 1996). These interpretations, however, are not infinitely malleable and are shaped and constrained in social worlds. In Wenger's (1998) terms, technologies are reified forms of participation in social life.

Technologies are objects around which different social worlds—of users, designers, and other invested parties—intersect and shape use and meaning.[24] Strauss (1982:137, quoting Kling and Gerson 1978:36) describes how designers and users intersect at a product or service, which in turn "'act as the medium and mechanism by which changes in technology (including new applications) flow from vendors to users, and their consequences in turn to consumers. Conversely, demands for change and criticism of existing procedures and policy flow in the other direction." However, situations are more complex than a notion of "flows" suggest. According to Brown and Duguid (1994a:10), the design, use, and appropriation of technologies rely on the presence of shared resources and genres—"socially constructed interpretive conventions." Continuity of material form and continuity of genre combine to sustain these resources (Brown and Duguid 1994a:18). Designers "borrow" from other designers and in effect mobilize these resources (though not always intentionally). When "design 'borrows,'" however, "it summons implicit but robust cultural understanding that has been built at other times and in other domains" (Brown and Duguid 1994b:142). What cultural understandings are summoned up is often left implicit as if these are natural and widely shared.

As Brown and Duguid's argument of resources and conventions implies, technologies are also sites where different social worlds of *users* intersect, a "mediation junction" (Schot and de la Bruhéze 2003) between users, worlds, and practices. This framing of technology plays on Cowan's notion of a "consumption junction…the place and the time at which the consumer makes choices between competing technologies" (1987:263), which she argues reveals the unintended consequences of production. In this dissertation, I am taking this point one step further. Technologies and the unintended consequences of production have further consequences downstream. Below in this chapter, elaborating the qualities of infrastructure in practice helps me explain how these consequences matter.

3.1.6   Summary and further implications

In this section, I have made the following key points: Identity formation is a social process, one intimately tied to questions of commitments to endeavors that take place within social worlds and communities of practice. Changes to these worlds may come from the entrance of new

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[23] Oudshoorn and Pinch argue, "Users and technology are too often viewed as separate objects of research" (2003:2); rather they should be understood as "co-constructed. There are a number of different approaches to how "users matter" that emphasize different ways that users and technologies are mutually constituted. The nuances of the differences in these approaches is beyond the scope of this dissertation, though see Grint and Woolgar (1997), Oudshoorn and Pinch (2003), and Van House (2003) for helpful reviews.

[24] Designers, users, marketers and other parties appropriate technologies for particular purposes and constrain their use for others (see Mackay and Gillespie 1992, Eglash 2004).

participants, new modes of organization, new technologies, and new ways of doing things. Inevitably, there arise questions of authenticity and legitimacy. There are various ways in which a world's activities are justified and legitimated, sparking different relationships amongst participants, some collaborative and others agonistic. Changes in relationships produce tensions, even outright conflict, in the practice. Finally, technologies are reifications of practice. In the design of technologies, multiple social worlds come together. Designers and users rely on shared resources, genres, and conventions. However, technologies come with unintended consequences, which may signal breakdowns in the construction of supposedly shared resources.

My approach provides new analytic vocabulary with which to analyze deviantART and the issues I raise in subsequent chapters (rather than terms such as "online community" and "social network site"). I view deviantART as *simultaneously*:

- A social world oriented around the use of the website (managed by a corporate organization, a collection of volunteers, and other "community" leaders);

- A collection of sub-social worlds, some that have formed on the site (e.g. regulars in particular forums or chatrooms or in other groups) and some that formed elsewhere but incorporated the site as useful communications technology for their sub-world;

- A site where multiple, diverse social worlds and communities of practice intersected, including worlds related to particular art forms, commercial industries (e.g. entertainment, web/Internet, advertising), technology, and likely others as well;[25]

- An arena where issues within and among worlds are negotiated, debated, and contested.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the notion of "social worlds" as an alternative to "communities of practice" but incorporate elements from accounts of the theoretical formulations of both into my analysis of deviantART and its participants' practices. Neither of the concepts, in abstracted form, assumes a necessarily "well-defined" activity (Lave and Wenger 1991:98). Both presume amorphous boundaries that may not be "socially visible" (Lave and Wenger 1991:98).

The two concepts are not simply interchangeable in all circumstances. In my view and usage all communities of practice are social worlds, though not all social worlds are communities of practice. The difference hinges on which practices one is concerned with as well as the scope and scale of that practice. Social worlds, in theory, seem to allow for more layers of nesting and can be defined at more abstract levels (e.g. a world of "art" or "football").[26] Typical accounts of social worlds seem to constitute more easily recognizable social categories (to analysts and participants alike) than communities of practice. Most important is Lave and Wenger's emphasis on an "activity system about which participants *share understandings* concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (1991:98, emphasis mine; see also Wenger 1998). Strauss emphasizes coordination of activities among social world participants (see, for example, Becker 1982), but he does not make claims about their level of shared understanding.

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[25] In this dissertation, I will not describe deviantART as "a" community of practice. I see it as likely that there are groups of people that could be analyzed in those terms (though taking into account issues regarding online communities of practice that I raise here and return to in chapter 8). Rather, the material in chapters 5, 6, and 7 will demonstrate attempts (and failures) to created shared understandings of "art" and "the web" and assumptions that they already exist.

[26] Thanks to Nancy Van House and Paul Duguid for helping me think through these distinctions.

Similarly, Fine (2004:5) describes the "*perception* of common interests" (emphasis mine) as part of the makeup of social worlds. A recurring theme throughout this dissertation is a presumption by some participants in deviantART—both staff and members—of shared understandings of what deviantART, art, and the web are all about.

Questions about the sharing of commitments also point to where "communities of practice" and "social worlds" have another important common element, in theory, but pose an important theoretical question, in practice. According to theory, neither concept necessarily implies face-to-face communication and co-presence. This point is implicit in Strauss' and others' account of social worlds, which span distance but are connected by networks of communication (Kling and Gerson 1978). Lave and Wenger make the point explicitly and note that communities of practice do not have to be face-to-face (1991:98), even as they rely primarily on examples of apprenticeship and the close proximity of participants.

Lave and Wenger's position here has given many scholars license to seek communities of practice within virtual communities, and some scholars have argued that Lave and Wenger's framework aligns easily with the web. Haythornthwaite (2007:132), for example, writes that communities of practice are "excellent examples of communities liberated from geography, well supported by online interaction." Yet, others have argued that such an alignment is, at best, "debatable" (Ellis et al. 2004). This difference has little to do with the question of *community* online (Haythornthwaite's primary concern) and instead hinges on what is meant by *practice* and how practice is "sustained and reproduced over time" (Duguid 2005b:109).

A practice is sustained and reproduced over time through participation and reification and the production of shared knowledge (Wenger 1998). Haythornthwaite describes how groups use the web to codify their shared knowledge base. But, the knowledge Lave and Wenger, Wenger, and other practice theorists describe is a blend of tacit and explicit forms (Brown and Duguid 2001, Ellis et al. 2004). The emphasis on tacit knowledge in the reproduction of practice is what raises important doubts about LPP, and thus identity transformation, mediated by networked communication technologies. Tacit knowledge typically suggests embodiment and close proximity maintained over time. How to share tacit knowledge, particularly the "epistemic and ethical commitments" of a practice, poses a central dilemma (Duguid 2005b).

The question is, how do Lave and Wenger (1991) argue for the importance of tacit knowledge while also suggesting that communities of practice do not have to be face-to-face? One possibility is that had Lave and Wenger further worked through the concept of community of practice—as they acknowledged (1991:42) they had not—they may have retracted their position about co-presence. Brown and Duguid (2001) and Duguid (2005b) take this approach when they refine the concept and limit its applicability.[27] Following the material in chapters 5, 6, and 7, however, I offer another possibility in chapter 8. This possibility focuses on the term "legitimate" in LPP and how it might relate to the tacit sharing of commitments. I suggest that participation in deviantART

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[27] Brown and Duguid (2001) introduce the term *networks of practice* to the discussion. They argue that people build up a network of practice where shared underlying practice and social-epistemic bonds "prepare the ground" for the construction of knowledge across space and time. They draw primarily from Knorr-Cetina's (1999) account of epistemic cultures and Giddens' (1990) discussion of "disembedding" and "reembedding" knowledge. Takhteyev (forthcoming) builds upon Brown and Duguid but instead of "networks of practice," he draws from Strauss and the sociology of work to describe "worlds of practice."

provides opportunities for the construction of quasi-explicit (or quasi-tacit) knowledge about a practice. In doing so, it provides *both* openings to and closings off from various practices.

The practice perspective outlined here provides a theoretical foundation for understanding particular perspectives on what I mean by creative practitioner and infrastructure. An identity as creative practitioner is formed out of individual action in social worlds that shape what it means to be creative. Infrastructure is only in part technological and is thoroughly social. In the rest of this chapter, I elaborate these concepts in more detail.

3.2   Recognition as creative practitioners and identities-as-artists

As introduced in chapter 1, a *creative practitioner* is an identity constituted by participation in creative practice. This definition raises the question, however, of what I mean by "creative" (and by "creativity"). The media scholars Banaji and Burn (2007) identify ten different—and sometimes contradictory—rhetorics through which the notion of creativity is constructed and deployed in society.[28] The perspective on creativity by the Web 2.0 creativity consensus is most closely aligned with what Banaji and Burn (2007:63) describe as the rhetorics of "Democratic Creativity" and "Ubiquitous Creativity," both of which are "explicitly anti-elitist conceptualisation[s] of creativity as inherent in the everyday cultural and symbolic practices of all human beings."[29] These notions of creativity are opposed to a rhetoric of the "Creative Genius," which is historically entangled with a Romantic conception of "art" (Banaji and Burn 2007, Williams 1983).[30] The anthropologists Hallam and Ingold (2007) endorse a view of creativity as *improvisation* that is opposed to *innovation.* In this view, creativity is not necessarily aligned with novelty, originality, or challenges to convention. Rather, creativity can also encapsulate all of the improvisational work that people do to maintain continuity and tradition in the face of continual change—"the art of making things stick" (Barber 2007).[31] Clearly, creativity is a complex and often contradictory concept.

Here, however, I do not set out to define creativity. Rather, I investigate how participants put different ideas of creativity into practice through their use of deviantART. Given the choice of deviantART as a primary field site, for the purposes of this study, participants' development of identities-as-*artists* is a proxy for their becoming creative practitioners.[32] Of course, I only defer the question of creativity and creators to art and artists, which does not make the terms clearer. As

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[28] See also Banaji et al. (2006) for a more detailed review.

[29] The difference between the Ubiquitous and Democratic rhetorics has to do with politics. Not everything Banaji and Burn categorize as Ubiquitous is as political as Democratic, though it seems that everything they describe as Democratic presumes ubiquity. For my purposes, both of these can be combined to produce a notion of "everyday creativity" or "vernacular creativity" (Burgess 2007).

[30] As I will discuss below, the modern sense of "creative" developed hand-in-hand with the modern sense of "art" (Williams 1983).

[31] While not necessarily focusing on practice in the sense that I have described in the previous section, the anthropological and historical approaches in Hallam and Ingold (2007) leads to their conceptions of creativity.

[32] I am not suggesting that creativity necessarily corresponds to art. A study of "creative practitioners" in worlds of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) "makers," scientists, or engineers would be different than this one.

folklorist Gerald Pocius puts it, "perhaps of all the words that surround us in our daily life, *art* is one of the most contentious, most controversial" (quoted in Fine 2003:154).[33]

There is no easy answer to the questions of what is art and who is an artist. This was a point clear to many participants in my study when they explicitly discussed these questions. The sociologist Shyon Baumann's brief review of literary, philosophical, biological, and psychological approaches points to the diversity of ways in which scholars have tried to come up with definitions (2007:3-6). Indeed, the figure of the "artist" and the status of his or her work as "art" have been a focus of sociological investigation for the past several decades. Sociologists have argued that art should be viewed much like any other human endeavor: the result of the social activities of a range of people and institutions. This approach to art does not seek to make a statement on who should or should not be considered "an artist" but how society produces certain people as artists and their products as art.

There are a number of different views about how this social production of art and artists happens, but here I focus on two of the foundational figures in the field—Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu.[34] In his seminal text on the subject Becker (1982) argues that art and artistic reputations are the products of collective action by all of the participants in *art worlds*. Becker's art worlds are cases of Strauss' concept of social worlds.[35] Becker defines an art world tautologically as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of artworks that art world is noted for" (1982:x). An artist is then someone who does whatever a particular art world sees as core to the activity of art. Artists, over time and in relation to the worlds in which they participate, can push at these core activities and, intentionally or not, create new theories of art that add to what these core activities are (see Danto 1964).[36]

Taking a different approach, Bourdieu (1993, 1996) describes artistic and literary activities as constituting a social *field*. A field is a "structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different resources or 'capital'" (Thompson in Bourdieu 1996).[37] The artistic field is a case of a "field of cultural production," formed by the "production, circulation, and consumption of symbolic goods" (Johnson in Bourdieu 1993:9). This

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[33] Fine (2004:279) writes, "Art is a dangerous word, a concept that claims both too much and too little."

[34] There are several other important approaches as the sociology of art has continued to evolve. Current debates include how to better theorize relations of power, describe the relations between consumers and producers of art and media content (more generally), and how to re-incorporate artistic objects and the tradition of art history back into the discussion (Hesmondhalgh 2006, de la Fuente 2007). De la Fuente (2007) provides a useful review of current debates (and a discussion of a "New Sociology of Art"). Hesmondhalgh (2006) provides a critique of the "production of culture" perspective (see fn. 36) and others. Here, however, I do not directly engage in these debates but rather draw from them key ideas that have shaped my analysis of material from field-work in line with the practice approach described in the previous section.

[35] Becker, in his publications prior to *Art Worlds*, was one of several key scholars that inspired Strauss' social world perspective.

[36] Becker and others inspired what has since been described as a "production of culture" perspective. Art—as well as science, law, religion, and other domains—emerges from a "production nexus" consisting of several interrelated facets. These facets include occupational careers, organizational structures, industry structures, technology, law, and commercial markets (Peterson and Anand 2004).

[37] Hesmondhalgh (2006) provides an excellent overview of Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus.

field is semi-autonomous from the broader political and economic fields that subsume it. The field of cultural production is structured internally by competing sub-fields, differentiated by the scale of production and the market for produced work. A sub-field of "restricted production" is where artists primarily produce for other artists. This sub-field works to make the entire artistic field autonomous from the larger fields in society. In contrast, the sub-field of "large scale production" creates products for audiences in those larger fields (as well as each other) and thus works against autonomy. Central to Bourdieu's theory, then, are processes by which people compete for different kinds of resources and legitimate or de-legitimate other positions in the field. I develop this point further below.

My approach in this study is closer to that of Becker. Below, I discuss the importance of conventions, resources, and distribution systems in the recognition of artists. While his social world perspective may not be wholly reconcilable with Bourdieu's elaborate conception of fields (see Becker and Pessin 2006, Bourdieu 1993:35), I borrow several concepts from Bourdieu, particularly his discussion of "symbolic capital" as a marker of value and legitimacy.[38] Finally, I also incorporate the work of the sociologist Natalie Heinich (2009, Danko 2008) to enhance the discussion of the social recognition of artists.

Before I delve into the details, however, I want to step back to engage more with the historical construction of the figure of the artist that these sociologists have sought to de-center. This discussion is important because deviantART participants grappled with the legacy of this history. The tensions I describe in chapters 5, 6, and 7 have their origins in this history. Furthermore, the emergence of Romantic notions of art formed in response to changing distribution systems for the circulation of writing and other "artistic" products. History illuminates central ideas of art, authorship, and creativity that proponents of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus argue are now challenged by new distributions systems and their most "creative" users: new web technologies and a new generation of content creators. In the chapters that follow, I show that deviantART's participants—both its members and its staff—provide new voices for many of the older ideals of artistic practice. These views are reproduced and reified through discourses, features, and uses of deviantART.[39] Romantic notions of art are a part of art's history *and* its ongoing production.

3.2.1   The emergence of the Romantic view of art, artists, and creative genius

Becker (1982:352) describes the concept of genius as a part of a particular theory of artistic reputation that enshrines the idea of "specially gifted people" who "express profound human emotions and cultural values." Reciprocally, "The work's special qualities testify to its maker's special gifts, and the already known gifts of the maker testify to the special qualities of the work." Bourdieu (1993:76) characterizes this theory as a "belief" in the "charismatic ideology" of the figure of the artist. According to Bourdieu, this belief is both ideological cause and consequence of

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[38] I am aware of Becker and Pessin's (2006) warning against too easy co-mingling of ideas from Becker and Bourdieu. Both of these theorists distinguish themselves from each other. And, I see Lave and Wenger's (1991) approach to practice much closer to Strauss' and Becker's notion of "social worlds" than Bourdieu's "fields" (see also appendix D). Yet, there are important compatibilities. Among other things, both Becker and Bourdieu reject ideas of structural "rules" that dictate the actions of others. Both ascribe some room for agency but not complete agency (though to different extents and in different ways, which I do not have room to describe here).

[39] As I conclude in chapter 8, however, deviantART also transformed these ideals in practice.

artistic recognition and the production of art. Such a belief helps to create the value of the work of art and provides the foundation for an economy by which art, as a "symbolic good," circulates. This economy concerns the status and reputation of artists as part of their accrued "symbolic capital": the "degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration, or honour…founded on a dialectic of knowledge…and recognition…" (Johnson in Bourdieu 1993:7).

Becker's "theory" and Bourdieu's "belief" are historically and culturally situated conceptions of art, creativity, and authorship. Modern Western conceptions of these terms emerged in the latter half of the 18th century and developed throughout the course of the 19th century. Here, I trace several important interrelated developments: the emergence of a unified notion of "art," the idea of "art for art's sake" rather than for a commercial market, modern conceptions of "the author" with new relationships with works and audiences, and, last, a Romantic conception of creativity linked to art as the product of individual genius.

As a concept to refer to a unified group of activities (e.g. literature, painting, drawing, dance, music), "art" is a relatively recent idea.[40] Woodmansee (1994) traces some of "art's" origins to 18th-century Germany, where the writer Moritz "gave the first unequivocal and systematic expression" to a theory of arts as products produced "for their own sake," independent of "any external relationships or effects they might have" (Woodmansee 1994b:11). These "relationships" were two-fold: (1) a contrast to products of a newly mechanized industrial, mechanical production system (see also Williams 1960) and (2) a separation of the art object from its place among the artist's social relationships, including those people who facilitate its distribution and the audience. Contrasting with thinkers from earlier in the century, Moritz argued the effects an object might have on an audience should have nothing to do with its classification as art or judgments of quality.

This separation of "art" from audience combined with a separation of art from a commercial market to create the idea of "art for art's sake." Moritz and counterparts in England developed these ideas in response to the rise of new distribution systems for their work as mechanized production and the emergence of a vibrant commercial book trade gradually displaced patronage. "Literary entertainment was becoming an industry" (Woodmansee 1994b:25, see also Williams 1960), and a new reading public produced a new appetite and commercial demand for writing. Commercial publishing helped turn the products of "artistic" activities into commodities (Williams 1960). The commercialization of literary activity posed considerable problems for German poets and writers who were finding audiences primarily among German elite and those in universities (Woodmansee 1994b).[41] Moritz's writing, which contained ideas later echoed by

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[40] While the term "art" was widely used in English since the 13th century, specializations distinct from other trades can be traced to the late Renaissance, including painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture and architecture (Becker 1982, Williams 1983). While some of these particular skills were institutionalized in the 18th century, the use of "art" and "artists" to specifically correspond to those specializations described today as "art" and not others is a 19th century phenomenon (Williams 1983). Prior to this period, those people today thought of as scientists, technologists, artisans, craftsmen, and skilled workers were all called "artists." It was in the middle of the 18th century that people were, for the first time, consciously working out theories that unified "artistic" categories of human activity—along with new ones such as literature, dance, music—and distinguished them from the others (Williams 1960, Woodmansee 1994b).

[41] Put another way, the development of a unified theory of art tied to an ideology art for art's sake came as a result of "interests in disinterestedness" (Woodmansee 1994b; see also Bourdieu 1993:40).

Romantic poets and writers, produced an ideology that "'rescues' art from…the market" (Woodmansee 1994b:33).

As well as playing a role in the emergence of a distinct sphere of "art" and the notion of "art for art's sake," the commercial market in books and literary works shaped the formation of the idea of the writer as *author*.[42] As the whole system of distribution of writing and book production changed in England, France, and Germany, those who wrote found themselves with the opportunity to make money independent of patronage (Williams 1960, Woodmansee 1994b). This change had two effects. First, the relationship between writers (and then "artists") and their audiences changed. The prospective audience was now mediated by a market, with less intimacy and personal knowledge between audiences and writers. The Romantic poet Wordsworth opposed this market-oriented "Public" with an "Ideal Reader" of "the People"—"the true standard of excellence…the court of appeal in which real values were determined…in opposition to the 'factitious' values thrown up by the market" (Williams 1960:36-37). Second, new distribution systems also had consequences for the relationship between writers and their products. In response to accusations of widespread book piracy over the course of the 18th century, legal decisions and important philosophical treatises combined to affirm and solidify the notion that there was a figure of an "author" who through his original efforts created work in which he had legal and moral rights (Foucault 1984, Johns 2009, Rose 1993, Woodmansee 1994b).[43]

The concept of writer as originator, not present in previous conceptions, was thus provided widespread legal and moral affirmation (Rose 1994). The result was an author-work relationship that Foucault (1984) describes as playing an *author function*. The author function constructs the work as a materialized discourse, separate and distinctive from other forms of discourse (what Wenger [1998] might have described as a reification). The author function also distinguishes the particular person who may have done the "writing" activity from the subject classified as an "author."[44] According to Foucault, a key characteristic of the author function was that it helped construct the author as an individual unit with deep, creative power, whose work reflected that power.

The emergence of the twin figures of the author and the artist helped produce their counterpart—the creative genius. Writers and painters in the late 18th and early 19th centuries worked to establish a new ideology of their "art" as a special activity:

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[42] According to Woodmansee (1994:36), the Renaissance notion of a writer was "an unstable marriage of two distinct concepts." One was writer as "craftsman," a "master of a body of rules, or techniques, preserved and handed down…for manipulating the traditional materials in order to achieve effects prescribed by a cultivated audience of the court to which he owed both livelihood and status." The second was the writer as someone inspired by a muse or God to produce something that transcended that which an ordinary craftsman, even a master, could accomplish (see also Hesse 2002). In contrast to the Romantic view of author that emerged later, in neither of these views was the writer wholly responsible for "his" writings.

[43] The notion of "piracy" as applied to the copying and distribution of literary works without the authorization of the regime that held the rights to do so was itself a relatively recent construct (see Johns 2009).

[44] Foucault (Foucault 1984:108) writes, "As a result…there are a certain number of discourses that are endowed with the 'author function,' while others are deprived of it. A private letter may well have a signer—it does not have an author; a contract may well have a gaurantor—it does not have an author. An anonymous text posted on a wall probably has a writer—but not an author. The author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society."

> At a time when the artist is being described as just one producer of a commodity for the market, he is describing himself as a specially endowed person…an emphasis on the embodiment in art of certain human values, capacities, energies, which the development of society towards an industrial civilization was felt to be threatening or even destroying. (Williams 1960:39)

As Woodmansee (1994:39) describes, "for Wordsworth, writing in 1815, the creative genius is someone who does something utterly new, unprecedented, or in the radical formulation that he prefers, produces something that never existed before." Echoing Moritz from the previous century, Wordsworth's notion of "Creative Art" as "our calling" spoke of separating poetry and painting as "art" from all other skills as wells as "fusing" them "into common 'spheres of imaginative truth'" (Williams 1960:43).[45]

The notion of being "creative" grew up in tandem with the rise of individuality that emerged in the late 17th century (Hirsch and MacDonald 2007). Hirsch and MacDonald (2007:186) argue that "the self" became a moral project that required people to be creative, "in the sense of taking individual responsibility and realizing their immanent potential."[46] Therefore, while modern senses of "creative" as linked to "art" can be traced back to the early 18th century, according to Williams (1983:83),

> The decisive development was the conscious and then conventional association of creative with *art* and thought. By [the early 19th century] it was conscious and powerful; by [the mid 19th century] conventional. Creativity, a general name for the faculty, followed in [the 20th century].

With these historical links between artists, authors, and creators established and tied to changing distribution systems, I now return to detailing the key elements of a sociological view on the production of art and artists.

3.2.2   A sociological view of art and artists

Sociologists of art have worked to unravel (and in some cases undermine) the legacies of Romantic ideals of art and creativity. In contrast to seeing art as special or distinct from other human activities or as the product of individual creative genius, sociologists have argued that the identities of artists and the work they produce are the result of social processes. I now turn to elements of these perspectives that are important for my analysis of deviantART in chapters, 5, 6, and 7.

3.2.2.1   Art worlds: resources, conventions, and distribution systems

Becker (1982) presents the artist as someone who does whatever a particular art world sees as core to its activity. This person can do other things as well, and depending on the circumstances, many artists do other things out of necessity (Menger 1999). Artists also draw upon different kinds of *resources* for their "non-essential" activities. Becker divides these resources into two types: human

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[45] That Wordsworth was writing these words to a painter is significant. Bourdieu (1996) writes that 19th century writers who helped painters "liberate" themselves from the conservative tradition and convention of the French Academy. Later in the century, painters liberated themselves from writers.

[46] Here they draw from the philosophers Charles Taylor and Ian Hacking,

and material.[47] Human resources may include assistants, apprentices, teachers, other artists, or even those who supply those designated as "artists" with food and drinks.[48] Material resources consist of the technologies, artifacts, and supplies an artist needs to produce the work, such as brushes, paint, canvases, computers, digital tablets, software, instruments, paper, and so forth. These materials are often products of other social worlds, sometimes intentionally to be used in artistic endeavors, but clearly not always.[49]

Art worlds bring together human and material resources in the formation of "cooperative links" (Becker 1982:24). This "cooperation" is not always intentional, nor is it overtly collaborative. Rather, the links are built around social and material *conventions*. Conventions make cooperation easier and more efficient, and their absence would make cooperation more difficult. Therefore, they shape the relationships between artists and other art world participants, including audiences. Artists rely on audiences' tacit or explicit understanding of certain conventions and have to consider whether to act in accordance with them, to break them, or to play with them somewhere in between. Conventions affect almost all of the decisions that an artist makes in the production of work.

According to Becker, conventions constrain but do not determine action. They help make some paths easy and others difficult. Either way, artists and other art world participants have to engage with them. Yet, Becker is careful to note that artists do not always consciously engage with conventions. Artists make choices that are attuned to conventions that are "deeply internalized" (1982:204). Audiences do as well. In addition, conventions may be embodied in technologies and material resources in ways that participants do not necessarily realize explicitly but tacitly understand in their use of them.[50] To Becker, a convention is analogous—if not at times synonymous—with terms like "norm," "rule," "shared understanding," and "custom" (1982:30).[51] Conventions produce and explain regularities in art worlds and social life more generally (Becker and Pessin 2006).

The final relevant element of Becker's argument is his discussion of *distribution systems*. As discussed above, distribution systems for literary and artistic works were central in shaping modern senses of art, artists, authors, and creativity. According to Becker, "Artists produce what the distribution system can and will carry." In some art worlds people in a distribution system, such as dealers and collectors, may even play a more dominant role in crafting someone's identity as an artist than the artist herself, as Fine (2003, 2004) details in his ethnography of the world of "self-taught art."

Distribution systems, whether constructed with "old" or "new" media, set the floor and ceilings of artistic recognition (Becker 1982).[52] They shape how the work the artist produces will be seen by

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[47] Artists are dependent on both types of resources but can also create alternatives and work-arounds if the need arises.

[48] Human resources are a function of a practice's division of labor and of the analytical placement of a world's boundaries (or the scale of sociological analysis).

[49] In chapter 6, I argue that the web complicates Becker's distinction of human and material resources.

[50] This is what practice theorists, including Bourdieu, might describe as "practical mastery." See also Giddens 1979.

[51] Becker's notion of conventions is an alternative to social "structure." Below, I will argue that conventions are a part of infrastructure.

[52] Describing art worlds with magazines providing a new distribution system, Becker (1982:363) writes: "The

others. Who these "others" are, how they encounter the work, and how the artists are recognized as such are all products of these distribution systems, whether the system is one of patronage, "gallery-dealer," "dealer-critic," commercial production for a mass market, or other models (see also Plattner 1996). Different systems, each made up of different people, organizations, and institutions, come with conventions for getting things done and standards for what a work should look like.

Distribution systems shape the conventions, resources, and the values of art worlds and thus play a central role in shaping identities as artists. These systems have been historically important in shaping the ideals of artistic practice. Therefore, analyzing deviantART (and the web more generally) as such a system elevates the significance and importance of understanding how sites like deviantART operate and change if one is seeking to understand the implications of the web in young people's media production practices and "creativity." In chapter 8, I argue that what is often overlooked in discussions of Web 2.0 and creativity is an explicit focus on distribution systems; scholars usually focus instead on the "blurring" of consumption and production.

3.2.2.2   Legitimacy and value in the recognition of art and artists

Above in the chapter, I provided an abstract view of how participants in social worlds help to legitimate their activities through different legitimation processes (Strauss 1982) and participation and reification (Wenger 1998). Legitimacy in an art world is dependent on adherence to conventions and on already established reputations (Becker 1982), a mix of art and biography (Fine 2004).[53] Both relate to art world participants' continual development or reproduction of theories of art (as Strauss and Wenger suggest). Art world participants also help establish standards by which art is judged and artists are recognized. These theories and standards provide the ideological basis for how artists "claim worth" for one form of art and establish "distance" from others (in Strauss' terms). Standards, conventions, and theories all reify (in Wenger's terms) certain ideological conceptions of artistic practice.

Legitimation helps produce value. According to Becker, "Artists' reputations are a sum of the values [participants in art worlds] assign to the works they have produced" (1982:23). In other words different art worlds value different activities differently. Becker differentiates between "reputational value" and "economic value" as two categories of legitimacy.[54]

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proliferation of magazines makes possible the publication of much more material than would otherwise be publicly available, but it prevents writers achieving the major reputations they would like, even though whatever minor reputations the present situation gives them is more than the nothing they would probably have otherwise."

[53] Fine (2004) adds that these are processes continually in play, even after an artist is dead. Other art world participants continue to shape the biographies of artists who have died as well as the theories, conventions, and standards that shape a work as art.

[54] Fine (2004) draws out the implications of Becker's observations by analyzing the worlds of "self-taught art" where questions of legitimacy are almost entirely answered by biographical criteria. In these worlds, the wrong biography or the wrong change in biography over time can delegitimize the work of the artists. The relationship between value and legitimacy shapes and is shaped by the people and systems that distribute the work. Self-taught art's status is not shaped as much by curators, academics, and critics connected with major institutions but by dealers, auction houses, and collectors through economic transactions. There is a different balance between the market and the critics (Fine 2004:6).

Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) discussion of the social production of art in fields enhances this discussion of the relationship between value and legitimacy. As noted earlier, he draws attention to the fact that some artists produce limited quantities of specific works, intending them primarily for other producers. According to Bourdieu, with "restricted production" the ideology of "art for art's sake" is at its most extreme. There are other creators whose primary audiences are the mass market. These artists rely on popularity in the market to succeed. Artists in the former group compete for symbolic capital (analogous to what Becker described as "reputational value"). Those in the latter group compete primarily for economic capital (money). In Bourdieu's model, the competition for symbolic capital is accompanied by an explicit rejection of economic capital as well as mass appeal, at least in the short run.[55] It is only through a process of consecration over time that an artist may be able to exchange symbolic capital into economic capital—what English (2005:11) refers to as "capital intraconversion"—as their audiences expand and their reputations are more firmly entrenched.

According to Bourdieu, legitimacy is linked to ways in which artists and other participants seek to dominate one another in competition for these various forms of capital. The sociologist Natalie Heinich (2009) argues, however, that such a view forges too close a link between legitimization and domination, ignoring artists' agency in the process.[56] She argues that those who seem to be at the mercy of domination, "passionately desire that power to be exercised" (Heinich 2009:102). And, artists in positions of granting legitimacy need the active support of those who are being granted it: "their capacity to recognize is itself framed by strong expectations about its fairness" (Heinich 2009:12). Therefore, according to Heinich, artists play an active role in shaping the very process by which their identities as artists are recognized.

According to Heinich, recognition (artistic or otherwise) is a social process in which individuals seek to stand out in what is a collective enterprise (Heinich 2009). By focusing on questions of individual recognition, Heinich differentiates herself from Becker. She does not deny that art is a collective endeavor but seeks to further understand the importance of individual representations as well as the "clues…used to sustain such a representation" (2009:89) to participants in art worlds. To Heinich (2009), prizes and awards are examples of forms of recognition that help produce these individual representations (Wenger might call these examples "reifications of recognition"). Drawing on art historian Alan Bowness (1989), Heinich (2009) argues that recognition happens over time and space through different "circles of recognition." In each step, the identity of the artist is reestablished, recognized, and legitimized to new audiences. In chapter 8, I provide more details about these circles and how deviantART strains their spatial, temporal, and social dimensions.

3.2.3   Summary and implications

I have outlined key elements of a sociological approach to the production art and artistic recognition. I have argued that who counts as an artist and what counts as art is determined by the collective activities of participants in particular art worlds (as social worlds). Individual artists play

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[55] In Bourdieu's (1993) account, newcomers in particular may shun both forms of capital the most extreme version of an "art for art's sake" ideology, though over time newcomers earn symbolic capital whether intentionally or not.

[56] Heinich, a current influential sociologist of art, was a student of Bourdieu and over time came to disagree with much of his approach and conclusions (Danko 2008).

an agentive role in the process of artistic recognition as part of how they create work, sometimes challenge conventions, select among resources, and maneuver through distribution systems. Yet, their activities are shaped by art worlds' resources, conventions, and distribution systems. I have also presented an account of the origins of modern, Romantic conceptions of art and creativity. The sociological perspectives I have discussed have indeed undermined Romantic ideals by illuminating the collective nature of art and making the ideals themselves objects of sociological analysis.

I wish to highlight several further implications of these discussions for my study. Perhaps the most obvious at this point is that activities labeled "art" are, like any human endeavor, historically constituted social practices produced by people in social worlds. Second, adding to the lenses through which to consider deviantART—a social world, a set of sub-social worlds, an arena for the intersection of broader worlds—I can now add that of a new distribution system for artwork and artists. I have argued that changes in distributions systems played transformative roles in the emergence of Romantic conceptions of art and the artist. And, they shape the conventions and resources of all art worlds, in turn helping produce the identity of the artist. deviantART and the web are parts of a new distribution system (or several systems) for art and artists. As noted above, after presenting the empirical material, I return to the significance of distribution systems in general when considering debates about Web 2.0 and changes to art worlds.

Next, following Heinich, the assumption that art is a collective process does not mean ignoring or dismissing the importance of the ideals of art that are put into practice and debated by people aspiring to be recognized as artists. Indeed, I show how "value judgments and systems under scrutiny 'are defined legitimated or invalidated, constructed, deconstructed or reconstructed by the actors' themselves'" (Danko 2008 quoting Heinich). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 each respond to Heinich's challenge and examine the "clues used to sustain" (2009:89) individualistic representations of artists as they seek artistic recognition. I draw attention to themes that emerged throughout the course of fieldwork, which demonstrate the persistence of Romantic ideals of artistic practice and efforts to position deviantART's features and conventions of use as adhering to these ideals.

Finally, I argue that because deviantART brought together multiple art worlds as well as people at different stages of their trajectories as artists, it also brought together different "circles of recognition" (Heinich 2009 after Bowness 1989) that in a world without the web may have been kept separate. The combination of different kinds of artistic practice and different forms of recognition transformed old tensions. These new manifestations had consequences both on participants' identities as artists and creative practitioners and on the features and social conventions of the site (see chapter 8).

3.3   Infrastructure in practice

In the previous section, I emphasized concepts that help address the first of my pair of research questions: how participation in deviantART shaped its members' socially recognized identities as creative practitioners. I have argued that identities form through participation in social worlds and described how identities-as-artists form in relation to art worlds. I now shift emphasis to the second question: how members and the process of becoming recognized as artists and creative practitioners might shape the ongoing development of deviantART. I also connect the two research questions more concretely. A practice-based account of *infrastructure* helps me do both.

My framing of infrastructure builds on that formulated by Star and Ruhleder (1996) and further developed by Bowker and Star (1999). As these scholars point out, for many academics and lay practitioners alike, the term "infrastructure" conjures up a material and technological substrate that supports or establishes a foundation or base for social life.[57] Infrastructure is usually conceived as things like railroads, power grids, highways, plumbing, buildings, and so forth. Or, when modified by the term "information" or "communication," infrastructure often refers to systems of fiber optic cables, telephone lines, personal computers, servers, and databases. Indeed, "the Internet" and "the web" are more recent examples (Edwards 2003, Bowker et al. 2010). Even if infrastructure is taken to imply a configuration of technologies and artifacts alone, analyzing infrastructure would require careful sociological investigation. As I argue above in the chapter, technologies are materialized and reified forms of participation whose meaning is produced and reproduced in ongoing social practice within and among multiple social worlds.[58]

Such conceptions of infrastructure as purely technological obscure important social, organizational, and ideological dimensions of infrastructure. Therefore, the first part of an alternative notion is seeing infrastructure as a *social-technical system*, "the complex systems of social and technical components intertwined in mutually influencing relationships" (Johnson and Wetmore 2007:574). As Edwards elaborates, "infrastructures consist not only of hardware, but also of legal, corporate, and political-economic elements" (2003:199). Lievrouw and Livingstone, in their reframing of "new media" as the study of infrastructures, suggest that they have three interrelated components: "artefacts or devices," "activities and practices," and the "social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices" (2006:2, drawing on Bowker and Star 1999 and Star and Bowker 2006). Drawing on the same sources, Gitelman (2006) defines all *media* as "socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols…. They include a vast clutter of normative rules and default conditions which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus" (2006:7).

Infrastructures are configurations of technologies, policies, practices, and social conventions. But these elements, though not all technological, still do not simply "exist" as a layered set of things.[59] Rather, infrastructure is a relational concept: these complex socio-technical configurations only *become* infrastructure in "relation to organized practices" (Star and Ruhleder 1996:113). In practice what might be experienced as infrastructure for some groups might be experienced as obstacles for others.

3.3.1   Qualities of infrastructure in practice

As a relational concept, infrastructure has several dimensions (after Star and Ruhleder 1996, Bowker and Star 1999; see also Van House 2003). First, it is embedded in and built on an already established installed set of practices, institutions, social conventions, and technologies. Second, social worlds rely on working infrastructure to accomplish their activities. As such, infrastructure is linked with established and evolving conventions of practice in these worlds. Third, the notion of "working" and "conventions" mean that infrastructure is transparent in use and embodies standards

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[57] See Edwards 2003 for a discussion of the history of the term and its literal relationship to military "bases."

[58] To be more accurate, technologies help constitute social worlds.

[59] Just as social structure does not simply "exist" in the world, as developed earlier in the chapter.

that support this sense of transparency. Fourth, breakdowns can lead to the seemingly sudden visibility of infrastructural elements. Finally, building upon Lave and Wenger's and Strauss' accounts of technology, infrastructures are learned as part of membership in social worlds and thus concern questions of identity.[60]

It is with this last point that I begin to elaborate upon several aspects of infrastructure that are important for my use of the concept in this investigation of deviantART. First, if working infrastructure is part of what is learned through participation in social worlds, it is linked to the transformation of particular identities in practice. The development of infrastructure, the practices that make up that infrastructure, and the transformation of identity in practice are all mutually constitutive. My presentation in chapters 5, 6, and 7 builds from this point. As members contend with what counts as artistic recognition, what dispositions a "serious" artist should cultivate, and the nature of ethical and fair practice, they are, in effect, working to make the site infrastructural for their own practices and the practices they presume are or should be broadly shared by other artists. Members' reifications of artistic identity, through journal entries, news articles, and commentary, contribute to the ongoing constitution of the site. deviantART staff also contend with these questions concerning the nature of artistic identity and also do so through their writing on the site, and they have the additional ability to alter the technical architecture of the site to fit their own views or particular sets of members' views.[61] Moreover, as I argue with respect to the launch of new features I describe in chapters 5, 6, and 7, features come with hidden compromises (Jenkins 2006) that uneasily accommodate multiple ways of thinking about artistic recognition.

While technologies (or policies) may be *designed*, infrastructure *emerges* as a set of collectively used material and social resources within and among social worlds. This fact leads to a second aspect of infrastructure in practice. The formation of infrastructure is an indeterminate social process characterized by tensions between the different groups and worlds actively engaged in, or brought into, its development. As Edwards (2010:12) argues, "the fundamental dynamic of infrastructure development" is the "perpetual oscillation between the desire for smooth system-like behavior and the need to combine capabilities no single system can yet provide…. Infrastructure is never tension-free." Rather, infrastructures manage and accommodate tensions in practice. To be clear, though, infrastructure may give rise to new tensions. Therefore, tensions are not simply products of infrastructure, nor are they embedded in it. The confluence of elements that emerge as infrastructure in practice are products of tension. As described above, social worlds are in tension internally and in tension when they intersect. Therefore, tensions are inherently part of any linked set of technologies, practices, conventions, norms, and institutions that participants position as infrastructure. Infrastructures in practice may temporarily resolve these tensions through standards and conventions of practice. Infrastructures may seem to provide stability and help create a sense of

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[60] As I explain in appendix D, for Bowker and Star's purposes, social worlds and communities of practice are interchangeable concepts.

[61] In one case, however, I describe a member's effort to technically redesign the site through customizations to the interface that rely on browser extensions (see chapter 5's discussion of the "Suggest DD" customization). *Wikipedia* defines extension as "a computer program that extends the functionality of a web browser in some way" (see Wikipedia contributors, "Browser extension," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Browser_extension&oldid=457656032, last accessed November 28, 2011).

"how things work" to participants as well as social analysts—such as those discussed in chapter 1—particularly when thoroughly theorized and reified over time.[62]

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 each analyze a set of tensions in artistic practice and relate them to tensions implicated in the history of the web (discussed in chapter 2). Both implicitly and explicitly, members and staff sought to address disruptions and configure the site as working infrastructure by elaborating rules and norms (e.g. for "getting noticed" in chapter 5), trying to establish standards (e.g. for "critique" in chapter 6), setting policy, or designing features (e.g. for "sharing" in chapter 7). Each chapter shows how the collective production of deviantART as infrastructure emerges from these tensions and gives rise to new ones. In turn, this depiction of the web and the practices of its members varies significantly from those provided by the Web 2.0 creativity consensus and even those of some its critics.

Third, the interplay between stability and instability implies limits to coordinate and establish coherence across social worlds.[63] As social worlds change over time—due to intergenerational conflict, segmentation, intersection, or other causes—conventions and standards may become focal points of renewed tension or disruption.[64] What was transparent in use becomes visible in new ways to participants in practice. There are consequences that matter: "Emerging infrastructures invariably create winners and losers. If they are really infrastructures, they eventually make older ways of life extremely difficult to maintain" (Edwards 2010:12). At the same time, infrastructures maintain continuity with the past. The practices I look at in later chapters illustrate how participants in practice attempt to sort through the dynamics and consequences of continuity and change that come with infrastructure.

Finally, that infrastructures may produce disruption means that they partially constitute social arenas. But, infrastructures bring together worlds *and* help constitute worlds. They are "social settings" and "environments" in their own right (Edwards 2003).[65] deviantART's ambiguous status as infrastructure for a social world forming around the design and use of the site as well as infrastructure that brings together multiple social worlds and forms of creative practice is a theme contributing to the interplay of tensions in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

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[62] Some of the situationally-resolved tensions between groups are usefully thought of as *boundary objects*. These are either symbolic or physical objects that "inhabit several intersecting social worlds" (Star and Griesemer 1989:393), are "plastic" enough to suit the needs of these worlds, yet are "robust enough to maintain a common identity" (Bowker and Star 1999:297)—or "structure" (Star and Griesemer 1989)—between them. As Bowker and Star (1999:297) summarize: "Such objects have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable.… The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting communities [social worlds]." Star (2010:603) stresses in a recent review of the concept, her use of "objects" refers ambiguously to physical things and, in a pragmatist vein, any thing that has consequences and directs action (like a "powerful theory"). In this sense, "objects" in general are analogous to Wenger's (1998) "reifications." Anything "can" be a boundary object, given the proper scope and scale of application of the concept (Star 2010). However, when an object has its status as a boundary object, commonalities allow for common use by different social worlds with different and unstated meanings. In contrast, objects function as reifications of practice through negotiation of meaning.

[63] Thanks to Paul Duguid for emphasizing this point.

[64] Objects may not be able to maintain their status as boundary objects (see earlier footnote).

[65] Producing infrastructure in practice results in a new "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996).

3.3.2   Summary and implications

Echoing now long-held beliefs in technology studies, Gitelman (2006:9) writes:

> [It is] as much of a mistake to write broadly of "the telephone," "the camera," or "the computer," as it is "the media," and of—now, somehow, "the Internet" and "the Web"—naturalizing or essentializing technologies as if they were unchanging, "immutable objects with given, self-defining properties" around which changes swirl, and to or from which history proceeds.

On the contrary, as noted earlier, technologies are shaped in practice and in turn help constitute infrastructures of practice. They are joined by ideologies, social conventions, institutions, rules, and policies—all shaped in and between social worlds. The key question for analysts (and often implicitly for participants as well) is not just *what* is infrastructure but *when* and *how* the complex arrangements of technologies, practices, conventions, institutions, ideologies, and so forth become *infrastructural* to practices and social worlds (Star and Ruhleder 1996, Star and Bowker 2006).

Infrastructure in the sense that I have been describing is a more elaborate theorizing of Becker's account of the interplay between resources, conventions, and distribution systems in art worlds. Indeed, Becker's account is an oft-cited canonical account of the unraveling of infrastructure— "infrastructural inversion" (e.g. in Star and Ruhleder 1996 and Bowker and Star 1999 after Bowker 1994). Most studies of infrastructure, however, are in the context of "e-science" or "cyber-infrastructure," and investigate systems designed explicitly to be infrastructure for professional collaboration and coordination (e.g. Bowker et al. 2010, Edwards et al. 2007, Ribes and Bowker 2009).[66] Professionals using them are users of large-scale systems in development, seeking to make new databases, classification systems, software systems, and so forth fit into their everyday working practices. But, there are other domains and other kinds of people who shape infrastructural development, neither with the intention of doing so nor with collaboration and coordination in mind. Therefore, I am going to provide a different kind of account of the development of infrastructure in practice.

In addition, analyzing deviantART and the web through the lens of infrastructure provides an alternative to conventional ways that social scientists have investigated and formed conclusions about Internet- and web-based sociality. Most studies of the Internet and web have framed themselves as investigations of "community" or "social networks."[67] The media anthropologist John

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[66] The historical cases that help provide foundations for the concept are different in this regard (e.g. Star and Griesemer 1989, Bowker and Star 1999).

[67] "Network" is currently in vogue to describe social life mediated by the Internet and web. Its popularization in academic and business contexts predates the widespread use of the term "social network (or network*ing*) sites" to classify one particular genre of website (Castells 1996, 2001, Duguid 2005a, Knox et al. 2006, Podolny and Page 2006), though undoubtedly sites such as Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook have had some influence in popularizing it further (boyd and Ellison 2007). See Castells 2001 for a review of the turn from "community" to "network" in social research. These are not necessarily terms in opposition to one another, however, as the sociologist Barry Wellman and colleagues have demonstrated. Wellman and colleagues have long argued that modern communities are should be analyzed as social networks; and computer networks, as social networks, support the formation of modern communities, whether geographically proximal or not (see Wellman 1997, Wellman and Gulia 1998, Wellman et al. 1996, Wellman et al. 2002, Haythornthwaite and Wellman 2002, and Haythornthwaite 2007).

Postill (2008) issued a call for ways of analyzing web-based sociality that go beyond what he calls the "community/network paradigm." Infrastructure, as I have elaborated here, extends to other alternatives frameworks such as "fields" (Postill 2008) or "networked publics" (boyd 2008, Varnelis et al. 2008). I argue that infrastructure helps provide a way of showing how participants struggle with and against each other as they produce, conventionalize, and standardize the web in practice. Understanding how they do so requires engaging with the empirical material before returning to the theoretical. I pick up this thread in chapter 8.

The appearances of common form and technical functionality provide some users and analysts with the sense that the web has universal qualities and consequences. Viewing deviantART—and the web more generally—as infrastructure in practice helps explain why these tendencies to universalize might take place and provides impetus to consider how, beneath the surface, things may not be as stable as they seem. As I argue throughout this dissertation, many of the features of deviantART that I have described in the previous chapter resemble features common elsewhere on the web. Yet, it should not be assumed that there are stable, conventional, and widely shared interpretations of such features that are widely shared. In the chapters that follow I illustrate cases in which assumptions of convention or attempts to establish convention are made in relation to how participants see the web "working" elsewhere.

3.4 Conclusion

In chapter 1, I argued that the lack of detailed attention to specific technologies and practices is a critical aspect of the universalizing claims made about Web 2.0, user-generated content, and creativity. In this chapter, I have presented a set of theoretical concepts for considering these specifics. As a site where multiple social worlds intersect and overlap, deviantART is being established by its users and staff as working infrastructure for artistic recognition. Seeing deviantART as infrastructure means treating its features and functionality seriously, though not deterministically. At the same time it suggests a way of linking the development and use of deviantART to the production of identities and tensions in practice.

These identities and tensions concern how the seemingly conventional features of the contemporary web relate to artistic recognition practices. I have presented a synthesis of important sociological perspectives on artistic practice and traced the origins of a Romantic view of art with which the sociological views engage. The sociological view certainly challenges the Romantic view but, the sociological view also demands taking the Romantic view seriously if and how it is manifested in everyday practice. This approach opens the door for a different view of the relationship between the contemporary web and creative practice than the one offered by the Web 2.0 creativity consensus. As I discovered in fieldwork, the participants in deviantART either articulated or put into practice a range of perspectives of art. Tensions in these practices can be traced to the long-standing concerns I have presented here. While sensitive to tensions in general, I did not begin this study looking for the particular tensions I discuss in later chapters: quality, popularity, and exposure; communal recognition and individual genius; inspiration and skilled craft; imitation and originality; and ownership and theft. Rather, the themes and concerns that I began to see as salient to participants over the course of the projects emphasized the continued presence and importance of Romantic conceptions of art.

The discussion in this chapter is as much a starting point for answering my research questions as it is a lens for making sense for analyzing material from fieldwork. deviantART participants produced the site as both web infrastructure and art infrastructure, with all of the complexities that either one of these would entail even without the simultaneous presence of the other. In the chapters that follow, I elaborate on the various infrastructural practices that participants engaged in through their use of the site. I describe how different configurations of its features and the practices of using the site come to support—or are positioned to try to support—multiple worlds, ideals of art, and ideals of the web. I foreground some of the work—both visible and invisible—being done to make these arrangements infrastructural on deviantART and as such make these arrangements infrastructural with respect to the web. Before I present this material, in the next chapter I describe the implications of this theory for my methods and elaborate how I carried out my fieldwork.

An ethnography of deviantART as infrastructure

The research questions and theoretical commitments I have described up to this point came with two primary implications for conducting the project. The first was the necessity of some form of ethnographic approach to field work based on sustained observation of people's practices, taking seriously what people say and do and the meanings they construct. The second was a requirement to relate these practices—doings, sayings, and meanings—to the particular features and functionality of deviantART as objects of analysis.

Like all research projects, this one came with a unique set of challenges and difficulties, some coming as a result of research questions, others stemming from issues encountered over the course of fieldwork. It proved difficult to contextualize the uses of deviantART within the lives of the participants I observed and engaged with, while at the same time holding the specifics of deviantART in view. It was similarly difficult to delve into the details of any one aspect of deviantART—historically and technologically—while keeping an eye on unfolding events and engaging with deviantART's participants. Drawing spatial and temporal boundaries around the site or even a particular situation—even artificial boundaries for the purposes of research—seemed at times impossible. The amount of material to draw from seemed endless. I struggled to pin down my role as a participant-observer. There were other challenges as well.[1]

In this chapter I detail how I addressed these various commitments and challenges as I constructed and carried out this study as an ethnography of deviantART as infrastructure. I begin by outlining how I approached fieldwork. I then walk through the phases of fieldwork in chronological fashion, detailing the methods and rationale for my process of gathering and analyzing material.

4.1 Approaching the field

My approach to designing and conducting this project was informed by several contemporary debates and perspectives. I first address several topics concerning ethnographic inquiry of and with the Internet and web. This discussion also incorporates considerations of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). Then, I add to this discussion by considering Star's (1999) account of what is entailed in an ethnography of infrastructure.

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[1] Appendix B includes a discussion of research ethics, specifically on issues pertaining to issues posed by studies of online interaction. It also provides some notes on how my representation of quotations in the text.

4.1.1   Ethnography on, of, and with the Internet

Speculating on "studying the new media," Becker (2002:342) writes,

> While I think there is a limit to what can be accomplished by sitting in front of a computer and surfing the Internet, that might be the appropriate method for at least some research on these topics. The Internet is filled with examples of proto art forms whose adepts have found each other and created small networks of user/viewers which are the basis of potential new art worlds.

Becker's uncertainty reflects a set of ongoing methodological concerns. As the Internet and web have become increasingly embedded in business and industry, leisure pursuits, domestic and family life, and everyday life, there have been extensive debates as to how to study activity mediated by the web and how to incorporate the web into research practice. There are two particular issues that I address here. The first is the distinction between online and offline, and whether and how to treat the web as a field site. The second is how to use the web as part of participant observation.[2]

4.1.1.1   Moving online and offline: a multi-sited approach

Much of the early scholarship described bulletin-board systems, chatrooms, Internet forums, multi-user dungeons/domains (MUDs), websites, and so forth as distinct online spaces (often in the language of "cyber" or "virtual" space/place/community). As Internet technologies including the web became increasingly embedded in business and industry, leisure pursuits, domestic and family life, and everyday life in the "developed" world, scholars challenged the boundaries between online and offline. Lyman and Wakeford (1999) point to contrasting views of how to incorporate "offline" observations and interviews in studies of "online" phenomena. Hine's (2000) distinction between the Internet as culture and as cultural artifact encompasses these contrasting approaches. But to Hine, it is not a question of either/or; she suggests that both views have some analytic purchase. Miller and Slater (2000), in their study of a uniquely "Trinidadian Internet," demonstrate that the very construction of the Internet as a distinct site of sociality is produced as an extension from other aspects of everyday life. They express far more skepticism about approaches that do not move away from the screen but leave the possibilities open for alternatives. They join Hine and challenge the construction of the Internet—and by extension the web—as unitary phenomena, opening up the door for a variety of approaches to how to go about conducting research that incorporates the web as research site, research tool, or both.[3]

Nevertheless, a decade since the publication of these and other important methodological guides to studying Internet technologies, the debate continues regarding if, when, and how to incorporate material from offline contexts in understanding online ones and *vice versa*. There are several important lessons to extract from the ongoing conversation.

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[2] For excellent guides as well as a historical vantage point to these debates and the others I am not addressing here, see Lyman and Wakeford (1999, and accompanying articles), Hine 2000, Wilson and Peterson 2002, Leander and McKim 2003, Beaulieu 2004, Hine 2005, Boellstorf 2008 (particularly chapter 3), Markham and Baym 2009, and Coleman 2010.

[3] Both Hine and Miller and Slater talk about disaggregating the Internet, albeit in different ways. Distinguishing different sites of activity (Hine) and embedding the Internet as locally constructed phenomena (Miller and Slater) are both relevant to this study.

The first concerns the online-offline distinction. These are somewhat clumsy terms, but they help distinguish different contexts of social interaction. However, as many scholars have convincingly demonstrated, what happens online never entirely happens solely online and is no more or less "real" than what happens in other contexts. Even Boellstorff (2008), who launches a resounding defense of his approach to studying Second Life exclusively from within the context of the Second Life virtual world, acknowledges the "permeability" between participants' experiences within Second Life and what happens elsewhere. Furthermore, because I take quite seriously the aforementioned challenges of the Internet or the web as unitary phenomena, it does not make sense to speak of a single "online" world.

Given a social-worlds perspective, it is equally nonsensical to speak of a single "offline" world. Some worlds may develop around a particular activity, others around technologies or media, and others around a particular place (and so forth). People experience social life as participants in multiple social worlds with amorphous boundaries. Participants in social worlds help construct these boundaries in their practice, and researchers construct them in *their* practice of analysis (Becker in Becker and Pessin 2006, see discussion in chapter 3). All social worlds are partly constituted by ongoing participation and reification (Wenger 1998). They are all partly material and partly "theoretical" or "imagined."[4] If participants in practice reify the idea of a "real world" as opposed to some other world, then researchers must learn how and why they might have done so (see also Miller and Slater 2000).

An example from my fieldwork helps illustrate how participants in practice reified boundaries between "Internet life" and "real life" and distinguished social world boundaries at the same time. In early 2009, deviantART, Inc. ran a contest to solicit designs for the next versions of official "deviantWEAR" t-shirts.[5] Although it did not eventually win, one entry's design centered around the phrase "Famous on dA Internet," with the "dA" logo in the middle playing on the sound of "dah" or "duh" as an alternative to "the" (see figure 4.1).

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[4] Cool (2008), drawing on Charles Taylor (2002)'s notion of "social imaginaries" and Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" to point out that all social life is partially imagined. This does not make social worlds and/or communities something less than "real." Taylor's idea of "social imaginaries" is a rough equivalent, though more precise, to Wenger's and Strauss' notion of "theories" held and constructed by participants in practice. According to Taylor, social imaginaries are "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations… the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms…" (2002:106 as quoted by Cool 2008:10).

[5] deviantWEAR was the branding for deviantART's line of clothing. Like other "dA" branded merchandise, these could help signal membership and affiliation to deviantART.

Figure 4.1: Famous on dA Internet

In this t-shirt design, alexds1 pokes fun at the idea of "Internet fame." Design and deviantART logo reprinted with permission.

The artist, alexds1, wrote in her comments:

> I confess I've always sort of wanted a shirt like this, just cuz the line "famous on the Internet" never ceases to crack me up. I wish I could say that to someone in real life... "Hey baby, I'm famous on the Internet" XD ["sideways" grin emoticon]

The shirt design poked fun at the ideas of "Internet fame" and of being famous on deviantART. The shirt and several of the comments that followed suggested that to some extent being famous on the Internet is humorous because of the fact that it could be seen as irrelevant in "real life."

However, the joke of the t-shirt and subsequent comments that others left reflected a deeper ambivalence and uncertainty about the true consequences of being famous or "popular" on the Internet, specifically on deviantART. Soon after submitting the design, alexds1 added a caveat that she did not mean to imply that she was famous, noting, "I'm not that conceited (nor famous, haha). I just think it's a funny phrase!" The clarification suggests a need to avoid being perceived as lacking humility or emphasizing the importance of fame and popularity, which, as I explain in detail in chapter 5, were contentious issues on deviantART. A few of the commenters picked up on the caveat, and one even wrote that this artist was, in fact, famous on the Internet. The artist noted that it was "hard to tell, since it doesn't mean anything IRL [in real life]." This point echoed a common refrain used to argue for the irrelevance of becoming popular on deviantART. The point is that in situationally contingent ways, people in practice distinguish what they do in some worlds from what they do in other worlds and, subsequently, what they do online with what they do elsewhere. Online-offline or "real life"-"Internet life" can be reified in practice. These are

important moments to be analyzed. While my study did not focus on this issue, it indexed broader dilemmas that I revisit in detail in chapter 5.

Breaking down the real-virtual or online-offline distinctions and re-framing the subject in terms of social worlds does not necessarily prescribe one right way to study websites, virtual worlds, or other partially "online" phenomena. This framing does, however, reinforce an important point in contemporary anthropology that relates to the second lesson that I take from the debates about online and offline in contemporary fieldwork. Fieldsites are not "found" but are "constructed" by scholars. A growing attention in anthropology to the flow of people and media across geographic boundaries has led many scholars to argue that mapping culture onto geographic places is an untenable idea (Appadurai 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). The endeavor of field research can no longer be seen as *going to* the field; rather, it involves *constructing* the field site, even when doing so involves ethnographic research that resembles traditional fieldwork involving no online interaction. This conclusion is equally true of a study that exclusively involves participation from within a virtual world such as Second Life (Boellstorff 2008) and of one that examines teenagers' use of MySpace and Facebook drawing from interviews (boyd 2008). Therefore, different kinds of sites, research questions, and framing of the phenomena in questions lend themselves to a variety of methods of field site construction. Ethnography becomes the "challenge of foregrounding—how to pull something coherent forward from such overlapping and intertwined social terrain" (Burrell 2009:184).

The questions I asked coming into the project necessitated sustained attention to deviantART itself, but not exclusively "within" the confines of the site. On the one hand, analyzing deviantART as infrastructure, investigating the specifics of its features, and understanding how its members positioned these features required an approach different from that of Baym (2007, see also Baym and Burnett 2009), who maps out the terrain of Swedish independent music fandom in seeking to understand "the new shape of online community." In her case, it was important to go beyond the workings of a particular single site. Although my fieldwork did extend beyond deviantART (as I describe further below), and my study could have been enhanced with additional detailed comparisons and even richer contextualization, there were limits to what I could accomplish given the constraints of time and resources.

At the same time, neither my research questions nor what I learned about deviantART as I proceeded in the course of fieldwork leant themselves to an approach modeled after Boellstorff's (2008) study of the virtual world Second Life. Unlike Boellstorff (2008), I was not seeking to understand the construction of sociality on deviantART as a world in its own right. That said, I came to learn of different ways in which staff and members constructed deviantART (or particular parts of the site) as social worlds distinct from others (see chapters 2 and 3). And, as Boellstorff (2008:62) suggests about Second Life, participants in deviantART established a context that people treated as "meaningful sites for social action" in its own right. However, deviantART, unlike a virtual world such as Second Life, had very different material boundaries (as explained in chapter 3). Nor did it intentionally create a sense of geographic place. Moreover, it became clear through the course of fieldwork that many participants saw it as one of many tools or sites that fit into a constellation of activities and other social worlds (e.g. the different worlds of comics) and that happenings in these worlds mattered significantly in the ongoing construction of the site. Understanding how participants sought to position the site as infrastructure required moving away from observation of the site exclusively.

The anthropologist George Marcus' (1995) account of "multi-sited ethnography" provides useful guidance for how to proceed.[6] He outlines several strategies of "following" that researchers have employed to move between spatial locations and social positions. Over the course of fieldwork, I adopted several of them, including following people, things, discourses, and conflicts across the multiple pages and sites "within" deviantART, other websites, and other places where deviantART members congregated, including devMeets and comic book and fan conventions.[7] Drawing on Marcus' notion of multi-sited ethnography, Couldry's (2003) investigation of contemporary media, and research on the Internet, Burrell (2009) describes the need to seek "entry points" into fieldwork rather than "bounded locations." Site construction then continues throughout the course of fieldwork.

The example of the t-shirt submission I introduced earlier helps illustrate some of the benefits of such an approach. alexds1 had first denied being famous "on the Internet" and then hinted that even if she were, it did not mean anything in "real life." Yet, from some points of view, including my own as well as those of others who had been following her work over time, alexds1 had acquired some amount fame that turned out to have consequences in propelling her emerging career. In the years prior to the first time I met her, she had built up an audience for her web-comic by posting early drafts to one site and garnering feedback and input. During my fieldwork, she had begun revising it into a full-color version, posted to her newly launched personal site and to deviantART, and then promoted via Facebook, Twitter, LiveJournal, and TopWebComics. In addition, for several years she had also sold her work and networked with other illustrators and comics artists at the Alternative Press Expo (APE), a convention featuring primarily "independent" comics creators and other artists (primarily from the San Francisco Bay Area, though there were people from other places as well). On the "Famous on dA Internet" t-shirt submission, one person commented that she would "totally spaz if I met you in real life," and while spending some time with alexds1 at APE, I observed many people do something to that effect. When people, often young women or teenagers, approached alexds1's table and realized who she was, some would shout with excitement, and others would freeze up in shock.[8] Then, despite having read alexds1's comic online, they would almost always buy the printed color version, which had just been released. Moreover, it was at that convention that a new independent publisher approached alexds1. His goal had been to find artists whose work had proven popular online. Later, alexds1 signed with the publisher and found herself more fully entering the world of mainstream comic production and distribution. When I observed these events unfold, I had already spent considerable time following the discourse of "popularity" on deviantART and in other venues, as well as how different notions

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[6] I should note that taking the notion of field-site construction seriously may mean that all fieldwork is multi-sited, though I appreciate Marcus' point.

[7] I have substituted "discourse" for Marcus' "metaphor" in the list of things to follow. With respect to following metaphors, he writes, "When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography. This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and grounds of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print of visual media" (1995:108).

[8] These were not unusual reactions either at this table or with other artists who were known "on the Internet." At an anime-themed convention I interviewed a young artist in his early 20s who told me that he had met "this girl who had been following my work for eight years but this was the first time she had met me in person. She was tripping out. It was really funny, but also flattering."

of popularity were embodied on the site. "Following" alexds1 and other people and groups into other locations improved my understanding of what I had observed on deviantART and *vice versa*.

My fieldwork also emphasized following conflict—tracing debate, contestation, and controversy (Marcus 1995), and other tactics of following. Following conflict resonates with Becker's (1998) advice of paying attention to moments of tension and disruption to the normal state of activities. Doing so foregrounds taken-for-granted assumptions. Because of my emphasis on tensions in the production and management of infrastructure (see chapter 3), I came to see following these tensions as a critical part of an ethnography of infrastructure (Star 1999). I develop what such an ethnography entails in the next section.

On deviantART, participants captured moments of tension and conflict as "drama." Drama was a rather imprecise term—and one that is not specific to deviantART—to refer to outright conflict between members, emotionally charged writings on the site, or posts that indexed tensions and conflict elsewhere. An oft-cited example of drama was a member's announcement of "leaving deviantART" as a form of protest against site policy or the actions of other members. Other examples included accusations and counter-accusations of "art theft," a topic I focus on in chapter 7, and accusations of finding a way to cheat the popularity algorithm. One long-time member and Senior on the site pointed out to me in both humor and frustration that drama on deviantART had a specific name—"dArama." That it had such a name was evidence to her of its prevalence and importance. Others found drama to be a distraction from the role and purpose of deviantART: creating and posting art. Whether couched as drama or dArama, these events provided vehicles for members to articulate and reify ideas of what deviantART, art, and the web were apparently all about.[9] Therefore, following drama and dArama within deviantART and into other sites was another important research tactic as I proceeded through fieldwork. It helped illuminate key discourses that I followed on and off deviantART.

Besides ways of following, Marcus (1995:110) also describes the value of a "strategically situated single-site" where "what goes on within a particular locale in which research is conducted is…calibrated with its implication for what goes on in another related locale, or other locales." Marcus cites Paul Willis' Learning to Labor (1981) as an exemplar of this approach. Observations at school were calibrated to the conditions of the shop floor in factories and at home. Willis also followed participants into many of these locations. Similarly, Burrell (2009) urges scholars to attend to the locations "indexed in interviews" as providing clues to where else to visit or take into account in analysis. In a sense, deviantART was both an entry point to my fieldwork and a strategically situated research site that I used to understand the production of the web (and "Web 2.0") as infrastructure. I "calibrated" (to use Marcus' term) what I observed on other sites and in interviews to what I was observing on deviantART. At the same time, I paid particular attention to other locales that participants in deviantART brought up on the site and in interviews, ones that they themselves used to calibrate or justify their perspectives on various issues. For example, in

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[9] Similarly, Cool (2008) writes that analysis of "flame wars"—heated exchanges on mailng lists—helped define the list and by extension the shaping of some parts of the Cyberorganic organization/community: "Yet these flame wards also stimulated intense reflection and discussion about what the list was for, what sort of speech and topics were appropriate, whether people should be kicked off the list, and under what circumstances. In this way, flame wars served to define the cc list, and Cyberorganic community, by brining out the community's consensus oppositions to kicking even the most reviled person off the list."

chapter 6, I describe the importance of references to art school as a model for what some people meant by "critique" and how to standardize the use of deviantART's comments to provide critique.

4.1.1.2 Online participant observation

While the discussion thus far has explicitly addressed the question of how I positioned deviantART—and the web—in relation to other sites, it also has implications for a second significant concern relating to conducting online research: the extent of "participation" in relation to "observation." Beaulieu (2004) notes that many scholars have come to see the Internet as a way of finally observing social life and everyday interaction without getting involved.[10] In contrast, Beaulieu also describes how others use various strategies of intersubjectivity specifically to engage in a joint construction of knowledge with participants. The former is an approach that assumes that participant-observation is saddled with "bias" that must be eliminated: the less the researcher "intervenes," the better. It also assumes that researchers can step outside of social life and assume a god-like view in order to understand it (Haraway 1988). Doing so is not only impossible but also undesirable. The goal of participant-observation is not to participate in social life to the minimal possible extent. On the contrary, it is to use the researcher's self as the research instrument through which to understand the world in question but to do so by considering multiple positions and perspectives.[11] The researcher provides moments of useful disruption that help make momentarily explicit that which had been implicit. Doing so may have the effect of further reifying practice, but it provides a sense of how this reification occurs. This outcome is equally true of observing interaction and traces of interaction in the online aspects of social worlds as it is in any other social venue. Without participating in the field and working through one's material, finding patterns, refining questions, and so forth, it is difficult to know how to go about constructing a field site in the first place.

"Observing" in the context of a website such as deviantART meant a great deal of reading: reading news articles, journals, forum posts, and conversations that ensued in the comments. It also meant looking at artworks and considering how people framed them in their "Artist's Comments." Perhaps the most significant challenge that I faced was finding ways to bound observation, spatially and temporally, particularly when dealing with posts that generated hundreds or even thousands of comments. Each comment linked back to its writer—offering opportunities to learn more about him or her—and writers sometimes specifically linked to other articles related to the conversation in question. Finally, these conversations could last days or weeks.

Ethnographers have always had to make choices and omissions based on theoretical concerns, stamina, or both. I did not have the endless time or energy required to read everything possible. In choosing when to finally move on from a post, I followed a principle often used in demarcating the ending point of any line of inquiry. When I stopped hearing new points of view or ideas that challenged my developing thinking on a topic, I stopped reading (either during a particular session of fieldwork or stopped returning to a conversation in the days or weeks that followed). Sometimes, I clicked through to learn more about who was speaking and perhaps follow up on a

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[10] This perspective has become even more important with the rise of Facebook and Twitter, which seem to hold out the promise of capturing an accurate representation of everyday social life.

[11] There are also ethical considerations, which I discuss below.

particular point with that person directly. However, not only was it impractical to do so in every case, but I could not always make conclusive arguments to myself about the value of the effort.

"Participating"—within the context of the website—meant establishing a presence on the site and contributing to it myself in the form of journals, writings, and, on occasion, my own version of a piece of work. It also meant using the site's features to engage with others, through comments, private notes, and spending time in chatrooms. Finally, participating meant adding people to my own Watchlist, favouriting people's artwork or news articles, and visiting pages, which might increase a deviation's view count, bump up a member's pageviews on a userpage, or make my name appear on a publicly displayed list of "recent visitors." As I detail in the second half of this chapter, I varied how I participated depending on the stage of my research process.

Although I learned something by observing the arguments and discussions on deviantART, it was only by participating over time that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what I observed. Participating online forced me to confront various issues that I may never have considered otherwise. For example, early on in my research I frequently observed comments on userpages such as "Thanks for the fav!"—thanking for favouriting a work—and "Thanks for the watch!"—thanking for adding the commenter to a Watchlist. My initial interpretation was to see these responses as a pattern of politeness and proper etiquette. However, once people started adding me to their Watchlists or adding items that I posted to their list of favourites, I suddenly and fully realized that public thanking in the manner described above could draw attention to me. Did I always want to draw such attention to myself? What might be the consequences? And, what would happen if I did not thank people? Furthermore, once it became clear that concerns over exposure were significant to site participants and the artists I spoke with, my thinking about the ramifications of thanking changed. These thoughts prompted me to ask several members about the etiquette of thanking (see chapter 5). What I heard varied, confirming the ambiguity of the practice and leading me to further consider the ramifications of such ambiguity.

There are numerous other examples of how actively participating in the site and in the lives of other members forced me to confront issues: when to comment on someone's artwork or journals, particularly when I have had repeated interaction with that person or even met him or her in person; when to offer critical feedback or simply applaud the person's effort; what I might be saying about myself or signaling to others when I favourited a work or a news article; and what notions of ownership and property I appear to be endorsing or dismissing, depending on how I provided credit or asked for permission for various uses of people's posted artwork. Therefore, my observations and conclusions in chapter 5, 6, and 7 are informed by my own experiences.

Finally, establishing a presence and then actively participating in the lives of other members helped me to construct my own authenticity as a researcher on the site. Doing so proved essential for finding the people that ethnographers often describe as "key informants" who would be willing to talk to me and, over time, establish some amount of rapport.[12] Establishing and strengthening rapport helped me better understand how people used deviantART and went about their lives in ways not always obvious from causal conversations. It also provided new opportunities for fieldwork and the various tactics of following described above.

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[12] In appendix B, I discuss how I indicated my role as a researcher to participants and discuss other ethical considerations.

4.1.2   An ethnography of infrastructure

As I developed in chapter 3, the concept of infrastructure brings together questions concerning identity and participation in social worlds with questions concerning the ongoing product and use of technologies that help constitute those worlds. Infrastructure manages and conceals tensions within and between worlds, and following these tensions became a crucial research strategy.

Many, if not most, ethnographies supplement participant-observation and interviewing with some historical research and document analysis.[13] Ethnographies of infrastructure add to these methods by bringing an "ethnographic sensibility" (Star 1999:383) to a critical analysis of technologies and symbolic objects (such as classification systems and categories). Along these lines, Coleman (2010:491) suggests that "to assess more richly the cultural and political life of digital media, [researchers] must attend to the role of social and technical protocols, infrastructure, and platforms." Doing so involves a process of "infrastructural inversion":

> [a] struggle against the tendency of infrastructure to disappear (except when breaking down). It means learning to look closely at technologies and arrangements that, by design and by habit, tend to fade into the woodwork. (Bowker and Star 1999:34, after Bowker 1994)

Infrastructural inversion "de-emphasizes things or people as simply causal factors in the development of systems" and foregrounds "infrastructural relations…. Substrate becomes substance" (Star and Ruhleder 1996:113).

According to Star (1999:384-385), an ethnography of infrastructure should help a researcher identify the "master narratives" in systems design—I would add *use* as well—that obscures difference in practice and the diversity of voices. It should surface "invisible work" that is left unnoticed or unrecognized, though crucial to a "working system" (Star 1999:386, see also Star and Strauss 1999). In addition, an ethnography of infrastructure may require a researcher to "study boring things" (Star 1999:377) and attend to objects that appear behind the scenes. These "boring" things, however, do not necessarily appear that way to some of the people who have a stake in their production, as Star (1999) makes clear in her discussion of the "surfacing of invisible work" of nurses and secretaries whose contributions remain tacit to the hospital staff and engineers in the different studies she describes. Nor are these things boring in the cases of "small obstacles" and "seemingly trivial alterations" that can be highly disruptive for some (Star 1999:386).

Finally, Star (Star 1999:387:388, original emphasis) notes that information infrastructure can be read in three ways:

- a "material *artifact* constructed by people, with physical properties and pragmatic properties in its effects on human organization" (original emphasis)

- a "a *trace* or *record* of activities"

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[13] Ethnographies incorporating observations of online interaction that is asynchronous is necessarily a historical analysis of documents. And, all ethnographies are historical analyses of documents—fieldnotes—that researchers themselves produce in the course of fieldwork

- a "veridical representation of the world," such that an "information system is taken unproblematically as a mirror of actions in the world, and often tacitly, as a complete enough record of those actions."[14]

These senses of information infrastructure are not mutually exclusive, but they must be distinguished. A researcher must attune to his or her own tendencies to blur the three and also pay attention to when participants in a research study do so as well.

Following these prescriptions and in line with arguments developed in chapter 3, I sought to develop an understanding of how participants used and interpreted the functionality and symbolic objects at deviantART's interface and analyze their apparent properties, affordances, and constraints through my own use (which supports the need to participate as described in the previous section). I looked for ways in which certain implementations of features embodied—or were positioned by participants as embodying—particular values and ideals, whether those of artistic practice, the Internet or web, or both. For example, in chapter 5, I discuss changes to deviantART's popularity algorithm, which was positioned to "work" just as "popularity" did elsewhere. Not only does this raise questions of both what it meant to "work" and what was meant by "popularity," but also questions about the popularity algorithm and its treatment of favourites as votes aligned with democratizing ideals of the web and egalitarian opportunities for artists to have their work seen. At the same time, it called into question what either popularity or exposure meant with respect to quality and artistic recognition.

In addition, I took the emphasis on boring things as inspiration to pay attention to the elements of deviantART's interfaces that may seem trivial from one perspective yet could arouse the passions and frustrations of deviantART's members when they were brought into focus by activities on the site. In chapter 5, I describe pageviews and metrics as an example. In chapter 7, I describe the launch of a new set of "Share Tools" that incorporated conventional web technologies—HTML code, application programming interfaces (APIs), and URL shortening services—to facilitate a seemingly conventional notion of "sharing." These features and others were accompanied by "master narratives" inscribed by deviantART's designers and embraced (or re-inscribed) by many of its members. These narratives were met with counter-narratives from other members. Paying attention to these "boring things" sometimes was the start of my process of following discourses and conflict within and beyond deviantART. At other times, I made sense of them after months of fieldwork in which I had started to trace the issues.

4.2   Phases and progression: sites, methods, and pragmatics

I turn now to describing the phases of my field work as well as elaborating on the methods used as I constructed a field of research across sites. In Summer 2007, I began preliminary investigations into deviantART as a site of research. I discuss them here for several reasons. First, what I learned in this phase led me to pursue the project in the manner that I did, justify deviantART as a site worth studying, and refine the research questions with which I started. It was during this phase of research that I started to gather background information about the site from any source that I

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[14] These points resonate with Hine's (2000) point that the Internet can be seen by scholars and participants as culture and cultural artifact.

could. I used the Internet Archive, news article databases (Lexis Nexis, Google News archives, etc.), Wikipedia Talk Pages, and even unpublished work generous colleagues shared with me.[15] Not only did I begin to get a sense of the history of the site, I also first learned of past controversies and of some of the opportunities and challenges people faced when using deviantART.

A particularly important early source of material was deviantART's Today page, which aggregated activity across the site (see chapter 2). When I joined the site, this page was featured prominently as one of the main site-wide navigation links. Given the page's emphasis on "popular" topics of the day, it often pointed to drama (or dArama) on the site (particularly when it involved members of the site who had a lot of Watchers and could respond to journals). Over time, I grew wary of over-relying on the Today page to ensure that I did not over emphasize the perspectives of certain members or certain issues (unless they were repeatedly raised elsewhere).

The second reason that I bring up these preliminary investigations is that it was in this phase that I began to construct my field site. Becoming a participant on deviantART for me was a process that unfolded over several months.[16] I first became aware of deviantART through the course of prior research when I interviewed teenagers about their use of digital media. I started visiting the site regularly, looking at the art, reading news articles and journals, and following conversations in comment threads as I tried to understand what it was that I was seeing. I soon realized that even as a visitor I was "contributing" to the site. I boosted members' view counts on their deviations and their userpages. I found myself entering the orbit of the social worlds in which the site's members were participating.

In this preliminary phase, I contributed more by joining the site and setting up the account. I created a bare-bones profile that included a link to my personal website and a link to my research group at the time. I avoided engaging directly with members, but I noticed when my username would appear on the list of "recent visitors" on other people's userpages and when some of those people visited my page and my pageview count slowly increased.

I have divided up the rest of the research into three phases, which roughly correspond to moments when I refined my methods in an effort to pursue particular lines of inquiry or moved into new research sites. There are no clear markers where one phase begins and another ends, and as such their timeframes overlap.

4.2.1 Phase 1: making connections, encountering tensions, refining methods

In the first phase of research, from roughly Spring 2008 through that Summer, I worked on learning what it meant to be a participant on the site, establishing my own authenticity as a researcher, building rapport with various members, and surfacing some of the key tensions that would drive further investigation. In doing so, I incorporated and refined a variety of methods. I emphasized participant-observation on deviantART and continued to refine what this entailed. I supplemented these observations with interviews. I also attended a few devMeets.[17]

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[15] I owe particular thanks to Sarita Yardi, danah boyd, and Mimi Ito for sharing their insights with me.

[16] I later learned through interviews and conversations that there were a number of entry points into deviantART and "entering" could be similarly drawn out depending on the person.

[17] My approach to analysis is similar to those labeled as "Grounded theory" mode, in which analysis begins as data

One important decision I made as I ended my exploratory phase and began this phase was that given my research questions, it was important to begin the study as best I could from the perspective of a new member on the periphery of deviantART, albeit one that might be very different from others regarding reasons for joining. I would observe the "official" positions put out by staff through their own participation on the site or the way they represented the site through documents such as marketing materials, appearances in the media, or policy documents. But, I would not specifically contact deviantART's paid staff at the outset or attempt to begin the study by getting a perspective which other members were not likely to have had access.[18] In addition, because a crucial aspect of participant observation is the establishment of rapport, I wanted to convey the impression that I was another member, perhaps not just another "artist," but not someone with a line to deviantART's staff, neither someone who might have some influence on the shaping of the site nor someone who would "report" any illicit behavior I might encounter along the way.[19]

4.2.1.1   Online participant-observation on deviantART

Picking up where I left off in my preliminary investigation of the site, I initially "lurked" on deviantART, assuming the role of observer. This position helped me get situated and familiar with some of the basic terms and features of the site as well as some of the language used by members. Within several months I added to my userpage and posted my first journal entry. I described myself and the study and positioned myself as an "art researcher" on the site.[20]

In this phase, I learned to do what other participants on the site did. I learned what was involved in Watching various artists on the site, seeing them post work and journals regularly, and observing how people responded. I also favourited work that I liked or found interesting, though for a long time I felt extremely self-conscious about this process. As I discussed earlier, I wondered what signals I was sending about myself and how this might affect how I would be perceived by others. I

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is collected in an inductive or abductive process. Through open coding of material gathered over the course of the fieldwork and comparisons to other material as well as various sensitizing concepts (see Chapter 3), I generated the categories and schemes that guided further fieldwork, new rounds of analysis of already-analyzed material, and eventually the writing of this dissertation. I do not claim to be doing "Grounded Theory." My approach is similar to that advocated by Emerson et al. 1995. The Grounded Theory method, much like the ethnography itself, is taken up and characterized differently by different scholars in the field (for some review of these debates, see Charmaz and Mitchell 2001, Clarke 2005, Charmaz 2006). Like many of those approaches, my methods of data gathering and analysis included analyzing data as I was gathering it in order to pursue themes and ideas as they emerged in the process of research (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001). For a insightful discussion of whether the logic inquiry is labeled better as abductive rather than inductive see Reichertz (2007).

[18] I had no reason to think that I might be granted some special access to the inner working of the site, but I did not know what would happen if I had started in that direction. It seemed the wrong way to go. Near the end of fieldwork, I did visit deviantART HQ and interviewed several staff members, including CEO Angelo Sotira (though not during that visit).

[19] As it turned out, I did meet someone who admitted to me that he was a troll. He expressed some wariness in doing so because he felt that I was "tight" with the "admins," based on the fact that by that point I had engaged with some of the volunteer Gallery Managers. Nevertheless, he decided he could trust me enough or the consequences of his being "caught" were low.

[20] I had already observed several people on the site who rather than claiming to being an "artist" described themselves with labels typical of other art world participants, such as resource provider, critic, and even just "art appreciator."

had a similar experience when commenting directly on artwork. I learned that people appreciated comments and some particularly sought comments that they felt would help them improve at art (a topic I return to chapter 6). I felt wary about taking on the role of critic, especially as I was presenting myself as a "researcher." Having to think through these issues felt paralyzing at times but also made me more aware of some of the possible complications of using the site.

Much of my participation on deviantART involved talking to people on the site using the features deviantART provided, including comments, Notes, and chatrooms. As I felt more comfortable, I began posting my own journal articles about my research, an occasional News article, and in one case an academic presentation as "dA-related" work. I used my posts to solicit further feedback on the topic and as a way of demonstrating that I was serious about my work and seriously interested in deviantART and the activities of its members. I felt that I was on the right track when one person complimented my efforts as "thorough."

I also participated in several events on the site. For example, I followed "Traditional Art Day" which featured various activities, contests, and even a chatroom-based round of trivia, in which I won a month-long subscription to the site.[21] Another event that I participated in was "Stock and Resources Week," which was a part of a larger effort of the Artist Relations department to educate members about the galleries and to promote various activities going on there. I participated by hanging out in several chatrooms, following the different news articles and journals affiliated with the event, and commenting on them. It was during this week that I first met and engaged with Gallery Managers on the site; they were very encouraging and one even promoted my efforts to interview members about tutorials in her journal.

It was also in this phase that I refined my methods for recording and analyzing material gathered from online participant-observation. At the beginning of the project I used software to download web-pages, take notes on them, and categorize them by thematic topics that they contained. Sometimes, I came back to the same page as a conversation developed. This ensured that I had a record of what a page looked like as I experienced it. In appendix C, I have included a description of the software and more details of this process.

It was here that I learned that online participant-observation on this site seemed to always included a sense of historical analysis, beyond consulting the Internet Archive or news archives. Participant-observation on deviantART, as opposed to the participant-observation that I had been more accustomed to in "offline" field sites, seemed to involve a constant blurring of time. Every reading of text online is an analysis of something that occurred "in the past." Sometimes this past stretched back only minutes; at other times the past meant hours, days, months, or even years. When looking at deviations, journals, news articles, and the conversations that ensued; trying to learn more about the people involved in the posts I read; or even planning for interviews, I frequently uncovered the past to provide more context for the present.

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[21] I answered a trivia question correctly in a chatroom and was suddenly granted a month long subscription as a prize.

4.2.1.2   Attending devMeets

In this first phase of research, I also attended two devMeets arranged by members located in the San Francisco Bay Area.[22] The first was attended by a group that affiliated itself with a particular chatroom on the site and was geographically scattered across the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. We spent the day on Alcatraz Island, ate dinner at a bar near San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, and spent the evening at other bars in the area.

Almost 30 people attended that meet, which I learned was unusually large.[23] Most attendees knew each other through deviantART, but many of them had never met in person. We introduced ourselves to each other by our usernames on deviantART and some only referred to each other by those names throughout the day. Some people there were long-time members of the site, even Seniors and former volunteer staff members. Others were newer to the site than I was. This event was the first of many times that I received the question, "So what do you do?," meaning what kind of art did I practice. This question was not surprising given the context of the meet; it signaled a link between artistic practice and a practice-based identity.[24] That time, and others, I stumbled through explaining my research and what I was doing on the site. I also found that at that meet, as in many other situations, people generally were happy and sometimes eager to talk to me about their experiences.

4.2.1.3   Interviews

Finally, I conducted my first formal interviews of the project. Throughout the project, I used purposive sampling in selecting participants to interview, based either on their engagement in a particular issue I was interested in (such as art theft or tutorials), or their membership in a sub-group of interest. All interviews of this sort were semi-structured: I entered with a set of questions and topic areas and let participants drive aspects of the conversation (see Weiss 1994). Besides asking questions on the topic of interest I also asked a common set of general questions about interviewees' experiences as artists, their use of the web as a part of their art practice, and their use of deviantART.

I conducted the interviews any way that I could: in person, over Skype, or via instant messenger. The people whom I interviewed used a range of communications media in their everyday lives. Some were geographically distant. They varied in their apparent levels of comfort in talking to me, as I was both a stranger and a researcher. I tried to let interviewees choose the medium in which they felt most comfortable being interviewed, though the medium and location usually came as the result of a negotiation between us (or at times, their parents). Several had prior experience being interviewed, though I learned that on deviantART this often meant someone sending a list of questions and participants filling out answers and sending them back.[25] Most who agreed to be interviewed also agreed to do so synchronously.[26] There were several situations in which I

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[22] Not being sure of the correct etiquette, I asked for and received permission to attend.

[23] Only a handful of people, including me, attended the next two "Bay Area" devMeets I attended over the course of the project.

[24] At that meet, most of the participants were "pro-am" photographers and came carrying large SLR cameras and a range of other equipment.

[25] This is also an approach taken by many researchers as well (e.g. Hine 2000).

[26] I found that many of my experiences setting up and coordinating the interviews resembled Markham's (1998)

exchanged Notes or emails with someone that largely consisted of me asking questions and then following up over the course of several weeks. These felt to me more like a form of participant-observation, in which informal "interviews" are common.

Instant messaging has particular challenges, as Voida et al. (2004) discuss. In past research, however, my colleagues and I found it to be particularly effective with young people and others more comfortable "talking" in this fashion (see Ito et al. 2010), though I should add that I did not let age determine the medium. I conducted interviews with several teenagers who were happy to talk in person or over Skype. In some cases, I found that participants were more comfortable and perhaps even more able to express their thoughts using IM than they might have been in person. I have found that the interviews with IM yielded excellent material for analysis, though they required a great deal more time than face-to-face or phone interviews: several of my IM interviews approached four hours, in comparison to phone or in-person interviews that usually were one to two hours long. The length of the interview offset the slower development of responses due to typing more composed answers and multi-tasking.[27]

4.2.1.4   Phase 1 outcomes

Being an active participant-observer on deviantART, attending devMeets, and conducting interviews helped me establish my role as a researcher, build rapport with participants, and identify key informants. I hoped to demonstrate my willingness to engage with people, take their views seriously, and listen to multiple perspectives. Based on what people told me and the comments they left on journals and my presentation, I felt I was successful in this regard. Of course, I had no way of knowing whether someone appreciated my project or efforts. I never encountered a situation in which someone criticized my presence or motives. I did experience situations in which people expressed a wariness of being interviewed or did not want to pursue a topic of conversation further. But, it was far more typical for me to encounter situations in which people expressed an appreciation for my paying attention to deviantART or to artists in general. I learned that I was playing an active part in a process of providing attention to some members as they sought to "get noticed" and "garner attention" (see chapter 5). For example, one participant told me that when I asked to interview her, she was "flattered." She told me her "hit count" (pageviews) on deviantART were low and that my interviewing her made her think "Oh, I am getting attention!" Her reaction accentuated the importance of the issue but also worried me about establishing expectations I could not match.

The gathering of material and early analysis in this first phase of fieldwork helped me identify several key concerns and tensions for participants in deviantART. Sometimes these tensions were marked by situations that unfolded over days or even weeks, on the site—what I described earlier as "drama" (or dArama). At other times these tensions were marked by a continual reappearance in journals, news articles, forums, and comments. This work helped me narrow down what to read and follow as I continued the project into later phases.

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account.

[27] Several people admitted that they were doing other things during the interview, which I did not find presented a particular problem. It was clear that they might not have done the interview in any other way given their schedules.

4.2.2 Phase 2: following the tensions and moving into other sites

In the second phase of research, roughly from Fall 2008 through Spring 2009, I continued online participant-observation on deviantART, focusing on particular tensions and themes that I had observed and learned about in the previous phase. I found myself increasing my activity on the site, as I made deviantART a part of my regular daily routine rather than a "site" that I visited. This increased involvement included becoming a more "active" Watcher of members, particularly those that I had already met and interviewed in Phase 1. I also posted journals to the site somewhat more regularly as a way of engaging with some of my informants. These journals focused on observations I had made on the site and solicited questions from people who had taken to watching me during Phase 1.

As I continued my research, I found that interviews and conversations—whether on deviantART, in email, or over IM—became an important way of triangulating my findings. They enabled me to compare what people said about particular aspects of their art or their particular use of deviantART with what I had already observed. Interviews and conversations also helped confirm that certain topics I had observed, whether as drama or tensions, were more broadly significant.[28] These conversations also pushed me to inquire further in some areas and shift my way of thinking about what I was seeing on the site.

Finally, it was during this phase that I ventured into other sites of activity beyond devMeets. In the remainder of this section, I describe two additional sources of material for this dissertation. The first was my attendance at comic book and fan conventions, specifically the "Artist Alleys" of these events. The second was my involvement with a group of artists based in the San Francisco Bay Area called Bay Area Artists Unite.[29]

4.2.2.1 Artist Alleys

In several interviews and in discussions on the site, I first learned of "Artist Alleys" at comic book and fan conventions. An Artist Alley is an area of a convention that is specially designated and demarcated for individual artists and small groups to sell their work to other convention attendees (and each other). One interviewee urged me to check out the Artist Alleys as a way of learning more about what artists like her were up to (she was an illustrator and aspiring comics artist). Hanging out in these Artist Alleys was an important part of her artistic "career" going back to when she was a teenager.

The Alleys varied in size depending on the venue, ranging from less than a dozen artists at one small convention I attended to hundreds at some of the larger comic book and Anime conventions (e.g. figure 4.2). There was usually a fee to be at a table, which also varied considerably. Artists who ranged in age from teenagers just starting out to experienced professionals would "set up shop"

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[28] There were times when I intentionally did not raise a question about a topic and waited to see if people I spoke with brought it up themselves.

[29] I have opted to use the real name of the group rather than disguise it. Many members of the group, particularly those who were regular members while I was more active in the group, indicated to me that this was okay with them. In addition, I felt it was ethically the right thing to do. My participation in the group proved to be a tremendous boon for the project and helping me learn much more about different individual artists as well as the activity in Artist Alleys. I do not see this exposure increasing any harm to participants. Rather, I worry that not mentioning the group by name might be seen as not acknowledging their contribution and help.

behind a table. Many displayed what they were selling on make-shift stands made of PVC piping and other material. Depending on the convention, there was tremendous range in the kinds of work artists sold. Many also accepted and fulfilled commissions.

I learned that these were important venues for many artists to sell work for the first time, network for jobs, and even just hang out with their friends. They were also occasions for aspiring creators and fans who were not behind tables to meet artists whose work they knew of from deviantART or other sites and even to seek feedback on their work. As one person told me, these conventions were important venues where he first "got out of his own little world," in a manner that corresponded with how others described deviantART.

Figure 4.2: An empty Artist Alley

Artists at many of the tables set up elaborate displays of PVC Piping and other materials. From these they hung samples of their work. Larger displays seemed to attract larger crowds.

Depending on the convention, I participated in a number of different ways. At almost all of the conventions I circulated around the Alley talking to different artists, sometimes engaging in short conversations and at other times conducting impromptu short interviews (see figure 4.3). Sometimes, I went with informants I already knew and shadowed them to see what they did and to hear their impressions of what they saw.
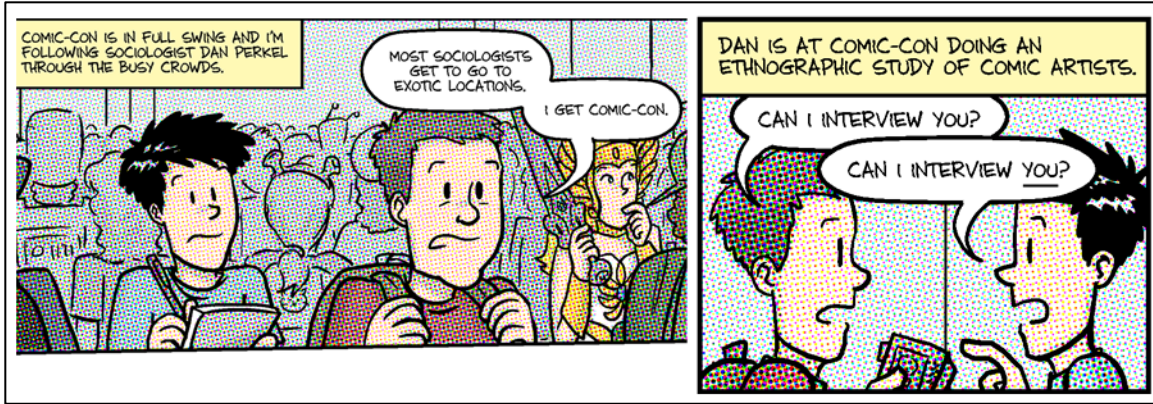
Figure 4.3: Satirical depiction of author doing fieldwork at the San Diego Comic Convention. From Piled Higher and Deeper (PhD) Comics by Jorge Cham. Reprinted with permission.

These engagements also helped me understand different concerns artists had by fielding their questions. For example, I attended the San Diego Comic Convention specifically to talk to professionals and other artists who had more experience in their respective fields. Several relayed their impressions of deviantART and then suggested that I talk to people who were known to actively use it and report back. They asked me questions such as how they could use deviantART to establish better relationships with fans and to make more money. These questions and others revealed the kinds of issues that the artists were interested in and revealed their anxieties. The questions also shaped my sense of how they saw me. I treaded carefully when artists asked me such questions, particularly in the first year of my research. As I accumulated a stock of observations and stories, I became more comfortable voicing my opinion, though I tried to monitor and observe how much it seemed that I was revealing something new or confirming what the person asking already believed.

I also had several opportunities to experience Artist Alleys from behind the tables. Several people whom I met on deviantART allowed me to sit beside them and observe what they did and how they engaged with people who approached their table and to discuss different situations. As I became actively involved in Bay Area Artists Unite (see next section), I spent time behind the group's tables, which provided me with a wider perspective as I helped the group and its members sell their work and talked to other artists who came around and were interested in the group's activity.

Adequately describing and analyzing the full range of Artist Alleys, the way they were organized and structured, and all of the different ways of participating in them is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[30] Rather, I used attendance and participation in the Artist Alleys to meet up with people whom I had first met online, to talk to other artists and see if and how they used deviantART or other websites as a part of their practice, to further build rapport and credibility, and to further reflect upon and analyze many of the issues I had first taken notice of on deviantART. Attending these venues provided another means of triangulation of material, providing insight into artists' lives and social worlds that intersected on deviantART.

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[30] Indeed, I came to realize that to do so would constitute an entirely different project that would focus on a different piece of "cultural infrastructure" for many groups of artists (Turner 2008).

4.2.2.2   Bay Area Artists Unite

It was at the first convention I attended that I met a group behind a table, called Bay Area Artists Unite (or BAAU). This loosely organized group was about the same age as deviantART and had been founded when participants on another web forum had realized that many were from the same location, the San Francisco Bay Area. They began to meet in person regularly and every year released a collaboratively produced comic anthology that they sold at Artist Alleys, particularly at Anime conventions. BAAU had its own website, a relatively small forum compared to deviantART.[31] It also had an account on deviantART. BAAU held regular in-person meet-ups (BAAU Meets) at various Bay Area malls, conventions, and other public venues.

I interviewed the group's business manager after meeting him at a convention, and he encouraged me to attend the meets and join the forum. I took up his invitation. This all occurred at a time when attendance at BAAU events was low and activity on the forum was light. Over the course of my fieldwork, however, an influx of new members led to a resurgence in the group over the next two years. Members I spent time with ranged in age from high schoolers to a couple of member who were middle aged; the bulk of active members, though, were in their 20s, and many were attending or had attended art school. Most BAAU members were also members of deviantART. Many were quite active on deviantART, and one was even one of the more popular members on the site, making him something of a celebrity among other BAAU members. There were also members just starting out in their artistic careers, who had joined deviantART around the same time I did.

By spending time with this group, hanging out on their forum, participating in regular face-to-face meetings, interviewing some of the groups' members, and even helping the group behind their tables as they "did the convention circuit" (a phrase used by one of its members), I gained a deeper understanding of a small group of artists covering a range of age and experience levels, as they networked online and offline in a variety of settings. The same points I made earlier about Artist Alleys apply to these occasions as well. The more involved I became in BAAU activities, the more I realized I could have written a whole dissertation that focused on their experiences. Keeping in mind the notion of deviantART as a "strategically situated single site" and the focus of my research, I used what I learned through participation in BAAU to calibrate and triangulate my findings.

4.2.3   Phase 3: wrapping up fieldwork

By the time I entered what I am describing as Phase 3 of my fieldwork—roughly from Summer to Fall of 2009—I had mapped out the major topics and themes and had begun more detailed analysis. I used this final phase to check in with participants in BAAU and deviantART to discuss tentative findings and hold more detailed conversations about particular topics. In the Fall of 2009, BAAU set up a chatroom on deviantART, and this provided an additional venue to remain engaged in fieldwork while I was developing ideas and concepts. I also continued to use IM to my advantage by having conversations with key informants as I analyzed and wrote up material.

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[31] The forum is publicly accessible, though one has to be a member to post to it.

In this phase I also began to directly engage with staff members of deviantART. Personal networks facilitated an introduction to Angelo Sotira, deviantART's CEO, and Josh Wattles, deviantART's "Advisor-in-chief," with whom I had several conversations. I re-introduced myself to Angelo Sotira, met other staff members at the San Diego Comic-Con, and had several impromptu conversations there. In September 2009, I visited the site's corporate headquarters, received a tour of the small Hollywood offices, and spent a day talking with various staff. Early the following year, as I wrapped up fieldwork, I conducted a lengthy formal interview with Sotira.

Choosing when to stop gathering material is a difficult question all researchers face. Burrell (2009:194) describes two rationales for stopping, given the "potentially infinite size" of multi-sited studies and studies that incorporate or focus on online activity. The first acknowledges that external factors impact the decision, such as "when time runs out"; "one stops when one must." The second she borrows from Grounded Theory's notion of meaning saturation. When the gathering of new material leads to "a repetition of themes," this may be a sign that this part of the research endeavor has come to an end. In this project my decision to move away from gathering material was governed by both rationales. I had stopped learning anything substantively new that helped me improve my sense of the topics and themes that I found myself writing about. While there would always be new things to learn, ways to reconsider findings in light of even newer events, and even entirely new topics, my time to work on this project was finite.

4.2.4   Summary

Table 4.1 summarizes the above narrative:

Phase	Methods
Preliminary investigation (Summer–Fall 2007)	Online observation and some historical analysis of the site and media about the site.
Phase 1 (Fall 2007–Summer 2008)	Online participant-observation Interviews devMeets
Phase 2 (Fall 2008–Summer 2009)	Online participant-observation on deviantART, more focused Online participant-observation on site of local art group Offline participant-observation in Artist Alleys at conventions, most with BAAU Attendance at BAAU Meets Interviews
Phase 3 (Summer 2009– Spring 2010)	Online participant-observation, primarily, though not exclusively, with local art group Offline participant-observation at two more conventions and meets Interviews with some of deviantARTstaff

Table 4.1: Phases of fieldwork

From late 2007 through the beginning of 2010, I used deviantART roughly 300 days. I spent roughly 3 to 4 hours each of those days, though this varied. The bulk of this time was from Spring 2008 through Summer 2009.

I attended three devMeets in the San Francisco Bay Area over the course of the project. I conducted participant-observation in the Artist Alleys at 10 conventions. I also attended half a dozen BAAU Meets (though I have attended several more meets and conventions over the course of 2010, while I was primarily writing and not actively conducting fieldwork). I spent one day at the deviantART headquarters. In total, I spent almost 400 hours conducting participant observation offline.

Finally, I conducted 30 formal interviews and many more conversations on deviantART, over IM, and at meets and conventions.

4.3   Conclusion

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973:22) writes, "Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods…); they study in villages." This distinction was a continual source of both inspiration and anxiety for me throughout fieldwork. I felt that I was doing both, continually moving back and forth between studying deviantART and specific objects on deviantART and studying the people, things, and practices that moved beyond deviantART. Echoing Star (1999), I was interpreting deviantART as artifact, as traces of other activity, and as actions in the world.

I studied deviantART and its various features as objects in a way that I was not doing when I was in Artist Alleys or on other websites looking at similar topics and even at the same people. At the same time, by moving beyond deviantART through interviews and participant-observation in other places, I learned that what I was studying were concerns much bigger than anything confined to deviantART. The site served as an "entry point" (Burrell 2009) for constructing a temporally and spatially ambiguous field site that illuminated broader tensions. As infrastructure, deviantART managed and also contributed to these tensions. It is to them that I now turn.

Getting noticed, becoming popular, and the quality of recognition

> Although the American and French Revolutions purported to substitute individual achievement for the traditional social hierarchies, new hierarchies grew up in their stead. A world more open to social advancement brought enviousness and competitiveness along with its promised freedoms. Unlike the situation in the monarchical world, where aspiration was strictly limited by class and background, a daunting paradox appeared at the root of democratic fame: There was more freedom to be recognized personally, but greater uncertainty over who would determine what really merited recognition.
> — Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown*, 1997

> It may be easier to speak in cyberspace, but it remains difficult to be heard.
> — Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, 2009

PAGEVIEW CHEATING—DA MOST POPULAR ARTIST EXPOSED exclaimed the headline to a deviantART news article. The article took aim at a 16-year-old girl who consistently appeared at or near the top of a list of deviantART's "Popular Deviants Today" throughout my field work. The article's author argued that if people looked at the girl's gallery statistics, the numbers did not make sense in relation to each other or in comparison to other "(genuine) popular artists." The girl must have been cheating. The accuser was not sure how, but speculated on the use of Internet proxies "to pad her pageview number each day."

Responses in comments to the article varied considerably. Some people were convinced that the accusations must be true and added new ones. It was not just that the accused was cheating deviantART's technical systems; she was putting up poor quality work created to appeal to kids as a way of further boosting her popularity. Perhaps, some people suggested, the accused needed an "ego boost" based on meaningless metrics that did not correspond to quality or skill. Other people, however, found reasons to be skeptical of accusations of cheating. Someone pointed out that the accused had created work that had been featured on another site, thus directing a steady volume of traffic back to her deviantART userpage. Some people argued that what the accuser had done was to reveal various bugs in the way deviantART's metrics had been implemented (e.g. the pageview counter could not handle numbers over a certain threshold). Finally, still others ignored the

substance of the charges and disapproved of the article's author for causing "drama" over nothing: the accuser was the one focusing too much attention on statistics, and he or she was guilty of attention seeking.

Debate and discussion spread to other journals and userpages on the site over the course of several days, but the story eventually fizzled out. The accused denied cheating and urged people not to get caught up in a "witch hunt." deviantART's staff eventually banned the accuser's account. The alleged cheater continued posting work and remained a "popular" member.

In chapter 2, I noted that deviantART provided its members a way to have their work seen by new audiences. At the same time it provided various means for these audiences to respond to—and engage with—artists and their artwork. In chapter 3, I argued that artistic recognition is shaped by the collective action of art worlds, which includes the ways in which particular activities are made legitimate within them and the distribution systems that circulate art and the names of artists. The story concerning a young artist accused of "cheating" deviantART by manipulating the pageviews metric frames the central concerns I take up in this chapter. I examine how participants in deviantART constructed relationships between "notice" (or visibility, exposure, attention, etc.), "popularity," and quality with respect to artistic recognition. At the same time I look at how these relationships were embodied in different features of the site. What balance of visibility, popularity, and quality should matter to an artist? How did deviantART's particular collection of features and practices shape the dynamics between them? What kinds of actions were ethically right and wrong in members' efforts to "get noticed" and "become popular"? Answering these questions provides one view of how members used deviantART differently from one another and tried to establish norms of fair practice, and how these uses and efforts reflected different conceptions of artistic recognition. While largely absent from the above vignette, other than to eventually ban the account of the accuser rather than the accused, deviantART's staff also played an active role in configuring the recognition process on the site by designing features, setting policy, and using their positions of power to shape site discourse. From all this work, members and staff both intentionally and unintentionally helped configure deviantART as infrastructure that accommodated multiple ideals of what counted towards artistic recognition and how the web could play a role in its conferral.

Celebratory claims about Web 2.0 and creativity partially rest on the argument that the web has democratized creative production. One claim suggests that the web has lowered barriers to participation in the production and initial circulation of content (e.g. Bruns 2008, Ito 2008, Ito et al. 2010, Jenkins 2006, Lessig 2008, Shirky 2008, 2010). A second claim argues that the web has lowered the barrier to participation in content's continued circulation by allowing more people to aggregate, filter, assess, and rank what others have produced (e.g. Bruns 2008, Benkler 2006, Shirky 2008, 2010, Sunstein 2006, Surowiecki 2005, Weinberger 2007). The first asserts that the web has democratized who gets to try to be recognized as a creator while the second posits that the web has democratized who gets to bestow such recognition. Whether these are complementary claims is an open question. It could be that they run counter to one another: opening up participation to recognize could limit who gets recognized.

The historian and cultural critic Leo Braudy (1997) raises this last possibility as a legacy of the history of fame, an extreme form of individual recognition (Lang and Lang 1988). Braudy argues that the democratization of widespread public recognition has been a gradual process unfolding over the last four centuries. The web has extended a process that includes the development of

photography in the 19th century, the rise of mass media, and the "reproducibility of the image" over the course of the 20th century (see also Benjamin 1968[1936]). Braudy notes that the democratization of fame came with a central paradox. More people could be famous and individually recognized, yet there was "greater uncertainty over who would determine what really merited recognition" (1997:611). I argue in this chapter that deviantART's participants offered competing answers to this dilemma and that their answers ended up materialized and reified (Wenger 1998) in the site's features, the uses of these features, and debates about them.

In the first part of the chapter I introduce members' desire to "get noticed" as well as different notions of "popularity" on the site. I then turn to three ways of getting noticed: (1) networking and participation, (2) having work that ranks highly in the site's popularity algorithm, and (3) receiving a Daily Deviation. Each of these ways reveals members' and staff's attempts to cultivate a sense of fairness albeit different notions of fairness. These illustrate the moral dimension of infrastructure. Then I examine deviantART's pageviews metric, a contentious feature that operationalized and quantified the different views of artistic recognition introduced earlier in the chapter. Finally, I analyze two ways that deviantART's staff sought to balance competing views of the recognition process. The first of these was a technical change; the second was an attempt to shift site discourse.

5.1   Getting noticed and becoming popular

deviantART provided opportunities for members to have their artwork and themselves seen by other people. Members used the phrases "getting noticed," "getting attention," and even "getting recognition" to describe the efforts of making oneself visible to others.[1] Whose attention or notice changed over time depending on members' "career" stage and aspirations. Some people wanted to build a fledgling audience for their work, others to be appreciated by fans. Many people hoped to attract feedback to help them improve (see chapter 6). Yet others sought to network with already established artists or to attract the attention of potential employers.

A single person could have all of these motivations over time. For example, Pirate-Cashoo joined the site when she was 11 or 12. When I interviewed her soon after she graduated high school, she told me that she felt her art teachers "rejected anime," the style and subject matter that she had pursued. "The Internet was the only place I could turn to," she told me. She wanted "recognition"—which here suggested notice and approval—but also "people's input" to know what others "said about my work." She added, "I didn't know what other people wanted." Since then, she had gained experience selling commissions online and had recently sold her work in an Artist Alley for the first time. She repeated the desire to "get recognition" but this time to attract more customers. RubyHawk, a college student, told me that she originally posted her work online "for fun." But after being active on deviantART as well as in Artist Alleys throughout high school, she saw in the site "potential" for her to "garner a reputation" to "get into the art industry" (interview).

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[1] The use of similar words and verb/noun constructions to sometimes mean the same thing and sometimes used to refer to different ideas contributed in making distinctions difficult to unravel. "Getting" was sometimes more actively phrased as "garnering" or "seeking." "Recognition" often meant "name recognition," pushing the phrase closer to visibility. Sometimes, however, "recognition" meant a combination of visibility and appreciation or positive acknowledgment.

Transformations over time raised questions for some people about the relationship between getting attention and being serious as an artist. Wen-M said that early in his career he "got some fame going," particularly among his friends and through deviantART (interview). He explained that "attention" kept him working for a while until he met established professionals at the San Diego Comic Convention and joined Bay Area Artists Unite (BAAU, see chapter 4). In both contexts he encountered models of artistic achievement that went beyond "the attention game." Reflecting on this change, Wen-M noted, "I realized I should stop doing it for attention and decide if I should really do this or not." I am not certain of everything that he meant by "really do this," though his achievement of a professional career as a commercial artist was a part of what he meant.[2] What was clear is how the phrase reflected his construction of an opposition between seriousness and attention, a changed practice that de-emphasized visibility and acclaim but not necessarily commercial success. Still, Wen-M admitted he still liked the attention from fans: "I fight for it. I fight against it… You want recognition from other people and it's proof that you are here."

On deviantART such "proof" of getting noticed came in the variety of forms: being added to watch lists, getting comments, receiving favourites, accumulating pageviews, and receiving Daily Deviations (the site's awards). Feedback further motivated the desire to continue. ArmadaRyu told me that her first comment or favourite got her "hooked" on deviantART (interview).[3] The feedback and attention she received left her "wanting to post more and more, and wanting to meet more people, and hear people's thoughts about my work." As another participant told me, "Being online has helped me immensely. Just to further my reason for drawing. And for doing art" (interview). Throughout this chapter I focus on different ways that members positioned various forms of feedback, debating whether such feedback provided proof of notice, popularity, quality, and ultimately, artistic recognition. The idea of "getting noticed," through the phrase's mixed active-passive connotation, reflected an awareness that notice and recognition were collectively produced achievements, yet individuals had some responsibility in bringing them about.

5.1.1   Popularity(-ies) on deviantART

In their study of YouTube, Burgess and Green (2009) describe different ways that the heavily trafficked video distribution allows users to browse the site by several ranking mechanisms. Burgess and Green point out that each mechanism sorts videos according to a "different logic of audience engagement" (2009:40). For example, while "Most Viewed" corresponds to an advertising model for broadcast television of "counting eyeballs," the others rely on the quantification of particular kinds of interaction through YouTube's interface.[4] Burgess and Green (2009:41) describe these rankings as collectively providing a "re-presentation" of popularity:

> Because they communicate to the audience what counts as popular on YouTube, these metrics also take an active role in creating the reality of what is popular on YouTube: they are not only descriptive; they are also performative.

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[2] At the time I interviewed him, Wen-M was in his early 30s, had built up a large fan base, and worked as a character designer for a game company. He attributed his job to his "popularity" on deviantART.

[3] At the time I interviewed her ArmadaRyu was an illustrator in her mid 20s and had joined the site when she was in college. She recalled her roommate at the time she joined asking her, "Are you on that website again? You're obsessed with it!"

[4] On YouTube, the others include Most Favorited, Most Responded, Most Discussed, and Most Active.

Like YouTube, deviantART's interface inscribed various notions of "popularity," also based on different logics.[5] deviantART's popularity algorithm determined the ranking of deviations on the front page and in the galleries.[6] The number of times a member added a work to his or her collection of favourites was the central factor in determining the work's popularity.[7] In this sense, the algorithm treated a "favourite" as a *vote* for a deviation.[8] The logic was that favouriting a work was showing appreciation for it or endorsing it in some fashion. Those works most appreciated or endorsed were thus the most "popular" over a given time period. As I elaborate later in the chapter, however, members' favouriting practices varied considerably, and some of these challenged the notion that favouriting had anything to do with genuine appreciation.

Similar to deviations, the most popular news articles were those that had been the most favourited over a given time period.[9] The Today page ranked the most popular journal entries as those that had received the most comments that day.[10] It ranked the most popular forum topics in a similar manner. With both, the logic was that the more reactions a particular piece of writing generated, whether appreciative or not, the more "popular" it was. Finally, the Today page ranked the most popular artists of that day by the number of pageviews a member had received that day on his or her userpage. All that mattered in this case was that a member had received some attention in the form of traffic, even if those visiting had not provided any reactive input analogous to favourites and comments.

These diverse meanings of "popular" reflect diverse historical usage of the term. Williams (1983:236-237) points out that even in the 16th century the term "popular" corresponded to "widespread" and was often attached to negative uses of the term (as modifier for error, sickness, or disease). He traces the sense of popular as "widely favoured" and "well-liked" to the 18th and 19th centuries, respectively. The concept "popular culture" came to connote having mass appeal and being of the people, but also connote inferiority and work intentionally created to "win favour" (and people seeking to as well).

Given the diversity of connotations in the term in everyday use and the different explicit uses of the term "popularity" on deviantART's interface, it is not be surprising that deviantART members had different understandings of what it might mean to produce work that was popular or to be popular themselves. Regarding what they meant by a "popular" artist on deviantART, answers varied and often included a combination of factors:

> Dan: So when you say "popular" what do you mean by that?
>
> Crow: Mainly like page views, amount of comments, how many people … how many other people are watching them. … I don't know. It's hard to really explain what the popular artists are. But the people that get literally thousands of

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[5] Unlike YouTube (in Burgess and Green's account), deviantART explicitly used the term "popular."

[6] Based on looking at former versions of deviantART (using the Internet Archive) and some of the changes over time to the FAQ, it seems that ranking art by "popularity" was an evolution from the "Daily Top Favourites" list.

[7] The relative weight of this factor changed, as I explain later in this chapter.

[8] This was also reflected in the language of "giving a favourite" or "favouriting" a work that co-existed with the language of "adding" a work to a favourites gallery.

[9] Or most "loved" as the interface also phrased it.

[10] Members could not favourite journal entries in the same way that they could favourite news articles.

comments on each picture that they post. (interview)

> Dan: What do you think it means, in this context, to be "popular"?
>
> Pirate-Cashoo: Being on the front page and having a lot of Watchers and having a lot of comments and favorites…I guess. (interview)

In neither of these cases is a popular artist determined by pageviews alone. Crow suggested that whatever popular meant, it was hard to put into exact terms or numbers. To Pirate-Cashoo, the placement of the work's popularity as reflected in deviantART's interface was a way of considering the popularity of its creator. It was clear from hesitation or other expressions of ambivalence that people I spoke with were not certain (and I observed similar uncertainty in conversations among others). To further complicate matters, some people brought up others who they claimed were popular in other contexts but were hardly known on deviantART. In those cases artists were popular because they had achieved some measure of fame in other worlds, they had a lot of fans, or both. I return to the implications of these ambivalences and differences when I discuss arguments over the pageviews metric toward the end of the chapter.

5.1.2 "Bubbling up": the promise of getting noticed and becoming popular

An important dynamic emerged between becoming popular on deviantART and getting noticed. To some members "popularity" was a sign of having been noticed. One's work ended up as popular because many people had noticed it and favourited it. ArmadaRyu recounted a time when one of her deviations ended up on the front page:

> I was all excited… I was getting a lot of favourites… And I was also getting watches from people and that made me think that somewhere this [piece] is posted where people are seeing it that aren't on my watchlist. So then I checked out the front page and I was like, "Oh hey! It's down there [laughs]!" I wasn't expecting it to do so well. (interview)

While having one's work become "popular" was evidence of it getting noticed, some hoped that becoming popular on deviantART could lead to further notice on deviantART or elsewhere. Crow explained to me that she had noticed that groups of well-known artists older and more experienced than she was seemed to work through deviantART, have tables in Artist Alleys, go to art school, and then get jobs or have their work sold in galleries. This was a depiction of an idealized trajectory that played on a cycle of getting noticed and becoming popular in different (or widening) social worlds.[11] Similarly, Wen-M was something of a celebrity in BAAU as he had amassed on deviantART millions of pageviews, thousands of fans, and a professional career. And though alexds1 joked online that being "famous on the Internet" didn't mean anything "IRL" (in real life), several noted that she, in fact, was famous both on and off the Internet (see chapter 4). A woman in her 20s who went by spacecoyote had garnered a following on deviantART and subsequently posted an illustration that was widely circulated on the Internet. This encounter with "Internet fame" led to a job at a major studio, which in turn boosted her popularity on deviantART and

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[11] She added, "When I first started at deviantART I didn't think I would ever become one of those popular artists. I'm starting to think, 'Hey, this might happen for me!'"

propelled her into a full-time professional career (I revisit this story in chapter 7). Stories such as these acquired mythic status and seemed to present to other members a realized dream of artistic recognition and fame worth working towards. Such stories helped shaped participants' imaginations of deviantART's possibilities.

The stories were important to deviantART, Inc. as well. deviantART's staff included such stories among noteworthy achievements and events on the site.[12] Josh Wattles described the move from growing up on deviantART to wider recognition and opportunities in other venues as "bubbling up."[13] He discussed several photographers and illustrators who had been on the site for several years and had become known in their respective fields. To Wattles, these figures were one form of proof of the site's value. Bubbling up was important for the site's corporate goals as well as the commercial goals of its members. As Wattles put it, the site was already important in some fields and might be on the verge in others:

> We haven't trickled up to the top 1-2% at SoHo, or every photographer for National Geographic… but we have bubbled up to every single artist who works for Marvel Comics.… We are infusing the art world with our numbers. (fieldnotes)

According to Wattles, he had a great deal of anecdotal evidence that major creative firms (such as ad agencies and design firms) "browse dA for treatments" (fieldnotes). Both he and Sotira expressed confidence that deviantART would be an important player in every major field of artistic production. Thus, they tied deviantART's reputation and recognition to the recognition of its members.

In sum, deviantART's members were motivated by a desire to get noticed, notice related to various notions of popularity, and, between notice and popularity, artistic recognition for members and recognition of the site were linked. Artistic recognition was often tied closely to commercial success or a professional job as a commercial artist, but I do not mean to suggest that everyone had these goals in mind. As examples later in this chapter show, situations emerged in which commercial activity contrasted with artistic seriousness.[14]

5.2   Ways of getting noticed

deviantART's staff and its members worked to position deviantART's features as ways of getting noticed, becoming popular, and gaining artistic recognition. In this section I discuss three of the ways in which members tried to get noticed and staff shaped the process: by networking and participation on the site, by vote through deviantART's popularity algorithm, and by award via the site's Daily Deviations. The combination of materialized discourse, technology, policy, and ideology added up to an assemblage of elements that could be positioned as infrastructural with respect to different ideals of artistic practice and different art worlds. Each way of getting noticed I discuss here facilitated visibility for members and art differently. Each provoked debates of fairness, illustrating the moral as well as technical aspects of infrastructure.

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[12] They presented these examples both to me personally and on the site in various articles.

[13] Wattles was a senior staff member who I introduced in chapter 4 (see phase 3 of my progression through fieldwork).

[14] I return to this point in chapter 6 as well.

Before I turn to these discussions and different ways of getting noticed, I introduce deviantART, Inc.'s official explanations of what was unfair. Any system of ranking is subject to attempts of manipulation (Van Dijck 2009) or suspicions of it (English 2005, Heinich 2009). On the web, attempts to game Google's search engine have been well-documented in the media, particularly with respect to efforts of advertisers to gain an advantage, the burgeoning "search engine optimization" cottage industry, and cases of "click fraud."[15] Burgess and Green (2009) mention such possibilities on YouTube, though they do not provide much detail. Members described to me different ways of trying to figure out how to best position themselves for optimal visibility on deviantART. They discussed different strategies with me and each other for uploading work, noting attention to the day and time of submission and how many deviations they uploaded in a given time frame. Others carefully studied what already "popular" artists were doing and sought to emulate them.

deviantART's staff was tuned in to a variety of strategies that members had developed over time, deeming some of them as particularly egregious. deviantART's FAQ defined an "Abuse or Exploit of the System" as "an action which uses or otherwise takes advantage of a feature…in a manner which is inappropriate or otherwise not originally intended."[16] Below I draw attention to the difficulty of clearly demarcating what uses were "appropriate" or what "as intended" means, as well as differences in what was, in fact, meant by "the System." The FAQ tried to do so by example, spelling out particular problems it described as "the most common." All of these involved efforts to draw attention to oneself or one's submissions.

The FAQ described a set of attempts to manipulate the popularity algorithm for work. Of these there were several examples. One was creating multiple accounts—which was otherwise acceptable—specifically for the purpose of using the other accounts to favourite a work on a primary account. Another was the coordination of "a large group of users" to boost a work's ranking (through coordinated favouriting). A third was the creation of links that automatically and deceptively favourite a work when clicked. Similarly, it was also an abuse for someone to create links that would automatically add oneself to an unsuspecting person's Watchlist.

A final set of abuses concerned using comments to draw attention to oneself. One version of this problem involved "flooding" a journal entry with comments to make it appear more prominently on the Today page, thus boosting the visibility of its author. deviantART also had a policy against spam, which it defined as leaving similar or identical comments, or sending private notes "with the obvious intent of indiscriminately spreading your message to as many users as possible without regard for whether they are interested in your message."

All of these abuses sought notice in ways perceived detrimental to other members of the site. The FAQ described creating multiple accounts for gaming the popularity algorithm as a form of "cheating," a "betrayal of trust," and it seemed to me that this was the rationale for most of the others. Several were based on inferences of intent, and significantly, the boundary between fair and

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[15] See, for example, "How to Cheat Google" (from *On the Media*, February 25, 2011, http://www.onthemedia.org/2011/feb/25/how-to-cheat-google/transcript/, last accessed October 1, 2011) and Mann, Charles, "How Click Fraud Could Swallow the Internet" *Wired*, January 2006, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.01/fraud_pr.html, last accessed October 1, 2011. See also Grimmelman (2007) for an analysis of these concerns and related ones.

[16] From FAQ #295: "What exactly is an 'Abuse or Exploit of the System'?"

unfair practices hinged on such inferences. I return to this point in my discussion of networking in the next section in which I examine problems with distinguishing fair practices from abusive ones.

5.2.1   Networking and participation: ethics and dilemmas

Both deviantART's staff and some of its members sought to cultivate a communal sensibility. To get noticed, members needed to engage with one another and get involved in various activities on the site. The FAQ's response to "How can I get noticed on this site?" noted that the "number one way" was to "*comment, comment, comment*" (original emphasis).[17] This included commenting on people's artwork as well as all of the other places a member on the site could engage in discussion.

Commenting implied broader participation. A teenager who posted an article on "How to be noticed on deviantART" wrote that participation could mean joining clubs, entering contests, posting news articles, giving out advice, or featuring other people's work in articles or journals.[18]

Such efforts were described as mutually beneficial and a form of networking. One member wrote in a news article, "you have to 'network' this site as if you would in the real art world." Chris Perguidi explained that networking online and offline was essential to getting people to view and read his work:

> You just gotta' go to conventions, shake people's hands. It's almost like being a politician. You know…you just gotta' go out and meet the people and network. And the Internet helps with that, with that a lot. You know you gotta' network with everybody.[19] (interview)

Networking came with positioning oneself on a perceived hierarchy. alexds1 described the importance of replying to the comments and questions of fans. She also tried to engage with those whom she saw as her peers or already "respected artists" through art trades and commissions. I observed how careful she was, like others who posted regular web comics, to frequently link and endorse other creators of web comics.

Another member wrote in an article, "be genuinely supportive of others and they will be supportive of you." This echoed the advice of the earlier-quoted FAQ: "You reap what you sow." Framed this way, getting noticed by networking and participation (on the site and in the activities of others) rested on a fair and reciprocal arrangement. Commenting on a news article that addressed the topic of popularity, one deviantART member described her experiences posting to FanFiction.net—one of the largest venues for posting fan fiction line (see Black 2008): "If you wanted people to notice you [on FanFiction.net], notice them. Participate. Write reviews. Add fanfiction you like to your favorites." Such an approach was the same online as in "real life":

> If you're new to school, you don't join any activities, clubs, sports, groups, anything…is it fair to wonder why no one's talking to you? It's the same here [on deviantART]. Don't be a hypocrite, I say. If you want people to see your art and tell you what they think about it, look at *their* art and tell them what *you* think about it.

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[17] From FAQ #56 "How can I get noticed on this site?"

[18] When I posted my first journal entry on the site explaining my research, one teenager told me that I should create contests and spread the word through news articles.

[19] I observed Perguidi at many conventions I attended.

(original emphasis)

This advice offered two rationales that were compatible yet also in tension with one another. To get noticed by others, on the one hand, an artist had to actively make herself *visible* to them, and on the other hand, an artist had to provide others with the attention she would want in return.[20] Being visible and being genuinely engaged raised a problem of authenticity. Fine (2003:177) describes authenticity as being "sincere" and "genuine," "distinct from strategic and pragmatic." The problem on deviantART was that the specific actions people prescribed could be seen as *both* genuine *and* strategic or pragmatic: the same features of the site could be used in quite different ways but with similar outcomes.[21] The examples of commenting and favouriting illustrate how the line between networking and abusing the system were difficult to demarcate.[22]

5.2.1.1 Commenting: notice, appreciation, or spam?

deviantART's FAQ encouraged people to "*comment, comment, comment*" and members encouraged each other to participate, which necessarily implied commenting. Yet as noted above deviantART's FAQ also saw indiscriminate commenting as spam. Recognizing the problem of discerning one from the other, the FAQ attempted to mitigate the problem by qualifying its advice for getting noticed by telling readers to "try to remember that deviantART is a *community* not a comment machine" (original emphasis).[23] It left readers to interpret what was meant here by "community," but pointed to a journal entry on "How to give better comments," which suggested a way of giving comments so that they would be helpful, demonstrate "sincerity," and possibly lead to "friendship." As I argue in chapter 6, there was a history of attempts on the site to link deviantART's status and strength as a community to the giving and receiving of quality feedback.

One problematic form of comment on deviations, short and seemingly enthusiastic and appreciative, were "kudos" (e.g. "Nice work!", "Awesome!", "Cool!," "So cute!", and so forth).[24] Some felt that such comments were important when artists were just starting out. One woman told me that such feedback had helped her develop "an ego" when she had been younger, a form of "recognition" that all artists "crave…in order to survive" (interview). Yet, many derided them as simply attention-seeking ways for fans to try to draw attention to themselves from the artists

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[20] In her study of musicians using MySpace, Suhr (2009:184) provides evidence of this dual framing being more general. In the same quote, one of her informants described using MySpace "as a platform for authentic contact" and as a way to "be more present."

[21] See also Marwick and boyd (2011) for a discussion of problems of authenticity on Twitter.

[22] This created a situation similar to what Becker (1994) describes as a "confusion of values." The practices I am describing here could be interpreted as a sign of getting (or giving) notice and/or appreciation. Yet, they could also be used as a means to draw attention back to the person commenting or favouriting. Appreciating others and drawing attention to oneself are not necessarily incompatible actions, though in some circumstances one is perceived as a less worthy motivation than the other. In other circumstances they may be altogether conflicting and incompatible. I observed patterns in journal entries, news articles, comments, and even the FAQ where a recommendation to participate was accompanied by a qualification, caveat, or warning emphasizing (or implying) a "right" way to follow that advice and implicitly or explicitly pointing to wrong ways. For example, people recommended that others comment (much like the FAQ) but not to be "an attention whore."

[23] From FAQ #56 "How can I get noticed on this site?"

[24] As I describe in chapter 6, these comments were similar to the "OMG Standards," comments on FanFiction.net that Black (2008, 2009) analyzes.

whom they admired (and perhaps from others as well). Moreover, some people also criticized those who received too many of these comments, accusing them of posting to deviantART only to get attention from fans, a motivation deemed inferior to others, such as seeking to improve.[25] Denigrating kudos was a way some sought to disentangle authentic interests in someone from attention seeking.

That commenting could actually be a means of attention seeking—and nothing more—could lead to uncertainty about their value and the limits of fair play. RubyHawk told me how hard it had been for her to get noticed and receive comments on her work and noted,

> I know that a lot of artists will comment on other people's work just so that they can get attention to their own work. Personally, I feel like that's a little shady so I don't really do that. (interview)

Together, we stumbled upon an example on one of her posted deviations. A comment read, "Amazing! I'd like to see what you can do for my contest. Check it out? [link]." It was clear to RubyHawk that the commenter was trying to draw her into a contest, an invitation that might have indicated appreciating RubyHawk's work and offering a new opportunity for her to get noticed. Yet, it also raised a question for RubyHawk regarding whether the invitation was in fact based on RubyHawk's work. RubyHawk saw it as a form of spam. While deviantART had a policy against spam, actual examples of spam were not always clear cut, accentuating the difficulty of disambiguating comments as genuine or as ways of raising the visibility of the commenter.[26]

The common practice of "thanking" provides another example. In response to having one's work favourited, being added to a watch list, or in some cases even simply visiting someone's userpage, many users left a note of thanks in return (e.g. "Thanks for the fav!" "Thanks for the watch!"). One Senior member told me that there were "two schools of thought" on thanking: "Some people think it's polite to thank people, and some people think that it's just a means of getting more pageviews and that it's 'bad form' to publicly thank someone."[27] For other people, the issue was even more complicated. Two teenagers I spoke with both thought it was polite to thank. However, one did not think it reasonable to expect "busy artists" to thank them, and the other thought it was particularly important to thank people he did not already know. Therefore, while neither of these members brought up spam as a possibility, both added to the range of reasons that one may or may not thank, the difficulty in interpreting the comments, and the complexity of the practice. That even a comment as seemingly mundane as a thank-you could mask such complexities illustrates the dilemma of members seeking to get noticed.

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[25] I develop this point further in chapter 6.

[26] And, of course, any comment could be both, raising the "confusion of values" (Becker 1994) I mentioned in footnote 21.

[27] She said she was of the former opinion, but I spoke to a friend of hers—another Senior member—who came down on the other side, especially if the "thanking" comment included a link back to the work. Suhr (2009:187) observed similar behavior and potential confusion in her description of "Thanks for the add" banners on MySpace. These demonstrated gratitude while also being a form of advertising or branding.

5.2.1.2 Favouriting: a form of appreciation?

Like commenting, favouriting was a complex, problematic, and often ambiguous practice. The name—"favourite"—suggested that favouriting was a sign of not just noticing the work, but appreciating it as well. Favouriting work, like commenting, was an important aspect of participating in deviantART. deviantART's particular implementation of the feature, however, made favouriting fit into a range of complex networking practices as well. Giving a favourite, like leaving a comment or adding someone to a Watch list, would result in the person giving the favourite showing up in the Message Center of the person receiving the favourite. A reciprocal "thanks" could be the beginning of a more personal relationship in addition to further increasing the visibility of the person receiving the favourite. Receiving a favourite boosted visibility in other ways as well. It increased the work's ranking in the popularity algorithm. And, it meant that the work would appear in the gallery and, for a time, on the userpage of the person giving the favourite. These specifics of deviantART's technical implementation in combination with general concerns over taste and judgment raised questions as to the purpose and value of favourites as well as the authenticity of people giving them.

The public nature of favouriting, encoded into its technical implementation, raised problems for some users about what a favourite said about the person giving one. Victor, an illustrator in his mid-20s, felt that favourites literally became "a part" of his account (fieldnotes).[28] Thus they "reflect on you."[29] He asked me rhetorically, if he were to see a piece of artwork that is "good, but cheese-cakey," should he favourite it?[30] "If I saw a picture of a dragon and liked it, does that mean I want it to be in my favourites?"[31] Favourites could reflect taste, and to some, taste was an integral part of one's artistic identity.

That people could amass thousands of favourites and that deviantART's popularity algorithm treated them like votes raised additional questions for Victor about the value of the favourite to the person whose work he was considering. As he put it, there was no "need" to favourite a "famous person." What would be the point, he wondered, in favouriting someone whose work was already well established in an industry or had thousands of fans favouriting each work submitted? Therefore, to Victor, a favourite was not just an expression of liking something; it had other social functions. Given all of these concerns, favouriting required an additional level of effort and

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[28] Victor was an engineer in his mid-20s and had recently renewed his interest in art and illustration as a hobby. He had joined deviantART around the same time that I did. All quotes in this section are from fieldnotes following a conversation with him at an Artist Alley.

[29] He asked me if I knew whether favourites "last forever" and if so, wondered how long should someone "keep" a favourite (fieldnotes).

[30] "Cheesecake" in this context seems to refer to a sub-genre of cartoon or comic illustration, a type of "pin-up" depicting women, sometimes scantily clad or in sexually suggestive poses. Victor's example was a popular comic book artist who worked for Marvel Comics and was an active member of deviantART: "It's good, but 'cheese-cake.'" Cheesecake has been a feature of mainstream comics for decades. See for example the description of a gallery showing at Fantagraphics books in 2008 that was titled "Now Serving Cheesecake - The Classic Art of Cartoon Pin-up," http://www.fantagraphics.com/index.php?option=com_eventlist&Itemid=117&func=details&did=54, last accessed on May 24, 2010.

[31] Considering the same situation from the perspective of the artist making the work in question, the public nature of favourites could potentially lead people's work being favourited less often. I do not recall having heard anyone speculating on this possibility, however.

thought that he preferred to avoid: "I have to ask myself, should I favourite? Should I not? It's a weird mindset." His solution was to favourite infrequently.

Another dilemma related to the fact that "favourites are unlimited and free to give," as Aaron put it. "Some people just give it to everything [they] click on" (interview).[32] That recipients were notified of favourites in combination with the social convention of thanking helped Aaron assess others' favouriting practices. Together, we looked at the userpage of someone who had recently favourited one of Aaron's photographs. He pointed out to me that the person had received a lot of "thanks" comments, and that signaled to Aaron that the person was a liberal favouriter. This observation in turn led Aaron to not value the favourite that he had received from this person as highly as favourites from others.[33]

The specific technical implementation of favourites as well as others' favouriting practices shaped Aaron's approach to cultivating his own tastes and aesthetic appreciation. We looked at someone else's submission to a gallery to which Aaron also contributed. Aaron described the work as "impressive" because the artist was able to draw a part of the image rather than use 3D software. Aaron characterized his own drawing ability as "awful" so he had "a lot of respect for the artist who can do it well." Yet, despite the work's "impressive" quality and this "respect" for the artist, Aaron opted not to favourite the piece. He only favourited work that was "visually impressive and/or took a lot of skill to make." He added, "I think that one took a lot of skill, but I didn't like the mountains that much."

Realizing that favourites may be less valuable came with time and experience using deviantART. Alice, a teenager, explained her excitement the first time "I got a favourite":

> Alice: I just thought, oh wow! I'm starting to get seen! ego + 10 or something along those lines ha
>
> Dan: ha
>
> Dan: do you still get excited by that?
>
> Alice: Not particularly. Most my favs end up being fav and runs and don't mean a lot to me because I don't have any clue about why they think my work deserves it. Especially those who fav several pieces at once or near enough my entire gallery. Loses its meaning. (interview)[34]

Alice derided "fav and runs," situations in which people favourited without commenting. She actively encouraged people *not* to favourite her work unless they also left a comment, a request I observed regularly on the site.

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[32] Aaron was a teenage photographer and game-modder when I interviewed him ("modding" refers to "modifying" a game). Aaron's specialty was creating backgrounds and 3D terrains. All quotes in this section are from several interviews with him.

[33] Aaron did not realize that favourites were an important driver of the popularity algorithm and was not thinking of how their material consequences could offset their symbolic value. He was "pretty sure" that pageviews determined popularity, with favourites and downloads as possible other factors.

[34] Alice was a teenager experimenting with a variety of media. She was learning to illustrate with software and was an avid photographer. She also was a regular contributor to the stock photography gallery.

It was not only a lack of scarcity that led people to question the value of favourites. Situations arose in which favourites led people to feel unappreciated, and people questioned the correspondence between the feature and the meaning of the label "favourite." I observed Alice express a great deal of emotional frustration with fav-and-runs in her journal. A news article exhorting people to consider the way they used the feature put the double-edged nature of favourites this way:

> Giving Fav's is a great way to show appreciation for a fellow artist's work. However, a word of caution... Fav the submissions you LOVE. Be a little discerning in your tastes. There's nothing worse than receiving a favourite from someone and realising that they've faved just about the entire photography gallery.

In other words, a "Fav" *could* be or *should* be "a great way to show appreciation," but it also *could* be the first step in feeling unappreciated.

Finally, liberal favouriting not only raised concerns to members about the value of the feature as a form of appreciation. Because deviantART's implementation of the feature included automatic notification, liberal favouriting also raised questions of authenticity. I learned that some people used the guise of liberal favouriting to mask a tactical approach to generating attention—even commercial revenue—for themselves.[35] Charlotte, who was heading to college and hoping to become a professional artist, told me that she used favourites as a means of building up her watch and generating new customers:

> It's kind of an abuse of the system. My best friend…she also goes on here… we both have this thing that we call fav-whoring. And we go to the Newest page and fav everything that's on the page. It's really kind of bad. I feel a little bit bad doing it… It took me a long time to get into it. But it really, really rakes in the Watchers and, uh, recognition.[36]

> [people who] get caught manipulating the system for personal attention and prestige not only are cheating and violating our policies against exploiting the system but they are also violating the trust which we place in everyone that you will be a responsible member of the community.[37]

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[35] Recall that Aaron did not indicate that a liberal favouriter was anything other than someone who did not have a discriminatory sensibility.

[36] She also told me that she favourited everything she likes as "nearly everything now-a-days is inspiring to me… I'm easy to please." I am not suggesting that she was misleading me here, but that both "motivations" for favouriting could co-exist.

[37] Despite Charlotte's admission of abuse and the staff member's warning against "favorites cheating," as I was writing up this material I observed that deviantART's staff mentioned Charlotte's way of using favourites as something that they would not make against policy: "The fact of the matter though is that people add Favorites for a variety of reasons…. Some people hand out a handful a week and others employ the fire hose approach. Ultimately though each individual passes out their Favorites as often as they see fit and as staff we do not care how fast or how rarely this occurs. As far as policy is concerned you cannot 'abuse' Favorites by handing out too many too quickly. You cannot 'abuse' Favorites by indiscriminately Favoriting everything you see or by Favoriting hundreds or thousands of works or by Favoriting 'too fast.' It is also not considered to be a problem if someone Favorites your work and then immediately removes it. Yes- that sort of thing is a cheap ploy for attention but ultimately it is not something which is severe enough to justify any sort of administrative involvement."

An older artist told me, "the more you favourite, the more pageviews you get." Such tactics were not on deviantART's list of abusing the favourites feature, all of which were concerned with trying to get one's *own* work more favourited. Even knowing this, Charlotte still felt that what she and her friend were doing "*is* an abuse of the system. We're using favourite in a way that they're not meant to" (indeed she may have been echoing the language of the FAQ here on "intended to"). In noting that it was "really kind of bad" but that it had beneficial outcomes for her, she indicated an awareness of abusing an ethical system that went beyond the policy. It was a deceptive act that raised the possibility that one might not have any interest in the work at all, taking advantage of people's desire to get noticed. A staff member of deviantART posted to a journal some time later soliciting input for new policies regarding "favourites cheating,"

One set of issues addressed the relationship between what a favourite indicated to the person receiving one and what it said about the person giving one. These issues concerned the value of the favourite as a visible marker of notice and appreciation (to both giver and receiver).

5.2.1.3   Summary

Comments and favourites were two features of deviantART that could be used to participate and network to get noticed. If used as part of a community-oriented mentality perceived as collectively beneficial, their use was considered to be not only fair but also part of an ethical practice. If used as part of self-oriented, purely attention-seeking strategies, they were deemed abusive and perhaps in violation of the site's official policies, collective norms, or both. There were questions about what favourites indicated about the person receiving them, questions about what they said about the person giving them, and questions about what they said to the artist. deviantART's particular implementation of the feature, its policies, and members' ways of using them shaped what favourites did in fact indicate. In turn, favourites, like comments, raised questions about what forms of "participation" and "networking" were indeed fair and ethical, and which were abusive.

What kind of "notice" these features signaled was highly fluid, dependent on the particular ways that they were implemented and used. These contributed to members working out the question of what *artists* should be recognized for and how this recognition should come about. These are questions that are central in my analysis of the popularity algorithm and deviantART's awards.

5.2.2   Vote: the popularity algorithm and fair exposure

Favourites were a central factor determining a submission's ranking and placement in the site's navigation and its site-defined "popularity." The algorithm treated favourites like votes, signals of endorsement regardless of why someone might have chosen to favourite a work. Members could vote for as many items as they wished but were allowed only one vote per item. The popularity algorithm was, in a sense, a democratic way of promoting work to deviantART's front page and, more prominently, in its galleries. As such, it was similar to other means by which content on websites could be made more visible.

5.2.2.1   Democracy and quality on the web and deviantART's front page

Rather than rely on a small group of specialized or expert curators, many so-called Web 2.0 sites have presented interfaces through which users explicitly or implicitly vote on content. Such voting

is typically intended to surface the content that is of the highest value with respect to the site's aim: the most relevant, the most important, the most note-worthy, the most controversial, and so forth.

Sites differ in the means by which they accomplish these goals. For example, one of the key innovations in Google's PageRank algorithm was to rely on website creators' hyperlinks to rank returned search results (Brin and Page 1998, Page et al. 1998). Surowiecki (2005:16), quoting Google, writes that PageRank "'capitalizes on the uniquely democratic characteristics of the web" and refers to links as "votes" (a point reiterated by others since, such as Benkler [2006]).[38] Other sites, such as Slashdot, Digg, and Reddit, use explicit voting up and down rather than inferences to propel some of the content to the top and push other content down to less noticeable positions (Weinberger 2007, Halavais 2009). Both the implicit and explicit means of voting are intended to be tied to quality.[39] These sites rely on a similar premise: given enough participants, the "best" will rise to the top (literally and figuratively), endorsing both the quality of the particular piece of content and the platform itself. In returning the most relevant and highest quality search results, PageRank is not just democratizing but also "wisdom" generating, according to Surowiecki (2005). Benkler (2006:387) argues that such a mechanism produces more transparent, diverse, and higher quality results. Weinberger (2007:226) similarly praises the outcomes on Digg and Reddit, which use "the collective wisdom of their readers to determine which stories are major."[40]

It was not obvious to me if a deviation's "popularity" was intended to be a measure of quality. As discussed earlier people did not always use favourites as measures of quality. CEO Angelo Sotira told me, "Our job is to reflect whatever the artists want to reflect. So we're there to be a democracy, there to let people rise however they're going to rise" (interview). Since the site specified abuses and exploits, there was a sense that the rankings could be "better" (or perhaps more "fair") than they were. Moreover, I routinely heard criticism of what appeared on the front page that questioned the quality of the work or of the set of results. For instance, Sharon, a teenage

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[38] I should note that I cannot be certain from where Surowiecki (2005) was quoting. In his text he mentions Brin and Page's 1998 paper as "now-legendary" and quotes "Google," implying the quote came from that paper. The *Atlantic Magazine* directly attributes the quote to Brin and Page (1998) as do other references, perhaps based on Surowiecki (though I can only speculate here, see Michael Hirschorn's "Truth Lies Here" in the November 2010 issue or at http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/truth-lies-here/8246/). That quote, however, is not found in Brin and Page (1998). Nor is it in Page et al. (1998), which Surowiecki also references. I found what may be a snapshot of an old Google page (the page says copyright 1999 and Google's logo appears with a service mark) answering the question "Why use Google?" that has the text in question (see: http://preg.org/collectibles/mentalplex.cmon/why_use.html, last accessed October 3, 2011). See also http://c_3_jwright.tripod.com/google.htm and http://www.math.upenn.edu/~kazdan/210/LectureNotes/google/google.html.

[39] Google describes its results as producing the most "important" (Page et al. 1998) or "relevant" and therefore the best. Brin and Page (1998) refer explicitly to improving the quality of results. Digg claims to "surface the best stuff on the web" ("Welcome to Digg. | Digg About." http://about.digg.com/, last accessed on March 27, 2011). Reddit, while its categories are labeled "hot," "controversial," and "top-scoring," notes that users decided what is "good" and what is "junk" ("What is Reddit" from the Reddit FAQ. http://www.reddit.com/help/faq#Whatisreddit, last accessed on March 27, 2011).

[40] Though here the logic is a bit circular. A "major" story is that which is deemed so. But the point is clearly that an argument that a story elevated as the most major is also the most important to readers (contra to those picked by editors).

photographer, told me, "A lot of people on DA are annoyed at the quality of the 'popular' work because there are so many talented artists who are ignored" (interview).

It was not necessarily the case to Sharon that popularity and quality should lead to the same outcome, but it was clear that she preferred the front page to provide a view of quality work. Shelly, a Senior, felt that "dA popularity depends on dumb luck, mob mentality, appealing to fandoms, and cuteness": "on dA, you can get on the front page if you show Harry Potter making out with a pregnant mongoose" (interview).[41] When I walked through the front page with another person, she looked at it and commented, "photography of beautiful models… anime… look at these pages… so repetitive" (interview). She was not commenting on the quality of any specific work but a lack of diversity in the aggregate, an implicit critique of the quality of the ranking system. Another person submitted a stamp that flashed "NOT FANART"; its creator wrote it to suggest *originality*, not just diversity for the sake of diversity. These quotes reflected doubts about whether the ranking system was fair: should it reflect quality, diversity, originality, or "popularity" determined by some other factors? Changes to the popularity algorithm under the rhetoric of "fair exposure" raised further questions as to what "popularity" did and should mean as well as what a "democratic" method of ranking art should entail.

5.2.2.2   Fair exposure?

In early 2008, deviantART's CTO Andrew McCann (hereafter $mccann), announced in his journal the release of a new popularity algorithm as part of a site-wide initiative named "FairExposure":

> FairExposure … is based on the idea that every deviant and deviation should have a fair chance at getting seen and noticed. We actually apply this concept to other aspects of deviantART as well, such as employees, departments, etc. Everyone, everything, deserves FairExposure.…

> Ranking deviations on deviantART based on raw popularity works, just as popularity works in the rest of the world. However, as some of you may know, there are many problems with popularity as it pertains to "fairness."

$mccann went on to describe two problems with rankings as they had been implemented up to that point. One was a feedback loop that resulted in already popular deviations becoming even more exposed, more favourited, and thus more popular: "That which is popular is more likely to be seen, and thus gain even more popularity." This was an insight into the fact that the rankings both reflected and produced a work's popularity. The second problem, according to $mccann, was that ranking based on "raw" votes privileged some forms of art over others:

> Different styles and types of art appeal to different users on deviantART and those users use the favorites systems in different ways. Thus, comparing the number of favorites on one type of a deviation to another was like comparing apples to oranges.

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[41] She added "(mostly) ;P [wink with tongue sticking out]…it's not always that way," indicating that she knew she was exaggerating, but also that she felt there was some truth in the joke. The particular example combines three genres stereotypically "popular" on deviantART: fan art, sexual material, and *deviant* sexual material. Shelly was an art student and illustrator who had been on the site for a long time; she was seeking a job as a commercial artist.

This second problem, $mccann wrote, was "really unfair," and the changes to the algorithm addressed this problem and not the first. To make the rankings more fair, the algorithm would take into account categorization. In response to a query as to how, $mccann wrote that the algorithm began by counting the number of favourites but tracked the categories and sub-categories as well. With each new calculation, the algorithm would make corrections to lower the odds of something from already represented categories from being picked again.[42] Taking into account categories would make sure that, as $mccann put it, "no category is starved for exposure" resulting in "a more fair popularity metric." Such an approach built on the understanding shared by many on the site that the categories also classified groups of artists as members of communities or sub-communities (see chapter 2). The changes to the algorithm purportedly would help manage tensions between different groups of artists who might create different kinds of work and who, as $mccann implied, might use favourites differently.

Before I discuss the reaction to this new algorithm in more detail, I want to go back and discuss the first problem concerning feedback loops. Feedback loops of the sort described were not just a concern within deviantART. Shirky (2003) explains how the existence of power law distributions—where a small percentage of items command the vast majority of attention—are quite common on the web and elsewhere. The existence of these situations might result in permanent inequality, notes Shirky, because they begin with a "preference premium" where the actions of earlier users of a system affect the options of later users.[43]

$mccann did not say exactly why the algorithm changes would not try to address the problem of feedback loops. But one possible explanation has to do with the idea that popularity on deviantART "works just as popularity works in the rest of the world." What seems to be implied here is that deviantART's rankings operate more or less the same way rankings operate elsewhere. Even if rankings *should* work differently, it might not be possible. That deviantART's designers did not try to tackle the fairness issue with respect to feedback loops only helped reinforce and make normal the existing social convention and thus further make it infrastructural—the way purportedly democratic systems of online ranking "worked."

Fair exposure was thus a reaction to a particular kind of problem fairness. Soon after the announcement, I observed some objections to the claim that the new rankings were, in fact, more fair. There were even several unsuccessful attempts to organize protests against it. Some members suggested that the changes unfairly targeted groups and genres that were already popular (in particular anime and artistic nude photography). One person referred to this new system as "DA's socialist revolution," which was anti-democratic because it did not simply count votes. Others argued that the new algorithm went against the will of the majority. It would lead to elitism by those who created in less "popular" categories. One commenter observed that the new algorithm "changed popular to something that is hard to name as popular." This view reflected the notion that the old system was "simply" meant to surface whatever was favourited the most—and hence "popular"—while the new system was trying to achieve something different.

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[42] At the time, I was struck by how much $mccann revealed about how it worked (he even included a lengthy hypothetical example in a comment). He did add, however, that his discussion was a "simplified version," and "that there was a lot more to it."

[43] For reasons I do not have room to address here, Shirky (2003) writes that this situation is actually "mostly fair," contra to members of deviantART and, it seems, also $mccann.

Much later in my fieldwork, I learned more about what such differences might imply. When I visited deviantART HQ nearly a year and a half after $mccann's announcement of the changes, two senior staff members implied that FairExposure was a response to particular communities on deviantART "favouriting everything." The implication was that the new algorithm was not simply category dependent but also took into account how liberal a person was with his/her use of favourites. As one of the staff members put it, the more "discerning" someone was, the more his/her favourites were counted towards the ranking (fieldnote).[44] To be more "fair," therefore, implied cultivating a more discriminating sensibility.

With the changes to the popularity algorithm in pursuit of "fair" exposure, deviantART's staff transformed a system that had been based on all favourites treated equally to one in which this was no longer the case. Was this really more fair? For some the new system went against a value of equality. The staff members implementing it—and the members who may have found that it worked better for them—made a different argument *also* based on equality: for the site to treat members' contributions of art more equally, it had to treat their contributions of favourites less equally. In either case, both positions anchored their sense of fairness in notions of egalitarianism and democratic values. Assertions about surfacing content from the bottom up need to carefully qualify what is meant by democracy in the first place. The fact that deviantART's staff felt that they could change the technologies that helped drive the rankings and that would have a dramatic impact on what appeared on the front page (and later claimed that it did have such an impact) is an illustration of the role of technical algorithms and the particular political interests they represent.

The argument I am making, however, is not just that notions of "democracy" need more nuance. In the next section, I call into question the assertion that the web is an inherently democratic medium.[45] In arguments about the awarding of Daily Deviations, some participants criticized egalitarian ideals. Daily Deviations provided a form of exposure that, depending on the grounds upon which they were granted, could successfully counterbalance a democratic system.

5.2.3   Award: Daily Deviations and fair criteria

The discussion in the previous section concerns the mechanism by which deviantART members had a collective say in what art should be ranked higher and more exposed, in turn offering more opportunities for artists to get noticed. The changes to the algorithm revealed tensions with respect to the principles of egalitarianism upon which this mechanism was based. Should members have an equal say in determining these outcomes? Or should the site try to promote equal opportunity to be promoted—in other words, more egalitarian outcomes? As an award selected by a specific individual, Daily Deviations operated quite differently from an algorithm partially based on "votes."

Gallery Managers (GMs), several of deviantART's paid staff, and a few other specially designated members selected the roughly 25 to 30 Daily Deviations (DDs) each day. Many of those selecting

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[44] I cannot be certain if this was a detail left out of $mccann's initial post or a tweak to the algorithm in the year and a half that had passed. Or, perhaps, it was an attempt to emphasize a different aspect to me.

[45] The rhetoric of "democracy" and the implications of these views have been challenged on a variety of grounds (see, for example, Cammaerts 2008, Hindman 2009, and Morozov 2011). I am sympathetic to these arguments, but I am not weighing in on the question of whether and how the web and Internet may promote political democracy.

DDs actively sought suggestions from other members. GMs, Seniors, and staff who encouraged suggestions described suggestions as efforts to make the process more participatory and more manageable; after all, there were thousands of submissions to the site each day. Between these twin motives came claims about making the process more fair as well (I develop this point further below).

DDs took on the form and function of awards. A "badge" indicating the deviation as a DD selection appeared permanently under the Artist's Comments of a deviation page. The badge included the name of the person who chose the DD as well as the name of the person who suggested the DD. It also came with a short statement of praise and perhaps the work's merits written either by the person making the final selection or by the person who had made the suggestion (see figure 5.1).

Daily Deviation, 2008-10-13

Wabi-Sabi by *thundercake is a beautiful work of art with a very unique perspective. Simple but gorgeous details make wonderful use of the lush colors. A very interesting and well done work! (**Suggested by =purpleartichoke and Featured by ^cosmosue**)
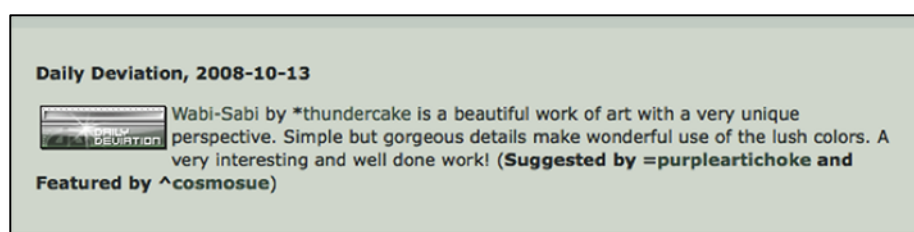
Figure 5.1: A Daily Deviation

DDs came with symbolic and material benefits. The symbolic benefits were analogous to prizes and awards in general: one's work had been recognized by a leader in the community or a recognized expert in a particular medium. People who received one often expressed enthusiasm and excitement as well as humility and gratitude (in journals, in Artist's Comments, etc.). The material benefits were a boost in exposure and traffic to the work and its creator. DDs appeared on a special page each day. When deviantART's front page featured "channels" rather than a matrix of work (at the time I joined), DDs were a default channel. When the site changed in 2008, DDs were prominently displayed in the new "footer" section that that appeared on many of the site's pages. DDs also received additional attention arising from the increase in favourites that came with their prominence.[46]

In addition, the DD selection process drove traffic to its selector and, when applicable, its suggester. The badge itself helped direct attention to these other people. Furthermore, some members saw the successful nomination of a DD as a sign of their ability to recognize talented artists or well-executed submissions. This view was clear from enthusiastic announcements on journals about successful nominations and even the creation of special sections on userpages for successfully suggested DDs. When selectors and suggesters featured their selections and suggestions on their own userpages, this also drove traffic back to the selected work and its creator.

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[46] While I did not conduct a systematic study of the effects of a DD on site metrics and traffic, I observed that when I looked at DDs on the day they were given, a vast majority of views, downloads, and favourites happened on that day. The general sentiment on the site was that DDs did result in new traffic.

The awarding of DDs could be contentious.[47] What I draw attention to in this section are not the aesthetic criteria but whether other criteria should be considered. Concerns over fairness revealed tensions between a stress on egalitarian outcomes and whether democratic values should play any role in *artistic* recognition. Moreover, because GMs had an explicit job description to help cultivate community within their respective galleries and across the site as a whole (see chapter 2), Daily Deviations also pointed to tensions between the values of community and those of *art* community.

5.2.3.1 Selection criteria and exposing the Unknown Artist

There were few policies for selecting DDs. The only general rule seemed to be that granters were not supposed to award a DD for a deviation whose creator had already received one in the preceding three months. Otherwise, the decision rested entirely with the person selecting. That even this one rule existed, however, points to the fact that a DD was an award granted to both the work and its creator. As I outlined in chapter 3, artistic recognition is a function of both the art itself and the biography of the artist (Fine 2004). DDs raised questions for participants in the site as to the relative weight of these criteria.

Many members of the site expressed a great deal of interest in providing more exposure to the figure of "the Unknown Artist." The Unknown Artist was an idealized character who had produced and posted work that merited recognition because of its quality yet for some reason had very few Watchers, pageviews, or both. The Unknown Artist might be someone who had been on the site for a long time, working away in her corner of the world, and deserving of long overdue recognition. This figure corresponded with a Romantic ideal of an artist, the person who threw his or her life into her work as the core activities of artistic practice rather than networking or socializing. Many people on the site used their journals or posted news articles that helped turn the Unknown Artist into a known one. Many GMs saw helping out Unknown Artists who submitted to their galleries as part of their jobs as community leaders and representatives. Indeed, exposing the Unknown Artist fit well with the mission of FairExposure.

Encouraging suggestions was not only a way of making the nomination process more participatory, it could help make the outcomes more egalitarian as well. To help expose the Unknown Artist and make DD selections more "fair" along such egalitarian lines, some GMs and other DD selectors adopted other selection criteria. These included whether to grant a DD to a past recipient, whether there was a cut-off for how many a person should receive, whether people could nominate themselves, and so forth. Some took into account the number of favourites or the exposure a particular piece already had received or even the apparent popularity of the artist.[48]

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[47] One 17-year-old writer explained to me that "mean comments" and "protests" left on DD-receiving deviations were recurring problems during her several years on the site (she had personal experience with one of her own DDs as well). In one news article, a GM felt compelled to defend both his selection and the DD recipient against a set of negative comments on the work. As he explained to me, "I don't care if they note me or come to my page and complain…I can take it. What gets me agitated is when they belittle the artist that had no control over me throwing their work on the front page."

[48] Ironically, the effort to broaden who received the award in some cases had the effect of reducing who would make the effort to participate in the process of selection. A teenage writer, but long-time member, told me that that GMs had created "all these guidelines to avoid get flamed over DDs," but felt that "It's getting kind of ridiculous. I've seen laundry lists of specifics before, regarding the length of time between DDs given to the same artist, or number of pageviews, or other random things. … It really made me reluctant to suggest anything, which I think wasn't the

A member-created site enhancement for facilitating the suggestion process and helping make it more participatory, called "SuggestDD," exposed questions about whether these various criteria were indeed fair. Just as modifications to the popularity algorithm demonstrated how technically modifying the site could make visible processes, conventions, and values that to some—including me—were otherwise hidden, the SuggestDD modification did so by adding layers of technical formalization to a somewhat informal process. The SuggestDD tool took advantage of the ability to modify the site from the point of view of users through the use of extensions to web browsers. It is an example of how such technical formalization and the problems that result did not just come as a result of changes made by site staff.

SuggestDD was seen as useful because it helped to automate the nomination process, direct suggesters to the right DD granters, and convert suggestions to private notes. Indeed, it had itself been awarded a DD. Following policy, the SuggestDD tool did not let members suggest anyone who had received a DD in the prior three months. It also warned suggesters when a member had received more than three DDs in the past, though it did not prevent the suggestion.

Several people took exception to this last measure. One person commented that "it doesn't matter how many DDs a person has" if the deviation merited the award. The creator of SuggestDD replied that many, if not most, GMs "believe everyone should be given a fair chance at receiving a DD" and that he also shared this belief:

> If a user already has at least three…, then they usually gain the popularity that comes with those three, meaning that if they have another DD worthy deviation, it already is as popular as it would be with a DD, and it is recommended that those deviations don't receive DDs.

To this point, the response was that a DD should not be about the popularity of the artist but rather about "outstanding artwork." Another person noted that "maybe the artist doesn't *need* the exposure, but it's about the art" (original emphasis).

At stake in this debate was the very purpose of DDs and awards as mechanisms for artistic recognition. Some explicitly saw the value of DD in its material consequences (i.e. the exposure and the results). Others saw the DD as an honor for outstanding work. Any further benefit that ensued was deserved because of the quality of the work and was not of direct concern to the award process.

5.2.3.2   Two views of fair awards

Two different notions of fairness confronted one another as staff and members tried to exert control and influence on the purpose of DDs. Proponents of each position had to confront challenges to their position that were in part ideological and not unique to deviantART. Their arguments, however, were related to the specificities of deviantART, a site that incorporated a number of different forms of appreciation, such as favourites and the popularity algorithm, that came with different ideological premises.

On one side, the attempt to use DDs to feature the Unknown Artist at times relied on contradictory arguments and practices. In one case a GM wrote in her journal that she had selected

point."

a DD based on an explicit attempt to feature an Unknown Artist, as she said had been requested by other members of the site. She lamented, however, that not enough people had favourited the work and fulfilled their end of an implicit bargain. Some of those who replied to the journal said that the GM's point persuaded them to favourite the piece. Others expressed hesitation. Some said that they just did not like the piece. But, others wrote that they only favourited work that had not already been favourited a lot by other people. One person said that he intentionally did not favourite work that had received a DD precisely because he did not think his favourites could help the person more than the DD already had. They did not see the purpose of favouriting a work that had just received the proverbial spotlight. These people, in a sense, implied that they had developed a practice of favouriting that was similar to how the GM used her DD selections.[49]

Thus, the desired effect of featuring the Unknown Artist could be undermined by the very logic that the GM used to select the DD in the first place. When one person explained that he only favourited work by already popular artists if they had done something exceptional—because "they already have a big amount of attention and support"—the GM replied that favourites should focus on the image, not the artist. Her point that people "should fav anything no matter how many favs it has" ran counter to the very argument that she had been trying to make about the importance of featuring Unknown Artists with her DDs. The power of DDs to feature the Unknown Artist relied on people *not treating favourites in the same manner.* Yet favourites were an important means by which most members—those who were not on staff or were particularly influential—could exercise some influence in exposing art and artists.

On the other side of the fairness debate the argument was simpler: the fair way to recognize artists was to focus on the quality of art and nothing else. Yet, this argument ran counter to values of fairness that participants widely espoused elsewhere on the site, values that people ascribed other features (e.g. the popularity algorithm). A GM wrote a lengthy journal in which she explained to her readers that she did not look at anything other than the work itself. While she felt that DDs "are a great way of exposing people"; she was "not going to go out of my way looking for underexposed artists just to feature when there is great feature-worthy art all around me." To do otherwise would be "unfair" to "popular people" who "don't pay others to visit their page…fav their work…or follow them."

Some people who replied to the GM claimed to have changed their minds and had a new perspective on the point of deviantART and what it meant to recognize artists. Others indicated a persistent ambivalence about what was really "fair" in this particular context. The point about being surrounded by "great, feature-worthy art" was exactly what those arguing the first view of fairness had been claiming was routinely ignored when DD selectors did not try to be egalitarian. Already popular art (or the work of already popular artists), they claimed, was more likely to be in the immediate "surroundings" because of all the other mechanisms on the site for exposing work.

The values of an "art" community, in this second view, were not egalitarian ones. They were to collectively recognize the inherent value in art itself irrespective of the biography of the artist. Yet, each view on fairness hinged on a lingering Romanticism. Featuring the Unknown Artist was a way of recognizing one version of the Romantic figure of the artist. Recognizing an idealized version of art as something separate from the figure of its creator and the network of social relationship from

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[49] They also recall the earlier quotes from Victor about not "needing" to favourite "a famous person."

which any work was produced and appreciated was another version. Yet, the consequences of each application of Romanticism conflicted with one another. Although this conflict might reveal important contradictions in the very ideology of Romanticism, what is important to me here is how the conflicting ways of positioning deviantART as infrastructure for artistic recognition surfaces long-standing tensions in artistic practice by making them explicit through technology and discourse.

5.2.4   Norms of notice

Awards, English (2005:37) argues, hold their controversies "in public view." Their social function extends beyond a granter and recipient. Rather, they are part of a broad set of relationships, and they publicly signify norms and community values (Duguid 2007, Czarniawska 2007). As public displays of assessment, favourites and the popularity rankings had similar functions. All of these different methods of getting noticed and publicly being recognized sat alongside each other within the same new distribution system for art and revealed tensions over what deviantART's norms and community values were and should be.

These tensions were especially pronounced in statements in the language of "deserving": which work deserved to be given a DD or end up on the front page and which did not; who deserved to be noticed or popular and who did not. What came under scrutiny was the method upon which the site should help expose artwork and help members achieve recognition, and the associated norms and values. Should a system described as one about "popularity" try to be representative or take into account the discriminatory sensibilities of those "voting"? Should a system of awards be more egalitarian in how they are chosen or how the results are distributed? Notions of deserving and fairness could be anchored in judgments of quality, principles of equality, or both at the same time. These different features of, and practices using, deviantART were at the intersection of these tensions.

All three of the ways of getting noticed I have described in this section deal with different issues of fairness, illustrating the moral and ideological aspects of infrastructure as produced in practice. Considering networking and participation, I looked at what kinds of practices of getting exposure were deemed fair and which were deemed abusive to "the community." With respect to the popularity algorithm and Daily Deviations, I examined various conflicting grounds upon which people debated how others members should be exposed and thus be recognized as artists. What these discussions have demonstrated are the ethical and normative aspects of infrastructure, a theme which I revisit through the dissertation. "Art" as a term binds together a range of heterogeneous practices and tensions under a single term (see chapter 3). Perhaps because of this fact, some of the arguments suggested that members sought to do the same for deviantART and that a consensus was possible, even if difficult to achieve.

As I moved through each of these ways of getting noticed, I began to show how artistic recognition came at the intersection of a set of tensions between visibility, public appreciation (and at times "popularity"), and quality. In the next section I describe how the metric of pageviews further exposed the uncertain relationship between artistic recognition and these three issues.

5.3   Pageviews: manifestations of what?

While the discussion of different ways of getting noticed featured different notions of fairness, to some members the issue of fairness, with its language of "deserving," helped to produce a central problem with the site that needed to be fixed. One person wrote, "There is no *deserving* when it comes to art." This language fed into deviantART's "popularity contest." This was a common derogatory trope and a long-standing one on the site.[50] The problem, the argument went, was that the focus on popularity corresponded to a focus on deviantART's metrics, seeing both popularity and metrics as *ends*. Lost in the middle, this view suggested, were ideals of both art and community.

Many people made versions of this argument in their reactions to recommendations in news articles on "how to become popular" or "how to get more pageviews." Even though many of the recommendations I observed were actually quite similar to those of "how to get noticed," the reactions to phrasing popularity and/or the accumulation of pageviews as ends were hostile. For example, in response to a "Guide to Popularity" that had been positioned to "assist new deviants," a person in deviantART's forums complained:

> What a way to deteriorate the place, we have here a guide on how to become popular on DA. Not about how to improve your art, not any specific helpful advice on any topic, but straight to the point 'popular.' That totally floored me.

Similarly, in response to a heavily favourited news article titled "How to get more Popularity and Pageviews," another member responded with another article: "many members of the artistic community here on DeviantART were shocked by a recent popular news article about how to become popular" that "made a mockery of all that deviantART stands for." The implication was that what deviantART "stood for" was settled, even though this was far from the case.

As deviantART's interface explicitly linked some notion of "popularity" to various metrics, it was these metrics that were frequently the subjects of intense scrutiny and debate whenever people wrote and talked about popularity. As one Senior member put it in a news article on popularity, "IGNORE the stats and ENJOY the art" and the problem of popularity would go away. Because the site linked the popularity of artists to pageviews, it was pageviews that raised particular ire. The singular obsession with pageviews, many argued, fed into the contest for popularity.[51] In arguments about the value and meaning of pageviews, members vociferously debated the relationship between getting noticed, becoming popular, the quality of produced art, and being recognized as an artist.

5.3.1   The problem (?) with pageviews

The author of the aforementioned controversial article on "How to get more Popularity and Pageviews" argued that pageviews were a sign that people were paying attention. They both helped people "have a good feeling" and were a measure of "fame." It was clear that many felt this way

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[50] A 2003 post by co-founder Scott Jarkoff reveals that deviantART had been thought of as a "popularity contest" for many years. I also saw the phrase in conversations about deviantART on other websites, and I heard people refer to deviantART in this way in many conversations in Artist Alleys and at BAAU meets.

[51] As Elliot told me, recalling the site before it made pageviews a prominent site feature, "I was extremely critical of it…. I knew exactly what was going to happen and it is exactly what happened."

when it came to evaluating their own pageviews. Pageviews could come with symbolic benefits, much like awards and favourites. A young woman who regularly posted work to deviantART told me enthusiastically that she had started to notice her pageview counter creeping up, and it was clear that she treated this as a sign that she was making progress (fieldnotes); she also posted to the site frustration at being on the site for such a long time and feeling like she had accumulated relatively few pageviews. I observed several situations in which people—even clubs— announced reaching what they felt were pageview milestones. A common practice by some on the site was to hold a contest for those who successfully took a screenshot of reaching such a milestone (e.g. the 10,000th pageview). Even some of those who sought to downplay the importance of pageviews as a marker of popularity acknowledged that they did have some meaning.[52]

In late 2008, deviantART issued a site-wide poll on the topic of pageviews and listed several possible changes.[53] Over the next month, the poll attracted tens of thousands of votes and thousands of comments. After a month, by a wide margin, a majority of those responding (54%) were in favor of giving members the option to hide pageviews, while a significant minority (35%) were in favor of keeping them visible at all times.[54]

The comments reflected the split in the numbers and added diverse rationales for the votes (many echoed arguments that I observed elsewhere). Pageviews, some suggested, could detract from deviantART as a "community" because they encouraged people to treat each other like numbers rather than like people. Some reiterated the point that pageviews were a "meaningless" number. As many pointed out, one could have pageviews without even having any artwork posted. Not only were they meaningless in assessing artistic quality, they were not reliable measures of popularity. Because one had been "viewed" did not mean that people liked what they were viewing.

But even some people who saw pageviews as a measurement of popularity still felt that the metric detracted from the art posted to the site. According to this perspective, the metric shifted the site discourse to an obsession with popularity and people's motivations for making art for the "wrong" reasons. For example, Treijim, a Senior on the site, told me he had "left" deviantART because he felt pageviews were having a negative impact on his own practice (interview).[55] He had been obsessed with pageviews and had become "addicted to the attention" they signaled to him. This addiction was "like a fix which temporarily replaced my own disappointment with my art with the admiration of others." Problematically to Treijim, pageviews had been the "manifestation of success on the site."

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[52] Even the author of the article that felt that emphasizing popularity and pageviews "made a mockery" of deviantART noted that they "can be a good thing."

[53] Given the timing, it was possible that this poll was in response to the two widely circulated and opposing articles on the topic I referenced earlier.

[54] Of course, this poll, like all others on the site, may not be representative of the entire site's view, but it provided interesting insight into what tens of thousands of people thought at the time. The rest of the votes were split almost evenly among the two other choices: making them private at all times or removing them completely. A year and a half later, long after the poll was easily accessible, I went back to it and saw that the raw percentages were almost exactly the same, though thousands more votes had been cast.

[55] Treijim was an illustrator and painter in his early 20s when I interviewed him. He had joined the site as a teenager.

In response to the pageviews poll and countering arguments against the display of pageviews, many expressed finding it important to be able to see others' pageviews. For those seeking to get noticed, pageviews could provide a guide. One person pointed me to an account he or she had created that tracked "millionaires" on deviantART (those with over a million pageviews) and used it to try to analyze them:

> I personally like having the pageviews around, just because it makes it convenient to see what people have made "popular" for whatever reason so I can try to distill it out into my own stuff if I need to. (fieldnotes)

Others pointed out that pageviews were one of the primary ways of identifying Unknown Artists and helping them. Some suggested that having the option to hide pageviews would not necessarily stop anyone who was "abusing the popularity thing." There were other features and methods that people would use as indicators of popularity, and the problem would shift. Along these lines, several noted that changing anything would actually reinforce the argument that pageviews were important in the first place.

One of the points addressed thus far concerned whether or not a view was a marker of appreciation and whether views were in fact a marker of "popularity," in the sense of being widely liked. At the same time, the relationship between views and quality was also of paramount concern to members. The responses to the pageviews poll and comments elsewhere suggested that some people found that pageviews were a helpful way of indicating quality, that many other people had found their way to a particular person. Pageviews, much like favourites, could provide guidance in deciding whose art to look at. Like the popularity algorithm, pageviews provided a collective filter.

This filter is precisely what scared many opposing this perspective. Even if pageviews, a measurement of traffic, were in turn a good representation of who (and thus what) was "popular," it was not a measure of quality. Even the person who told me he or she used them to track "millionaires" and develop strategies for using the site told me, "I can see why most people would like to hide them; they can be misleading and aren't a good indicator of art quality." To others, it was not just that they might be misleading but that they could shape people's opinions of quality. Therefore, they could undermine two Romantic ideals: art speaking for itself and an individual making his or her own unique and individual assessment of it.

Therefore, the underlying concern in my view was whether pageviews, intentionally or unwittingly, "do make the artist" (paraphrasing someone's comment to the contrary). One comment on the pageviews poll pointed out that they did, just not as a reflection on quality. Without pageviews, this commenter suggested, "the showcase element of DA dies," and without a way to assess "popularity," there was no point to deviantART other than "the esoteric, localized fun of 'showing your friends.'" If one hoped to "one day be recognized or to present/sell your work," then pageviews were "a necessary evil." They "cheapen dA as a place to flourish," this person continued, yet "allow dA to work."

5.3.2   An ambiguous value

As I outlined in chapter 3, different art worlds operate with different principles of legitimacy and value in the recognition of art and artists. These may, and often do, operate even within particular art worlds as successive generations of practitioners argue about what artists should be recognized

for. In one sense deviantART members simply reflected long-standing debates. People argued as if there should be a consensus view on "art." That deviantART brought together different art worlds and connected them through the discourse of community, and a common set of features reinforced this possibility of consensus.

deviantART also presented new wrinkles to these historic tensions, however. As noted in chapter 3, a long-standing tension in art worlds is the value of money and commercial success as a measure of artistic success, against "art for art's sake." Some artists competed for economic capital and commercial popularity in the short run, while others for symbolic capital and economic capital and renown in the long run (Bourdieu 1993, 1996).

Many users of deviantART were pursuing commercial careers, as noted earlier in the chapter. Many members saw pageviews as "meaningless" because they could not easily be translated into commercial success, and being commercially successful was a worthy artistic pursuit. In this view pageviews could only become meaningful if they were markers of, or translatable into, commercial success or "popularity" elsewhere. But this difficulty allying pageviews with commercial goals did not mean that people creating "art for art's sake," status, or fame (as opposed to money or commercial success) embraced pageviews. With "popularity" at times defined by pageviews, the metric became a materialization of "attention" and displaced money as the opposite of art for art's sake. Therefore, deviantART did not just surface and make various tensions in art explicit, it also changed them.

5.4 Balancing acts

It may not have been possible to overcome long-standing tensions and their new manifestations while at the same time creating consensus out of heterogeneous practices. Yet, deviantART's staff at times intentionally sought to balance competing views that they, along with the other participants on the site, unwittingly helped make explicit. These efforts resulted in the continued accommodation of a diversity of practices and, perhaps unintentionally, continued obfuscation of differences. Such efforts revealed a struggle for control of the ideological, discursive, and technical infrastructure of the process of recognition among participants.

5.4.1 An "injection of elitism"

Around the same time that deviantART's staff was considering what to do about the pageviews metric, tensions regarding deviantART's values as an art community on the question of artistic recognition factored into an attempt by CEO Angelo Sotira to change the direction of the broader debate. Later, Sotira told me that if he saw "certain points in the community" that he did not like, he put out "little doctrines that I intend to shift…the culture" (interview). In a news article circulated to every member of the site, Sotira took aim at the principles of egalitarianism and argued that as an *art* community, the goal of deviantART should be to recognize and award genius.[56]

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[56] To be more accurate, Sotira posted his "doctrine" in his journal and then linked back to it through the news article (which could then be sent to every member and also favourited). He also posted the doctrine as a deviation, which could also be favourited and circulated.

The article was—as it seemed to me at the time and to Sotira in his later account of it—a response to all of the debates and issues I have discussed thus far. But what specifically prompted the article was a dispute between two members over a suggestion for a Daily Deviation. A several-year member of the site had suggested a deviation to one of the few non-staff members who could select DDs and, according to accounts, had referred to the suggestion as a "must feature." In Sotira's words, the latter person did "nothing short of puke" on the person who had suggested the deviation. Because of the special status of the person granting the deviation, the dispute had been elevated to Sotira to resolve.

Although Sotira admitted he was conflicted about the situation, he decided that the reaction and hostility to the suggester was justified. According to Sotira, the DD selector in this case had already been or should be recognizable as a "creative genius." The evidence for this genius, Sotira noted, was the body of work he had amassed and his participation in an elite art collective that generously distributed art packs to deviantART members for free. The "power" that this particular person had been granted was a reward for this genius and generosity. While such genius and power may not give this person the right to be rude or hostile arbitrarily, Sotira said, he had earned a particular sense of entitlement, and this entitlement was being regularly challenged as people clamored to be recognized for what Sotira felt was mediocrity.

"Strive to achieve creative genius," Sotira urged, "Respect those who have." To do otherwise, he argued, threatened the kind of community that made the site different from other sites on the web, such as MySpace (or Facebook) or even other art-focused websites. The creative genius in this particular case represented the kind of artist that all members of deviantART should aspire to emulate and therefore had to be held up as a model, Sotira argued. Arguments appealing to fairness and the language of "deserving," applied too liberally, threatened this model. Sotira admitted that the confrontation may have become ugly, but it also helped make deviantART an *artistic* community with creators who were both members and managers and in which all were (or should be) striving for creative genius.

Sotira told me later, "deviantART isn't about having just customers. It's about having *deviants*" (interview). This distinction was a way of demonstrating to me how deviantART sought to balance corporate goals and artistic ones. The central message to "deviants" in Sotira's article was that they were first and foremost *artists*. Because the site was created for artists, to Sotira deviantART was not about the democratic recognition of everyone. The article itself, Sotira told me, was

> An injection of a little bit of elitism that says, "Hey this isn't fucking MySpace.'
> Not everybody's equal… We are trying to be better artists here. We are trying to
> progress and go in a particular direction…. I'm not gonna' stand up for 'everyone is
> equal' and 'everybody's great' in a community where the purpose is art. Take that
> shit to MySpace. It doesn't belong here. [Laughs] And that's sharp. And that's
> aggressive…But it just sets the grit and sets the tone that deviantART hasn't lost
> site of that. And that just super charges our leaders. Because they agree. And that's
> what matters. (interview)

These sentiments and those in the article seemed to me to contradict the earlier quote in which Sotira, in the same interview, told me that deviantART was a "democracy" that let people "rise however they were going to rise." I saw the contradiction, however, not as a sign that one was more important than the other, but that different sets of values were operating at the same time, in a

struggle, and were prioritized situationally. Through this article and his position of power on the site, Sotira sought to manage the competing sets of values and views of fairness that permeated the site. As *artists*, deviantART members should aspire to individual genius, and genius could not be "democratized." As an *art* community, deviantART had the responsibility of upholding, and therefore reproducing, the Romantic theories of artistic recognition (see chapter 3). Therefore, the reputation of deviantART itself was at stake.

Despite a move away from egalitarianism and towards genius, Sotira at the same time reinforced values to which Romantic theories of art were opposed. He reinforced the importance of the "solid surge of traffic" that came with Daily Deviations, and the significance of those who had been granted such power. The implication was that the goals of receiving more traffic and being "better artists" were complementary. As I noted in the previous section, this equation of traffic and artistic recognition is what helped make pageviews so problematic.

Sotira seemed to be striking a balance between democratic and elite processes of recognition, working to position deviantART's evolving features, values, and conventions as infrastructure for maintaining this balance. In this case he did so by trying to "shift the culture" discursively, through his unique ability to reach those whom he saw as deviantART's leaders. In the next section, I describe how the site used a technical change to strike balances and reconfigure the infrastructure.

5.4.2   Going "pageview blind" and questions of control

In February 2009, deviantART's staff made a change to the pageviews feature, but the change was not one of those among the choices in the previous year's pageview poll (in which providing the option to hide one's own pageviews was the clear favorite). Members now had the option to go "pageview blind." Going pageview blind did not mean hiding one's own pageviews from others. Rather, it meant not being able to see any pageviews metric on the site—both others' and one's own. Those who went pageview blind would have a little icon on their userpages that would signal to others that they had turned off pageviews on the site and thereby make a public statement, albeit a small one, on the metric's lack of importance. The new feature was a challenge of self-restraint. Members could not track one's own progress through them and then complain that others were taking them too seriously. It was all or nothing.

One person happily noted that hiding pageviews would "keep [people] objective." The GM who explicitly rejected the notion of awarding DDs to Unknown Artists opted to go pageview blind so that metrics would not factor into her decision. When Treijim discovered the new feature after he had "returned" to deviantART, he was happy that he could avoid pageviews as a "guideline for popularity" and thus assessment: he was now "more convinced to look at people's galleries" (interview). He felt he now "treated everybody more equally." The teenager who was accused of cheating, as I describe in the opening of the chapter, went pageview blind and urged everyone else to do so as well. Doing so, she wrote, showed that she did not care about pageviews and that others should not assess her work and herself—for good or ill—based on them.

Yet, on these very grounds there were objections to the way deviantART had addressed the problems with pageviews. The former Director of Community Development argued that the current staff had "overlooked" what it was that people really wanted:

> What was wanted was something wholly from an artistic point of view, and that

being that artists do not want their pageviews to speak for their work, or to gain unwanted people watching them trying to glom onto perceived Internet fame by association.

This objection links concerns of "impression management" (Goffman 1959), which generally feature in people's attempts to craft how they are viewed online (e.g. boyd 2008, Tufecki 2008, Hogan 2010), with concerns over artistic control. It also speaks to some members' ambivalences about the consequences of both getting noticed and becoming popular (even if pageviews were not the right measure of popularity). While getting noticed and becoming popular on deviantART came with the possibility of "bubbling up"—getting a job, becoming popular elsewhere, perhaps even fame—there were other consequences as well.

Becoming popular could result in a new sense of obligation and a new conception of oneself in relation to one's audience. Shelly, a young illustrator who was a Senior on deviantART, told me how becoming popular on deviantART had shifted her sense of what it meant to have an audience, seeing them as "a mob" rather than as individuals:

> Shelly: To be frank, I felt differently when I was unknown on dA.
>
> Shelly: Today I got over 2,000 messages to sift through.
>
> Shelly: About 90% were identical and the other 10% were stupid beyond belief.
>
> Shelly: Even when people are nice, it starts to seem like they're just following the crowd.
>
> Shelly: It becomes meaningless.
>
> …
>
> Dan: …how do you deal with that feeling of it becoming meaningless?
>
> Shelly: I try to read every comment but after a while they're all saying the same thing. By the end of the day I was mass deleting.
>
> Shelly: I felt bad because I know that each person took the time to visit me and comment
>
> …
>
> Shelly: It sounds cliche, but I used to wonder how awesome it would be to have a following. Now I wish it would go away sometimes. (interview)

In addition, becoming popular could remind people of the limits of their control over their own image and how they might be recognized as artists by others. Rachel, a student in art school, told me that while having her name "out there" could "make or break" her career, "so many people hold so many expectations with popularity. You're held at a different bar, you're expected to be good, you set examples for other people, etc." (interview). As one GM warned deviantART's members, "Being popular sucks":

> A popular person can't do/say certain things in the risk of being labeled as a drama/attention whore or even as an antagonist. Simple things like writing a journal because you're depressed… A popular person in dA feels the pressure of deviants to keep that bar high… and sometimes they stagnate and end up doing the

safe thing instead of being open to failure… And then, when you've become
'popular' you can't fail… or you will be called out, put into some sort of sacrifice
cross, you have to be careful and chose the words you use or they'll be used against
you.. it's like being in court all the time… and if you get about 1000favs in a piece
but don't go and thank them its because 'you're an "arrogant bitch…" and not
because you don't have the time…

All of the benefits that participation on deviantART could bring—getting social support from
others, getting connected with like-minded artists, having work considered thoughtfully, receiving
attention and recognition from new audiences—were suddenly at risk as one achieved popularity
and fame on the site. As Braudy (1997:607) puts it, "the famous soon realize that fame has them
rather than the other way round":

> As most performers and people who create for a public audience finally realize,
> audiences pay at best only partial attention to what the performer wants to happen.
> Each audience takes the individual desire for recognition and shapes it to fit its own
> needs. (Braudy 1997:609)

With this material providing additional context, the pageview blind feature takes on a different
character. The change concerned questions over control—who had control over the assessment and
recognition of artists. It embedded a compromise with respect to one issue of control and came
down definitively on another side. People who found pageviews useful and important could
continue as before. Those who found popularity either as contradictory to the purpose of art or in
line with art, just not with pageviews, could go pageview-blind and ignore the metrics. Each could
try to control his or her own personal engagement with the site and how he or she sought to
perceive others.

Members could neither ignore nor control how others perceived them, however. This, of course,
was already the case, though the web provides opportunities to try to craft particular versions of
oneself. But the pageview-blind feature was a reminder of the limits of such efforts inscribed in
technology. Being able to hide one's own pageviews would have been a way to exert more control
over one's own public persona and how one might be assessed by known and future audiences.
Going pageview-blind meant controlling the way one viewed art and the way one recognized
others as artists. deviantART rejected the first form of control and embraced the second. The
paramount concern, intentional or not, was increasing control for those seeking to recognize rather
than be recognized. At the same time, in making such a choice, deviantART, Inc. asserted its own
authority—though far from absolute—to control the entire process, as it had the power to control
the material aspects of the infrastructure.

5.5   The accommodation of uncertainties in artistic recognition on the web

Developing an identity as artist and creative practitioner is a matter of seeking and receiving
recognition, mediated by the collective activity of art worlds and their distribution systems.
deviantART is an example of a new art world (and sub-worlds) oriented around the use of a new
web-based distribution system for artists and their artwork. At the same time, it brought together
different art worlds that extended well beyond deviantART. It consisted of a malleable

configuration of elements that could be positioned as infrastructural for all of these worlds. Sometimes, these elements were made to complement one another; others times, they were in tension.

I opened the chapter by suggesting that even if the web constitutes a new aspect of the infrastructure for the democratization of recognition, the consequences are highly uncertain. As Braudy (1997) indicates, the democratization of fame came with a paradox, an uncertainty of what "merited recognition" in a world where more people could become recognized. The web may exacerbate the paradox: the increased participation in ranking, filtering, and curating content has to be considered in light of the increase in participation by people seeking to have their work seen, ranked, filtered, and curated (if indeed it is accepted without analysis whether an increase in participation is a reasonable proposition). This chapter demonstrates how this paradox manifested on deviantART and how deviantART's participants unintentionally dealt with it.

deviantART featured competing and contradictory means of doing so and as infrastructure balanced these means. Romantic views of art came with a set of ideals as to what kinds of practices did, in fact, merit legitimate artistic recognition. As I have argued in chapter 3 and revisited in this chapter, however, these elements were long in tension with other principles of legitimacy. They resurfaced on deviantART in different and conflicting efforts to position artistic recognition between exposure (or "notice"), popularity, and quality and shaping deviantART's features and practices to fit the result of these attempts. On deviantART, comments, favourites, pageviews, and Daily Deviations were sometimes positioned as markers of symbolic capital within the world of deviantART. At the same time, these features also mediated how members were made visible to broader worlds and could be converted from symbolic capital into economic capital (or others forms of symbolic capital) or "capital intraconversion" (English 2005:11). Whether notice and popularity on deviantART could be "cashed in" (as English puts it) into gains elsewhere was a central concern for some but not others.

Just as deviantART members struggled to account for competing forms of capital, deviantART featured competing views of recognition. Heinich (2009:103-104) contrasts recognition (in general) as a "matter of respect" with recognition "as a matter of esteem." As a matter of respect, recognition focuses on concerns of dignity, "collective status," and egalitarian principles. This notion of recognition was tied to arguments on deviantART about ideas of community. Everyone should have a chance to be recognized, and such recognition, when deserving, should be distributed as equally as possible. As a matter of esteem, recognition "stresses the antagonistic, competitive, and unequal dimensions." In focusing on prizes and awards, Heinich argues that artistic recognition is primarily a matter of esteem as individuals seek to rank themselves and each other. Artists themselves have a role in validating the fairness in this process; they seek to be evaluated for their individual and singular qualities. My argument in this chapter is that artistic recognition on deviantART was positioned both as a matter of respect and as esteem.

deviantART brought together, on the one hand, the uncertain relationship between two different views of how the web might democratize recognition and on the other the range of competing views of what deserved recognition. It could be that democratizing the process of assessment and ranking addresses Braudy's paradox by asserting that merit is, tautologically, whatever the crowd deems worthy: the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki 2005) when applied to questions of value rather than fact (*contra* Sunstein 2006). It also could be that with the increased proliferation, accessibility, and popularity of a media form comes a greater trend towards more formalized

gatekeeping, taste-making, and distinction (Ito 2010). In this case merit comes with rigorous standards and a potentially higher bar for participation, which would be anti-democratic, at least in the way the term is used in the claims themselves. In both cases Braudy's paradox is addressed but not resolved.

"The quality of recognition," writes Heinich (2009:90), "depends on the quality of those who grant it." The issue at hand is the quality of deviantART as infrastructure for the recognition of creative practitioners and how it might be changed or repositioned to address perceived shortcomings. In the chapters that follow I turn to different sets of tensions at the intersection of art worlds and web worlds that further examine this process of producing infrastructure.

Improving and learning

The latest evolution of the Internet, the so-called Web 2.0, has blurred the line between producers and consumers of content and has shifted attention from access to information toward access to other people. New kinds of online resources—such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and virtual communities—have allowed people with common interests to meet, share ideas, and collaborate in innovative ways. Indeed, the Web 2.0 is creating a new kind of participatory medium that is ideal for supporting multiple modes of learning.

> —John Seely Brown and Richard P. Adler, "Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0," 2008

Participant: [deviantART] is a community, not a big school nurturing talents…the more talented you are, the less you can get from dA in terms of artistic growth. There's just not enough real skilled, experienced people helping others there.

Dan: Has your opinion on that changed over time? Did you used to think differently?

Participant: When I joined I was really looking to get constructive feedback on my work, especially my photography—the kind of feedback I'd get in school. I thought dA was filled with advanced people who'd have something really instructive to say. I quickly found out otherwise. I do get good feedback from time to time, but it's peer-to-peer feedback, or audience feedback—how the work comes across to the viewer. If I want a real critique, I have to look in real life, which is also where the serious, stimulating discussions take place.

> —From an interview with an illustrator, 2008

Just as deviantART surfaced and shaped tensions among visibility, popularity, and quality in relation to artistic recognition, it also did so with respect to ideas about learning and improving as an artist. Learning and improving were oft-stated reasons for using deviantART and trying to get noticed on the site. Yet, I observed differences in opinion as to whether deviantART was a good site to learn from and what were the best and *right* ways to go about improving. In this chapter I

investigate how site participants tried to establish practices and dispositions that would configure and formalize deviantART as infrastructure for improving and learning.

There is a great deal of excitement among scholars and practitioners about the potential for the web as a part of everyday learning practices. Capturing this sentiment, John Seely Brown and Richard Adler (2008) outline a provocative vision of "Learning 2.0." Their vision is based on two theoretical premises. The first is that understanding and knowledge are constructed (Brown and Adler 2008:4) through participation with others in common activities. The second is that such understanding is a matter of "learning *to be*" (Brown and Adler 2008:4, emphasis mine), a matter of identity.[1] Brown and Adler argue that *how* learning happens is of paramount concern, rather than *what* is being learned. Brown and Adler argue that the Internet and the web, particularly the phenomena associated with Web 2.0, are revolutionary because they are uniquely suited to facilitate ideals of learning that they imply are not met in most schools. Learning 2.0 is the leveraging of Web 2.0 for "active, passion-based" learning (Brown and Adler 2008:15). It is a vision aligned theoretically and substantively with other key ideas in this area, such as "affinity spaces" (Gee 2005, Black 2008), "interest-driven participation" (Ito et al. 2010), and "participatory culture" (Jenkins et al. 2006). It is also an extension of a broader research agenda into "informal learning" (e.g. Sefton-Green 2004, Straka 2004, Drotner et al. 2008).

Over the past decade, scholars from a variety of fields have produced numerous research studies demonstrating compelling examples of the potential to which Brown and Adler point. Examples include using IM and fan-fiction sites to learn English and become authors (Lam 2000, 2009; Black 2008, 2009); using sites and software to promote media arts and digital fluency through programming (Peppler and Kafai 2007, Resnick et al. 2009, Maloney et al. 2010) and digital storytelling (Beach et al. forthcoming, Hull and Stornaiulo 2010); blogging, journaling, and fiction writing online (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003, Guzzetti and Gamboa 2005, Jenkins 2006:169-205); and finally, engaging with social networks sites, mobile devices, online gaming, and various media production sites as a part of "friendship-driven" and "interest-driven" pursuits (Ito et al. 2010).[2] These scholars point to the self-directed nature of participants' activities, the multiple forms of expertise that participants can employ and different roles they can take on, the potential for connecting with mentors and pupils, and finally, the opportunity for feedback and recognition from others with similar interests.[3] These claims rest on the fact that such activities are non-compulsory and that the web connects people pursuing common interests across time and distance.

In my study, I found evidence that supports many of the findings from these other studies. For example, deviantART's members and staff created clubs and groups dedicated to mentorship and

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[1] Brown and Adler's first point is based on Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989). Their second is based on Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998).

[2] Relevant examples of foundation initiatives include: the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Initiative, the Hewlett Foundation's support of Open Educational Resources, and the National Science Foundation's and the Gates Foundation's funding of various projects looking at online learning.

[3] See in particular Rebecca Black's study of Fanfiction.net and her documentation of the policy implications (Black 2008, 2009). She draws on several leading scholars in the field (particularly Gee), and I see her work as broadly representative of the arguments made for the possibility of the web.

skill-based improvement.[4] These groups collected and curated reference materials and other resources. Participants organized online classes and workshops complete with homework assignments.[5] Some people created challenges for themselves and enticed others to join—forcing themselves to draw, paint, or photograph consistently with accountability.[6] I interviewed people who had found mentors who provided technical pointers as well as tips for navigating different career paths. Finally, deviantART served as a medium for people to discuss and reflect on the process of learning art. Participants wrote about and discussed a range of topics such as particular techniques in a medium, materials and equipment to use or avoid, whether to go to art school, how to pursue a career, and so forth.

Still, I do not want to paint too idealistic a portrait here. Those who organized clubs struggled to maintain consistency. The same is true for those who gave themselves self-imposed challenges and struggled to find others to participate or acknowledge their efforts. Furthermore, these efforts were produced through tensions in what it meant for an artist to improve and how deviantART could be molded to fit competing ideals. The opportunities that came with deviantART, as well as limitations, relied on a great deal of participants' active work (as Black 2008 notes). This chapter complicates the portrayals of the web as a learning environment. It also points out that even while following a passion or interest, learning as identity transformation—whether online or offline—is often an unintentional and conflicted endeavor (Lave and Wenger 1991, Lave 2008). The same is true for the emergence of technologies, policies, standards, norms, and conventions as infrastructure in practice.

In the previous chapter I noted that a critical concern to members was how to get noticed while avoiding being labeled as one whose goal was merely becoming visible or popular as ends rather than a means to other ends. However, some defended popularity-seeking strategies even as ends by saying that participating in deviantART was "just for fun" and that others should stop taking the site or themselves so seriously. Such a defense, though, reaffirmed certain ideals about what it meant to be a "serious" artist. For some members, improvement was not merely a legitimate reason for seeking to get noticed: it was an imperative. To be taken seriously as an artist, some participants suggested, one must consistently strive to do better. In the section that follows I discuss this imperative and note a tension between improvement and self-promotion that is discussed throughout the chapter. Site participants tried to enforce practices that would help establish deviantART as a site for learning and improving rather than self-promoting and marketing. Doing so helped to create a binary division between the two, even as the development of the site reaffirmed their inseparability.

I then examine tensions with respect to two ways of improving. First, I discuss members' feedback on each others' work through comments and the resulting difficulties in positioning this form of feedback as *critique*. Second, I examine *tutorials*—deviations that help explain or instruct some aspect of the artistic process. In examining feedback and critique, I draw attention here to the *contextual ambiguity* of infrastructure (Star and Ruhleder 1996, Bowker and Star 1999). One form I describe as *institutional ambiguity* arose as members sought to transform deviantART into extensions of various other venues (e.g. school and Artist Alleys). I also show how bringing

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[4] dA-mentors and ArtistsHospital are two examples.

[5] Such as the MangaWorkshop, started by a Gallery Manager but continued by other members.

[6] For example, an informant's "100 girls challenge" and its counterpart, the "100 guys challenge."

together people of various ages, expertise, and career stages in contact with one another in a new web-based context further contributes to tensions in art. Finally, the introduction of a new technology—the Critique Feature—formalized a particular version of "critique" that helped resolved some of the new tensions where art and the web intersect but made others more pronounced. Looking at tutorials reveals the persistence of Romantic ideals of the self-taught artist but also sharp differences as to whether tutorials fit these ideals. I argue that deviantART, and the web more broadly, transform art worlds by confounding distinctions between material and human resources (Becker 1982) as part of learning infrastructure. Finally I conclude the chapter by revisiting these findings in light of arguments made about Learning 2.0 and its apparent informality.

6.1　The imperative to improve

In the previous chapter, I described CEO Angelo Sotira's self-described attempt to inject "a little bit of elitism" into deviantART:

> We are trying to be better artists here. We are trying to progress and go in a particular direction. Whether that's through education. Whether that's through mentorship. Whether that's through whatever. (interview)

In embracing a collective "we," Sotira echoed a principle I encountered on deviantART and other venues. Being an artist came with obligations to improve one's craft and skill. An artist always *could* improve and therefore an artist always *should* strive to do so. In this view, art was a teleological endeavor: its purpose was the achievement of pre-determined ends.

Demonstrating this disposition and being commended for it played roles in the recognition of someone as on the right path to being taken seriously as an artist. At meet-ups with Bay Area Artists Unite (BAAU, see chapter 4), I observed considerable praise for people who seemed to be working hard, especially when the results seemed evident in the product. People were pleased to be recognized in this way, responding with a thank-you or a smile while also modestly downplaying their improvement.

Not striving to improve could be a marker of a lack of seriousness. One BAAU member described deviantART as a site used by many people whom she did not see as "serious artists."[7] When I asked how she distinguished these she replied:

> Do they want to improve? Do they work hard towards bettering themselves? Can they take crit? [critique or criticism]…

> Do they only do art to "get pageviews and get popular on DA [deviantART]?" Is critique of any kind viewed as some kind of attack on them as a person?

Not only was "bettering themselves" a marker of seriousness, doing art "only to 'get pageviews and get popular on DA'" was positioned here in opposition to the emphasis on improvement.[8] The creation of a dichotomy between these two motivations was a recurring theme.

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[7] She was also an active user of deviantART and had been for several years.

[8] Such points echo arguments made in the previous chapter about the question between the "popularity contest" and

A particularly contentious news article constructed this tension between improvement and popularity. The discussion that followed indicated that even if one disagreed with the notion that improvement was obligatory, it still marked seriousness. In the article, a Senior member pointed to the "handful of extremely popular ones [artists] that show almost no improvement in their work over the years." Some of the artists "don't ever venture out from their norm" and it was "even scarier when it [improvement] doesn't happen over time as it naturally should." These people defied "the point" of being an artist. Fans' use of comments and favourites, the article suggested, played a role: praise caused artists to "perpetuate their mediocrity."[9]

Many commenters seemed to support the resentment of popular artists and their fans who apparently undermined popular members' legitimacy as artists. There was active disagreement about the imperative to improve, however. One person wrote:

> *sighs* I understand the stuff about ego—that I agree with—but people shouldn't be criticized for 'not improving their art.'

Others agreed but reaffirmed the point that improvement was a marker of seriousness:

> Maybe art is just a hobby to them, and they're not serious about improving?… I agree with almost everything pointed out in this article, but I do not agree that everyone should strive to improve. There's nothing wrong with just wanting to have fun, without hardcore focus on improvement.

Thus, there remained tacit agreement that "being serious" and "just having fun" were opposing positions and improvement went with the former. It was just that one should not be forced to "be serious" or be taken seriously.

Finally, one person pointed out that not only should others not be forced to be serious; artists should not be forced to conform to others' standards of behavior: "It's their art. Let them make it as they see fit. It isn't anyone's place to tell them they MUST improve." Therefore, if individuality and autonomy in the process of making art was an important value, no one should then try to enforce a particular ethos. Just as the author of the article implicitly criticized some popular artists conforming to their past work and the adoration of their fans, some criticized the author of sacrificing individuality to conformity, but in a different way. In either case the value of individuality was what these different opinions stressed.

Despite this imperative to improve, there were differences of opinion as to whether deviantART was, in fact, a good site for addressing the imperative. In one case, a woman explained to me that deviantART was like one giant school where she had learned so much from the other people. Another person told me that deviantART had been the site where she had first been exposed to particular forms of media. I observed several people who were able to use deviantART, among other means, to facilitate connections to mentors. I also interviewed someone who had a passion for teaching and found in deviantART a site where she encountered eager students.

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recognition

[9] According to the article, some "popular" artists "get convinced they're already great, and don't need to get any better." Exemplars of seriousness, on the other hand, continue to find fault with their own work and seek ways to get better even if they are "popular."

Yet, other members did not see deviantART as a particularly good place for learning or improving, such as the member I quoted in the chapter's epigraph. The site was not the school she hoped that it could be. Another long-time member told me that deviantART was a site that was great for marketing yet not for improving, again helping create a dichotomy between the two. Another person added that it had been better for learning when she was younger and more inexperienced, suggesting that perhaps it was only good for improving at certain stages in an artistic career. Finally, one person told me that he had started posting to deviantART for the sole purpose of trying to find people to help him improve but had found it quite difficult to get anyone to pay attention.

6.2   Values, standards, and features for feedback, criticism, and critique

Members who believed that deviantART was a good place to learn often made such claims explicitly in relation to being able to get critical feedback on their work.[10] For many, receptiveness to criticism or critique was the form of improvement *par excellence* that distinguished serious creators from others.[11]

Scholars who have studied learning online have pointed to the fact that the web provides creators new opportunities for instructive feedback. Ito et al. (2010) describe examples across a number of different venues and argue that online sites provide "access to people who are uniquely placed to evaluate their particular media creation or contribution" (Ito et al. 2010:275). They point to different kinds of feedback as well as differences in how people responded to it, depending on the status and reputation of the source.[12]

Studies of the practice of fan fiction writing demonstrate that even within a particular practice there are a number of forms of feedback. "Beta-readers" act as ongoing reviewers for a work (Karpovich 2006, Jenkins 2006:179-181, Black 2008).[13] Alongside the beta-reading process, the web has provided authors opportunities for other forms of feedback via sites' commenting interfaces. Participants have appropriated these interfaces for different kinds of "reviews" (Black 2008). Busse and Hellekson (2006:15) argue that the nature of writer-reviewer feedback is different on sites like LiveJournal than on other sites, where the ease of offering some form of

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[10] Many contrasted deviantART with other sites. ConceptArt.org was one in particular that had a reputation for highly critical feedback.

[11] Below I discuss the difficulty distinguishing the criticism and critique from each other and from feedback in general.

[12] Stern (2008) writes that youth often express frustration when their blogs are not validated and they don't receive feedback. At the same time authors in her study were conflicted as to what kind of feedback they desired.

[13] Karpovich (2006) argues that the practice of beta-reading may have its roots in circulation of fan-fiction via printed "fanzines," but that the name of the practice and its current form is connected to the world of software development and the widespread integration of various Internet technologies into fan practices. She attributes the increasing prevalence of the practice to the dramatic expansion in fan fiction authors—particularly younger authors—coming into contact with one another online: developing a sense of themselves as a community and then posting to the same places as experienced authors. Some fan fiction sites include a formal process that help pair up writers and beta-readers, while in other cases members take advantage of particular features to seek out writers and readers (see Black 2008:40-42, Jenkins 2006:179-181, Karpovich 2006).

feedback outside of the beta reading process has lead to an increase in the "amount of feedback…yet it has become less detailed and critical."

The studies I have referenced demonstrate that what counts as valuable feedback is always situational and at times contentious. However, while the authors hint at tensions among participants, they stop short of examining the possible implications for the ongoing development of the sites they describe. One of the central issues I develop in what follows are debates about what kind of and in what circumstances were comments articulated as "good" feedback, and in turn, what kinds of criticism could be considered critique. Members' efforts to create standards and norms for comments to function as "critique" as well as the staff's launch of a new Critique Feature, helped draw attention to these ambiguities and surface tensions in practice.

In the discussion that follows, at stake to participants in these efforts was not only the legitimacy of deviantART's members as serious artists but also the status of deviantART as a serious art website and art community. Seniors, long-time members, and staff members lamented that deviantART had in the past been a good site for critical feedback. According to these participants, consideration, effort, and quality of feedback were indicative of community. As both a *community* and an *art* community, the site had to find a way to once again make constructive feedback, or "critique," a prominent feature of site activity if indeed "critique" were infrastructural to artistic practice.[14]

6.2.1   Quality feedback and critique between kudos and bashing

The uses of deviantART's commenting system were frequently at the center of discussions of the desire for quality feedback. At the time I joined, the deviation submission interface allowed members to specify to potential viewers the desired type of comment.[15] The three options were to "encourage advanced critique," "discourage criticism," or not specify either way.[16] The request—if

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[14] I did not hear specifically what had gone wrong. However, the material that follows in the text points to some possibilities. There was continually a concern that deviantART's staff had "sold out" and that as a corporation, it didn't care about what made the site a community (such as quality feedback). People also attributed lost community to the site's growth and perhaps this is what has supposed to have affected lost feedback as well. The link between feedback and community, the articulations of a sense of loss of both, and a tension between the site's commercial goals and its artistic ones can be traced back to early accounts of deviantART's origins. As early as 2003 there were stories widely circulated on the site that suggested that deviantART had been a site for thoughtful feedback, that such feedback was no longer typical, and lost was something that made deviantART a community. In 2003, Sotira posted a history of deviantART to let members know that site leadership, himself included, had realized that deviantART had lost a bit of what had made deviantART a "community" as they sought to make deviantART financially sustainable as a company. In "bringing back the community of year one," an immediate goal would be to re-create "the place where people paused and made sure their comments were of value before posting them." Two years later, co-founder Scott Jarkoff hinted that this goal had still not been achieved. He posted that in the "'early days' deviantART was known for the amount of comments that submissions would receive. Feedback was great in comparison to the various other sites…." Jarkoff attributed this success to efforts he, along with co-founder Matt Stephens, made to comment on "every single piece of art that was submitted to the site," to lead "by example" and hope that other members "would follow in our footsteps and offer as much critique as possible."

[15] Members could also turn comments off, but I rarely encountered a work that did not allow for comments.

[16] I learned from an older post to the site that there may have been an option in the past that said "critique welcome," or something similar, but I cannot be sure.

one of the first two options were specified—would appear next to the commenting interface on the deviation page.

There were several recognized problems with this interface. First, it was not necessarily clear what "advanced critique" meant and that this understanding was shared. Second, it was not certain what not specifying either way was supposed to indicate.[17] Finally, even if commenter and artist had the same understanding of what the interface implied, it did not help people attract the attention of members who might have the skill, experience, or energy and time to offer the desired critical feedback.[18] Here and in the next two sections, I address problems related to the first two issues. Then, I describe a new feature deviantART launched in April 2009 that addressed all of them.

Members positioned quality feedback on a spectrum between two other kinds of feedback: kudos and bashing. Yet, there was disagreement on a number of fronts. One was whether either kudos or bashing was necessarily bad. If so, a second concern was how to construct comments that were "good." Another issue was how to specify when comments crossed from one kind to another. Finally, there were differences as to the relationship between all of these comments and "critique."

Kudos were analogous to what Black (2008:107) refers to as "OMG Standards," short, "enthusiastic statements of appreciation."[19] Black points out that these encouraged the writers in her study. To several people I spoke with, kudos were important for similar reasons. An artist who went by NEN described to me the feedback she received on art forums prior to joining deviantART:

> NEN: ["critiquing of art"] wasn't necessarily constructive or anything…
>
> NEN: but i think it helped back then when i didn't have an ego of my own
>
> Dan: in what way did it help?
>
> NEN: since everyone on those boards were so young, no one knew any better than to say "OMG THAT'S SO COOL IT LOOKS TOTALLY COOL"
>
> NEN: and no one got helped, and everyone just got seated in bad habits— but it still helped to bolster an ego that's required to get ones work out there more.
>
> NEN: Eventually…i learned to be objective about my work, but…it helped a lot to know that people liked what i was doing (interview)[20]

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[17] That everyone was a member of an "art community" should the assumption be that each member welcomed critical feedback, as some suggested everyone should? Did not specifying mean that they did not want critical feedback? Perhaps they had not understood the difference between feedback and "advanced critique" and desired the former but were unsure about the latter. Or, as others told me, should the attitude be not to offer criticism unless someone asked for it?

[18] Additionally there may have been a visual design problem. Some people complained that these specifications as to what kinds of comments they wanted were generally unhelpful simply because people didn't notice them when commenting. The text was nestled in a smaller font between the commenter's username, which was presented in a large bold font, and the large white text box for writing the comment. If one didn't know to look for the specification, it was easy to miss.

[19] As I noted in chapter 5, on deviantART these were often: "Nice work!", "Awesome!", "Great job!", "Cool!," "OMG! [Oh my god!]" and so forth

[20] NEN, the artist's pen name, was a young woman in art college who had been a member of deviantART since her

The different uses of the word "help" emphasize the ambiguous status of kudos: they may have been "detrimental" in one respect but essential in another.[21]

Still, I observed many on deviantART deride kudos as the kind of praise fans heaped upon popular artists, reflecting poorly on both commenter and artist. I spoke to several people who received praise of this form but expressed a desire for more involved feedback and a weariness for having to manage the dozens if not hundreds of comments received on their work.[22] One person argued in an article that these kinds of comments "provide the artist with nothing except the mere knowledge that at least their work is cool, so skip the 'Cool' or 'Wow + fav' one-liners." Even while acknowledging the value of encouragement through *positive* comments, some still sought to denigrate kudos as a form of positive expression. One Senior member wrote that while not everyone should have critical feedback forced upon them, positive comments should be sophisticated and point out what was good about the work.[23]

The denigration of kudos as distinct from both critical feedback and other forms of positive feedback was a form of norm-setting that addressed two concerns I raised earlier. First, it spoke to concerns over popularity and attention-seeking and reinforced the sentiment that ego-boosting in itself was a problematic goal.[24] Second, if "community" rested on ideals of thoughtful consideration, kudos could be seen as shallow or promoting superficiality.

Positive comments that indicated the good aspects of one's work, even if better than kudos, were still not the kind of critical feedback that so many hoped to attract and try to cultivate more generally on the site. Instead many expressed a desire to see flaws in their work pointed out and suggestions on how to do better. Taken to an extreme, pointing out flaws could take the form of "bashing." Such comments were "mean," one person noted, and did not necessarily help artists

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early teenage years. She had a large following on deviantART and her work had been exhibited in galleries.

[21] While neither of the following examples specifically reference kudos, they help illuminate kudos' potential value. Treijim told me, "Encouragement was utterly important in my artistic development. Were it not for the encouraging words… I wouldn't have gotten where I am today." Wen-M told me that showing his work to professional artists at San Diego Comic Con helped him in part because "they were very good about telling me how good I was… A lot of those people were just trying to be nice to me and they knew it was my first time going and they don't want to tear me up right away."

[22] It is possible that some were performing the right disposition and attitude to me (and others), but there were cases that suggested otherwise.

[23] This person wrote, "Even if it's not appropriate to comment critically on a piece, you can STILL say something deeper than 'Nice work' or 'OMG fav.'… Positive input can be just as valuable as critique - if an artist hears from lots of people that something is GOOD in their work, they can keep doing that while working on other aspects of their style and technique." Examples of sophisticated positive comments included, "What the piece means to you, what it makes you think of, how it sparks your imagination, what emotional reaction you had to the art, what you think of the various aspects of the piece like colour, form, symbolism etc." Many echoed doubts about the value of kudos on deviantART and in conversations I had elsewhere. People would sarcastically reference kudos when mockingly saying "great job!" or "cool!" in other conversations.

[24] See arguments made in chapter 5 as well my discussion of the imperative to improve. Artists should be trying to improve, so the argument went, not receiving empty praise; additionally, fans of those artists should also behave accordingly.

understand how to improve. Bashing could also lead to disruptive drama and hostilities that affected the site as a whole, such as when fans of artists reacted to what they saw as an attack.[25]

Yet, drawing the line between bashing and critical feedback was difficult, unlike drawing the line between critical feedback and kudos. A Senior member wrote in her journal that she had grown tired of people sending her notes asking for critique and then getting angry when she did not "sugar coat" the criticism. In a forum discussion that lamented that people on deviantART were "anti-criticism," a person noted, "There's a way to be constructive, and a way to be a total asshole. You need to know the line." The problem, however, was not just in "knowing" the line but in how to draw it in the first place. As one person wrote:

> I had a teacher who would look at a drawing that I spent 7+ hours on and would tell me it sucked and make me do it over. Brutal, I know. But it made me a better artist. It made me a more critical artist.

Contrary to the idea of "constructive/asshole" dichotomy, the teacher in this story is an example of someone being both: by being so critical (perhaps even an "asshole") the teacher *was* being constructive. By what criteria would one even decide how to draw the line between critical feedback and bashing? This question seemed always to be answered with an expectation that it would be clear from the comment itself. Yet, I suspect that the reason the line was unclear was that for some, in practice, there was no line. Even bashing had its importance and value. I spoke with several art students who often talked about having their work "torn down" in their art classes. One person told me about a teacher that almost made her cry (and she had heard of another who had cried after a critique). But, she added, "It's okay. I'm just starting out. I will learn to absorb it. I'm just a little seed getting ready to grow!" (fieldnotes). Thus, what she was learning at school was that becoming a better artist was about absorbing all forms of criticism, bashing included.

This last quote introduces a new term and a new distinction: that between *criticism* and *critique*. deviantART's staff and members (me included) often used "critique" and "criticism" interchangeably, particularly when discussing whether one member or another was or should be open to receiving critical feedback *and* when the form of criticism was positioned as "good" or "constructive."[26] As one person noted, she hoped to impart to readers that "critique" and "criticism" were not negatives but positives for one's art, offering little sense that the two might be different from one another. The author of a journal on "How to Give Better Comments" reserved the word "critique" only for one part of this process, separate from the "interpretation," "compliments," and "questions." Soep (2005) describes *critique* as a form of assessment in the arts in which artists present their opinions of each others' work directly to them and that these opinions are oriented towards both the work at hand and future projects. Schön's (1983, 1987) describing the training of architecture professionals, focuses on critique (or "the crit") as a form of "reflection-in-action" as a teacher coaches a student through dialogue. This "crit" is in part based on criticism of the work (in

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[25] I encountered many complaints about "constructive" criticism taken as personal attacks. One person pointed me towards examples of criticism of deviations that lead to open conflict between artist and commenter and/or between fans of the person whose work was being criticized and the person who did the criticizing. She and others felt that this was a fairly typical scenario.

[26] The inconsistencies and ambiguities in how these terms were used should, perhaps, not be surprising given the multiple meanings of the term criticism (see Williams 1983:84-86).

the sense of "fault-finding" [Williams 1983:85]). In this sense critique is both assessment, which would include criticism, and resource for further development (see also Winner et al. 2006). As part of a broader practice of critique, criticism is direct critical feedback. But, in other contexts criticism refers to artistic/aesthetic criticism of a work written by a professional, addressed to a public, and positioned in the context of a broader aesthetic discourse.

6.2.2   Creating standards for critique

To help draw clear lines, or as one person put it, to resolve "miscommunication" and "disharmony between artists," some members tried to establish formal standards for commenting practices to function as critique. The hope seemed to be that with standards in place, deviantART could become the ideal art community that many hoped it would be, bringing together many different art worlds and practices. These standards, like texts on how to be a good "beta-reader" for fan-fiction writers (Karpovich 2006, Jenkins 2006:180), were norm-producing documents.[27] They tried to shape how artists and art-appreciators should engage with work, the proper structure for commenting, the right use of language and tone, or all of these.

With respect to content, a journal entry on "How to Give Better Comments" recommended that commenters follow a particular skeleton structure. This skeleton consisted of several components: an interpretation of the work that would reveal a vantage point; a critique that is "direct" and "firm" in describing problems with the work and suggestions for improvement; compliments that are specific and help show what works in the piece; and optionally, questions for the artist that will further a conversation. The author of this journal entry said that people should not be afraid of lacking particular vocabulary that would come with a school-based art education. At the same time others sought to explain what such a vocabulary might consist of and teach it to others on the site. A group that called itself ProCritique promoted several detailed "critique standards" that highlighted the formal elements of a work: "form/composition," "color," "contrast," "fluidity," "proportion," and "subject matter/content." A Senior member posted a tutorial on critique that defined it as a process of commenting on the formal elements of the work rather than "passing judgment" or "assessing validity."[28]

Participants' efforts to create standards are an example of producing infrastructure in practice. But, unlike analogous efforts I presented in chapter 5, these standards were more formal than arguments about fair practice, though less formal than policy. Attempts to formalize revealed different conceptions of critique. More important to the argument in this dissertation, they also pointed out how deviantART gave rise to tensions between different worlds and practices through the classification of a practice whose label suggested commonality but which rested on different conventions and contexts.

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[27] See Jenkins (2006:180) for an example of such a guide from the site "Writer's University."

[28] According to this member such elements consisted of: "theme," "expression," "line," "color," "form," "repetition," "composition," "balance," "direction," "movement," "energy," "rhythm," "flow," "focus," "depth of field," "emotion," "symbolism," and "iconography."

6.2.3   Institutional ambiguity

Given the ambiguity of the term critique and questions about its relationship to practices elsewhere, it is not surprising that some people hinted that context as much as content mattered in the writing of quality feedback. For example, the author of the aforementioned tutorial on standards for critique accompanied her formal elements with a list of recommendations as to how to write a critique in the right way given the context of deviantART. In doing so she urged people to try to assess the age, experience, and possible intentions of the artist before writing the critique. That such recommendations were necessary illustrates an awareness of *contextual ambiguities* that deviantART members had to address when trying to cultivate "critique" on the site. Problems that arose because of these ambiguities both drove the creation of standards and gave rise to new tensions resulting from attempts to enforce them. In this section and the next, I discuss problems arising from the construction of shared expectations and understandings of situations of critique. First, I discuss dilemmas that arose as participants attempted to use deviantART as an online context that extended different institutional contexts under the assumption of a common endeavor. In the next section, I discuss the importance of shared history and trust between participants.

One contextual problem posed by deviantART was the public nature of the feedback posted through the site's comments. As already discussed, there was an awareness that feedback said something about both parties involved.[29] Criticism, even if well-intentioned, could lead to the feeling of being called out in public. It was clear to me from stories about some artists and their fans that there was a perceived threat of reactions and escalations.

The contextual issues, however, went beyond a simple reduction to a public-private dichotomy. Rather, the public nature of feedback through comments points to differences between deviantART and many other venues through which one might receive feedback. The notion of "frames" from discourse analysis is a useful concept to help explain. Tannen and Wallet (1987:206) describe the concept of "frames" as "structures of expectation." *Interactive frames* "refers to what activity is being engaged in" in a particular situation. *Knowledge schemas* "refers to participants' expectations about people, objects, events and settings in the world" (Tannen and Wallet 1987:206-207). The institutions and organizations of various worlds shape both interactive frames and knowledge schemas.

As I have suggested, deviantART was an arena at the intersection of multiple art worlds and related institutions. At the same time some of its participants tried to fashion it into its own world. I came to see deviantART as *institutionally ambiguous*. Some saw it as an environment to facilitate self-promotion, marketing, and even commerce. Others saw it as an educational environment. The interactive frames and knowledge schemas structuring expectations were diverse, as were the standards for critique. The implied assumption that deviantART should (or could) have a common language and set of standards underscored the contextual problems

Some argued that if the goal was to improve, deviantART should be treated like a school.[30] As a school "criticism and feedback" were the key means to improvement:

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[29] See also the discussion of favouriting practices in chapter 5.

[30] This sentiment reflects the long-standing assumptions in Western educational practice that learning and education are the domain of schools (Lave 2011).

> If you think art is NOT about getting criticism and feedback, why are you here?…That's the whole point of art classes too. Why would someone go to an art class if not to improve?

Thus, some tried to recreate a school-like environment on deviantART, one that either corresponded to their own experience in art school or an idealized model of one. But, even as a concept borrowed from a school or studio, the label critique could mean different things. For some, as I have noted, this included "bashing." For others, as I return to momentarily, it included writing up comments that conformed to a particular structure and used a particular vocabulary. For some of the people I spoke with, critique at school took place in a classroom environment during dedicated sessions that involved everyone in the class as witnesses to an instructor's critique as well as having a chance to critique each other, in front of one another. At other times, critique could take place as a dialogue between instructor and student or between two students.[31]

Nevertheless, as others saw deviantART quite differently from a school, what feedback, criticism, and critique meant and should look like differed as well. As a website oriented around networking, marketing, promotion, and the sale of artwork, deviantART to some people resembled the Artist Alleys at conventions, fairs or exhibitions, or even art galleries. In such contexts, criticisms are neither publicly made nor permanently attached to artwork. Nor are artists expected to respond or engage in dialogue or public conversation about them.

My observations of Artist Alleys and comic/fan conventions help illustrate two contextual problems. The first concerns how institutions structure social conventions and expectations. Several of the comic book and fan conventions I attended featured an institutionalized form of critique— the portfolio review. Recruiters from major studios such as Nickelodeon, the Cartoon Network, DC Comics, and others, offered all attendees a chance to have their work reviewed by a professional and established organization. Such conversations were typically between an artist and the individual or group of reviewers, isolated from other people. Such a review was quite different from what a classroom critique at school looked like. Both, however, shared long established institutional conventions which artists learned as part of their participation in those worlds. In other words, certain practices of critique were more or less infrastructural to those worlds. But, both were quite different from deviantART. I observed the aftermath of an artist's encounter with a portfolio review, his first time having his work reviewed by, in his words, "real professionals." He explained to a small group of people that these professionals had given harsh feedback. He seemed shaken, but he expressed that this was to be expected, hinting at an accepted knowledge schema related to the experience.

A second set of issues concerns the resources at hand to assess and contextualize the people involved in a particular interaction. In Artist Alleys feedback occurred at artists' tables or in whatever space two people might encounter each other, not just in specially configured portfolio reviews or critique sessions. I observed many such situations, and reviewers had a range of resources to assess the other person and determine how to engage. There were many pre-reflective, embodied conditions that shaped the process and could help produce participants' interpretative frames and knowledge schemas. These included the presence of family and friends as well as the

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[31] Schön (1987) illustrates the mutual vulnerability in his analysis of "the crit" and it is an open question as to how to replicate this feeling online. An example in the next section suggests how participants created possibilities under certain conditions.

presence of other artists who may have their own opinions on the work and the quality of the feedback. There were also a variety of cues to contextualize the person who had offered up work for review, such as demographic characteristics, the other work in a portfolio or sketch book, non-verbal cues, and so forth.

In contrast, on deviantART it could take time and effort to assess or relate markers of identity.[32] As I laid out in chapter 2, deviantART provided several opportunities for members to indicate their age, gender, geographic location, personal interests and hobbies, appearance, and so forth. Journal entries, posted artwork, favourites, and other material all offered other ways to make assessments of identity and contextualize the person. The longer one followed an artist and the more one paid attention to his or her whole body of work over time, the more context for making such assessments was available. It took time and effort to untangle where people might be in their personal trajectories (and to me, in many cases it felt impossible). Given how much time this could take, it did not seem likely that everyone would necessarily spend a great deal of time looking into the backgrounds of someone with whom they were engaging.

Discussing critique in any situation two participants told me,

> jinh-yuhn: You really have to be a huge douche-bag to really strongly critique someone the first time you meet them… unless they ask for it …
>
> Wen-M: …You don't know how hard they worked…
>
> jinh-yuhn: …You don't know how they'll react to it…and criticism could have a totally negative effect on them. Instead of saying, 'I need to get better,' …they may say, 'I don't need to get better!' This guy doesn't know what he's talking about!' (interview)

While, according to jinh-yuhn, "online it [negative reactions] happen a lot," his and Wen-M's reasons point to concerns that go beyond a reduction to online/offline distinction, as I illustrate in the next example.

6.2.4   Shared history in critique

A final example draws together several of the contextual issues I have been describing. It illustrates the ways in which critique—online or offline—rests on a great deal of work to create an appropriate context. That context is based on institutional and personal resources as well as shared time and experience. In others words the context is dependent on a variety of factors that are infrastructural with respect to practice.

In 2009 members of BAAU set up a chatroom on deviantART. In the chatroom one evening I observed a rather complex episode of critical feedback unfold. Ken was an older member of the group in terms of age and experience; had an art degree as well as professional experience. Jessica was 15, at the time one of the youngest and newest members of BAAU. She had discovered the group in an Artist Alley at a convention several months earlier. While Jessica had yet to attend a

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[32] These are well documented concerns in studies of computer-mediated communication. There are pre-reflective cues online as studies that indicate assumption of characteristics from language suggest (see, for example, Markham 2005)

BAAU meet up to that point, she had been a regular participant in the BAAU forums and in the chatroom. Ken had been working with Jessica on some projects. Finally there was Alex, someone whom I did not recognize and was not a member of BAAU. His deviantART profile indicated that he was in his early 20s and in art school. I cannot be certain if this was Alex's first time in the BAAU chatroom; to my knowledge, Alex did not know anything about Ken, Jessica, their shared background, apart from anything he could have gleaned from their deviantART profiles and prior posts. At the time, Jessica did not list her age, though I had seen her talk about her age in her journals, and Alex certainly could have done some digging and drawn his own conclusions.[33]

As Ken was advising Alex on careers in art, Jessica told Ken she had another screenshot to show him, indicating excitement using a dancing emoticon. She posted the link to her image. Ken said it was a "good start," and Jessica asked him, "Do you know anything I should fix?" Ken commented on Jessica's use of color but also added several caveats that tempered what might have sounded critical. He also asked questions about where she saw the piece in terms of its progress and how she wanted to proceed. In other words, he was asking her to reflect and in the process was assessing how he should proceed based on her answers.

In the meantime, Alex provided Jessica a specific suggestion.[34] Jessica did not respond as she continued to respond to Ken's questions.[35] Ken did not offer any more suggestions and encouraged her to continue. Alex commented again. He criticized the work and posed a question that revealed that he did not understand what Jessica was trying to depict:

> Alex: Jessica—looks a bit stiff to me, is that bird thing holding that mage back?

This time Jessica responded:

> Jessica: Alex—Its a coat o3o [pouty lips emoticon]

This response prompted Alex to offer another suggestion as to how to fix the drawing to make that more clear. Jessica said, however, that she could not really make that fix:

> Jessica: Alex—I can't really fix the line art anymores [anymore] though ;_; [crying emoticon][36]

The "crying" emoticon was telling; it provided an important contrast with the "dancing" emoticon that she had used earlier when she entered the conversation.[37]

When Alex pressed Jessica for her reasons that she could not fix the drawing, Ken intervened. Ken said he had also noticed the problem, but if Alex would "look at her previous work" he would notice that "this is one of the best things she's done so far." In other words, Ken agreed with the

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[33] Along with Ken, Alex, and Jessica, there were other members of BAAU in the chatroom at the time and others dropped in and out.

[34] He tempered the suggestion with a "maybe" and posed it as a question, but it seemed to me that it was a direct suggestion all the same.

[35] I do not know if Jessica ignored Alex or was not paying complete attention.

[36] The "line art" is the part of the illustration that refers to the outlines, distinct from the shading and coloring. The piece was fully colored at this point.

[37] It is the contrast between the uses of emoticons that is important to me here. My sense is that one should not take these emoticons as literal representations of emotional state.

specific point about the "problem" with the drawing but that this criticism should be weighed in relation to taking into account what she had done in the past and was planning on doing going forward. Thus, Ken was not only critiquing Jessica's work; he was also critiquing Alex's critique.

Alex said he realized that "its good to encorage [encourage] her but giving her a little to work on isnt bad." Ken said that he was "planning to crit harder" on her later work "as she improved." Alex was right, he added, but it was "up to her ultimately, how much crit she will take and use."

Meanwhile, Jessica tried to explain what she had been trying to do and in doing so pointed out that she noticed other problems with her drawing. Alex had exposed something she had been trying to work out and his comments (and perhaps Ken's agreement) now made her much less positive than she had been about the way it had turned out. Her change here also reflects an awareness that perhaps Alex was right and that the critique had some value.

After Ken applauded Jessica's choice of strategy for managing a technical aspect of the work, Jessica addressed Alex and said that if she ever came back to it, she would "try to remember your advice… I would like to change a lot of things…." I read both Ken's encouragement and then Jessica's response to Alex as a way of defusing tension. Jessica performed a level of seriousness about her work by indicating how much improvement she needed, and acknowledged that Alex clearly was trying to help.

She also indicated, however, that the changes in this case were "hard" and joked about herself being "lazy." Perhaps something in this response prompted Alex to re-open the critique again and put Jessica's attitude towards improvement on the line:

> Alex: Jessica—Ok cool, just a word of advice. Never be afraid to change something, it isnt the final artwork that counts but the many steps you took to get to it. You see what I mean?
>
> Jessica: Alex—Okay, oof I'm starting to feel nervous ;_;
>
> Alex: Jessica—awww dont feel nervous, you are doing fine! Is it something I said?

Jessica never responded to this final question, and activity in the chatroom continued in different directions.

I spoke with Jessica and Ken at a BAAU meeting at a mall several weeks later. It was the first time the two had met in person. Jessica told me that she was proud of that piece and felt it was the best thing she had created up to that point, thanks in large part to Ken's help. On the ride home, he told me that Jessica was really good at taking critique—as he had determined from a few months with her in the chatroom—and that he measured how much to "push her" based on her previous work.[38]

Ken's experience (and authority) and Jessica's personality undoubtedly helped establish the context for critique. Both had to learn these qualities about each other. It is also likely that Ken and Jessica's shared affiliation with BAAU also contributed, yet it is unlikely that this was enough, as I observed other situations in which shared membership in BAAU did not translate into an easy give-and-take of feedback. It was not just their personalities or their shared affiliation but also their shared history and the way it had unfolded over time that made a difference. On sites as open and

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[38] Only Ken and I were in the car; he was not saying this to flatter Jessica.

ambiguous as deviantART, it could require time and experience to create this shared context for critique. Perhaps, however, like the provisioning of critique in a classroom or in a portfolio review, a technological solution could help establish a unique context for critique on deviantART.

6.2.5   Re-designing Critique

In April 2009 deviantART launched a new feature explicitly aimed at the site's "Critique Feature."[39] Like the debates concerning the right way to comment and the different proposed standards for critique, the specific implementation of the Critique Feature, the accompanying descriptions of its benefits, and some members' reactions formalized and standardized a particular notion of critique and in doing so exposed particular sets of assumptions and ideals about the practice of art and improving at this practice. Changes to interfaces that sit at the intersection of several different ways of thinking about a seemingly common endeavor expose unsettled tensions, created new ones, but also turn out as compromises between different values and art worlds.

With the new feature in place, the options for requesting a particular type of comment were removed. Premium Members (those who paid for subscriptions to the site) could now "Request critique." Doing so revealed a prominent box on the deviation page that read, "The Artist has requested Critique on this Artwork" and that "Critiques should be thoughtful, in-depth responses to the work." This framing was in line with the values of an art community that staff and long-time members promoted. Then, other Premium Members could post a Critique of the work on a special Critique page.[40]

The Critique itself consisted of two parts, both required (see figure 6.1). First, "Critics" had to write a narrative that had to be a minimum of 100 words long, conforming to no particular structure.[41] The forced 100-word minimum length requirement was intended to help facilitate better quality feedback.[42] Second, Critics had to rate each piece along four dimensions: "vision,"

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[39] According to the announcements that accompanied its launch in April 2009, the new Critique Feature had been designed to address the concerns with the lack of critique and "good feedback" on deviantART. Of course, there may have been other motivations or intended purposes that I cannot address conclusively. One issue I return to later is the fact that the new feature was only available for Premium Members. This feature may have been a part of deviantART's effort to shift more of its revenue to subscriptions in the face of declining advertising revenues in the face of a recession (Wang, "The Deviant Experience…" 2011).

[40] After receiving a Critique, the artist received a notification in her Message Center and could specify whether or not she felt the Critique was "fair" or "unfair." If the artist specified "fair," the Critique would then appear on the deviation page above the comments for anyone to see. Any other member of the site could indicate whether or not the Critique was "fair" or "unfair" and any member could comment on the Critique itself.

[41] From this point on, I will refer to those posting critiques using the Critique Feature as "Critics," with a capital "C." One person told me she referred to them as "Critique-ers."

[42] I this learned from a poll that a developer at deviantART, Inc. put out on the topic. The poll also revealed that there was considerable disagreement on the minimum length of "advanced critique" and whether there should be any at all. The comments suggest that those people who wanted the minimum felt that a 50-100 word minimum would force people to be thoughtful and considerate. A few people argued that no minimum was necessary because you could be thoughtful and have an impact in fewer words, and forcing people to write more could have the negative effect of making people lose clarity.

"originality," "technique," and "impact." The ratings were from one to five stars and were automatically aggregated into a "Devious Rating" for each image.[43]

Requesting and receiving a Critique had additional material effects. They increased the number of places the work appeared on the site. If an artist requested Critique, the deviation would appear in a new "Critiqueable" section of the site. Once given, the "Critiques" appeared in another new section of the site, on the Today page, and on a new widget on the userpage of the Critics. In addition, all of the Critic's Watchers were notified of the Critique in *their* Message Centers, just as they would be notified of other posted content. This might direct traffic to the work itself.[44]
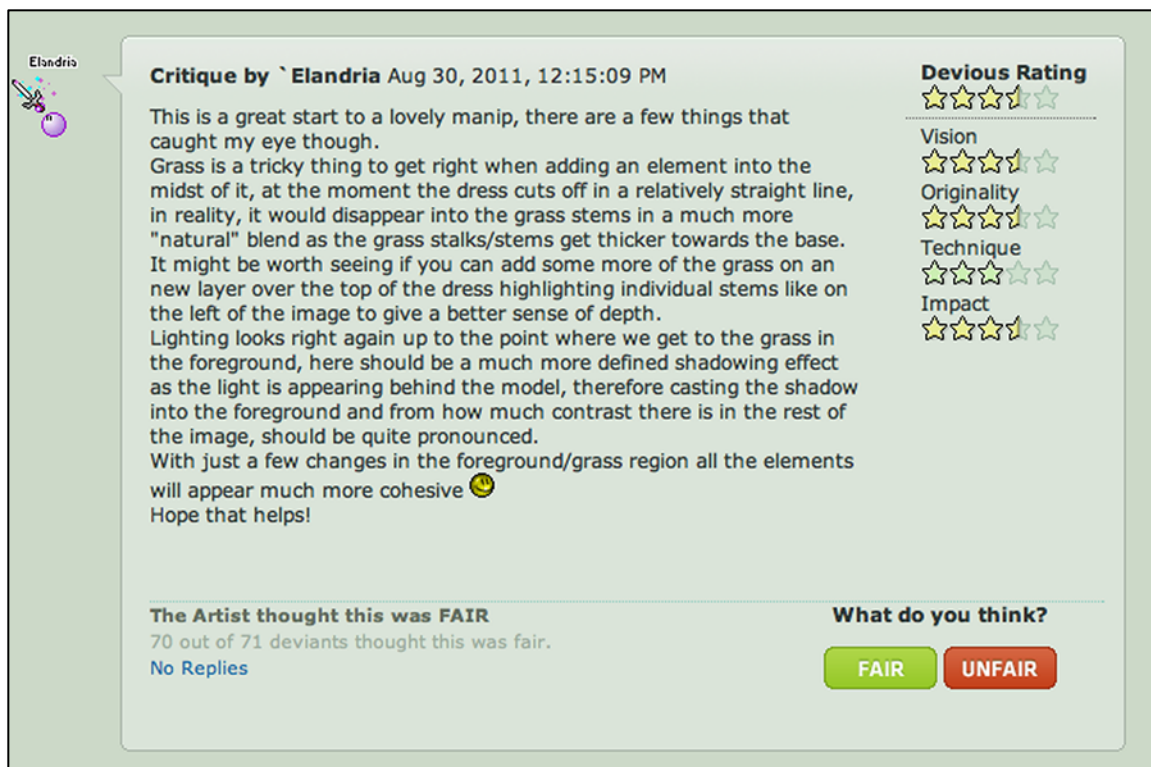
Figure 6.1: A Critique given with the Critique Feature

During the deviation submission process, deviantART Inc. provided three reasons that one might want to "request Critique" on the work. One was to "Get real commentary and real feedback on your work" or "Give and get meaningful feedback on your art with Critique" (original emphasis). Angelo Sotira echoed the point in a journal: the feature was for "real feedback, real exposure by a group of members who take being devious pretty damn seriously." The implication was that other forms of comments and feedback were not as real or serious.[45] Combined, the length requirement

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[43] Later, I observed some of the written analysis used these dimensions as a guide but also many that did not.

[44] With the Critique Feature in place, Critiques (unlike comments) were discrete objects that were listed, commented upon, circulated, and potentially ranked, much like deviations. I have not seen the rating/ranking used for anything on the site's interface. It is possible that they might be used in ways of which I am unaware.

[45] The new feature, in Sotira'a words, would solve the problem of "a lot of amateur noise and 'not enough good feedback.'" The news article that accompanied the feature's launch contrasted a screenshot of a lengthy Critique with

and the notion of "real" or "meaningful" feedback made the Critique Feature a part of the ideal of fostering a thoughtful and considerate art community I described earlier. Sotira's reference to "being devious" was a signal for someone who was committed to both art and deviantART as an art community. Using this system would also demarcate one's seriousness through their participation in a new system distinct from the rest of the site's feedback systems.

By referring to "real exposure," Sotira was referencing the second reason to "request Critique" on submissions: "Attract more views through critical attention and rankings." As described, simply being open to Critique came with the reward of more exposure, and receiving a Critique further increased exposure. Related, a third reason given for using the new feature was that Critiques would help members "Achieve community acclaim." It was unclear how the feature itself would help boost one's "acclaim" on the site, but the implication seemed to be that making one's work open for Critique would attract not only more viewers but particular kinds of viewers who could help propel one toward such acclaim.

Finally, deviantART proposed benefits to Critics as well as artists. This new form of Critique was…

> a way for art enthusiasts and fans to participate in the creative process and develop their curatorial eye and art analysis skills. By submitting thoughtful, constructive critiques and searching out fresh talent and overlooked gems, you will gain respect as a critic while providing a valuable service to the community.[46]

The feature would help some "publish real criticism, gain recognition as a Critic, and introduce new and emerging art to the community."[47] Building on themes described in chapter 5, the Critique Feature would thus help make the entire process of recognition more participatory and at the same time would help people discover more Unknown Artists on the site. Sotira added, "For critics, become world renowned with your skill, help artists grow, and promote artists to your watchlist who deserve that boost and are not getting it due to the flaws in popularity." This last reason, combined with the previous one, led me to see the feature as another "balancing act," like those in the previous chapter. The new feature was for both improving and self promotion (and self-promotion of both Critics and those Critiqued).

Many seemed excited about the new feature. But, here I focus on the reactions that challenged the feature's assumptions. First, some took exception to the criteria for rating ("vision," "originality," "technique," and "impact"). Many did not agree that the criteria were the right ones to judge work.[48] There was even disagreement over what these particular criteria meant.[49] Making these

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a comment that simply said "nice shot.". The implication seemed to be that normal comments, particularly kudos, provided neither "meaningful" nor "real" feedback. Thus, the feature contributed to the downplay of kudos that I've pointed to elsewhere. The point seemed to be that Critique was meaningful; other forms of feedback were not.

[46] From the news article that accompanied the launch of the feature.

[47] From the new FAQ on the feature.

[48] As I saw it, many on the site did in fact judge each others' work by such criteria but not exclusively so, embedding similar ideas into different criteria.

[49] When viewing a Critique, there was no indication what the terms corresponding to the stars were intended to mean. In the news article and FAQ on the feature, the site articulated a set of questions Critics could ask themselves to assess the four dimensions: "Vision: How well does the artwork present or reflect a point of view, theme or idea? Originality: Is the artwork fresh or new in its style, execution or approach? Is it something you haven't seen before

particular terms explicit as the dimensions to judge artwork was a departure for many regarding the nature and purpose of critique. Though there may have been overlap, they were not the same as the standards members tried to promote.

The idea of numeric rating also departed from some people's expectations, seemingly unrelated to particular ideas of what critique was about. Numerical ratings are common on the web and even in "artistic" products such as movies. But this did not make them easy conventions to import to critique as feedback.[50] A concern was that these ratings depicted the wrong way of thinking about critique and not something to be encouraged among those who were being exposed to the concept of critique for the first—and possibly only—time.

Concerns over the relationship between the implementation of the Critique Feature and the ostensible purpose of critique extended beyond questioning the criteria and its ratings. Many people questioned the relationship between critique as help for others and critique as a means of self-promotion for critics; they also questioned the purpose of broadcasting Critiques to Watchers. The feature's implementation and staff rhetoric suggested that help for others and self-promotion need not be in opposition. These aspects of the feature did not fit the models of critique they were used to from other contexts or had envisioned. As one person put it, "Critiques are supposed to benefit the person being critiqued, not the person critiquing… Why the hell should I be a showboat about the fact that I critiqued someone's work?" This statement and others like it highlighted strong assumptions about the ostensible purpose of critique. It also highlights differences in this motivation for critique and the articles I pointed to earlier, in which members emphasized critique as the method to help people improve, specifically in contrast with their self-promotion. But, such sentiments may have been overlooking or understating the various dynamics going on even in an art classroom. This set of reactions also pointed to the feature's conflation of *criticism*, as published writing about art, and *critique*, as aid for improving.

Finally, some called into question whether the feature supported deviantART as an art community, as had been implied. The central point of contention was that not everyone could participate in the new system—only those who paid for it.[51] People who agreed with the premise that a willingness to be critiqued or negatively criticized was a marker of seriousness objected to willingness to pay (or ability to pay) deviantART for access to this marker. Even while agreeing with those who countered that deviantART had to charge for some services, some pointed out that critique and feedback were unique. If deviantART was truly an *art* community, a feature that addressed what they saw as a fundamental aspect of being an artist should be equally available. As some put it, every artist "deserved" the chance to be critiqued, recalling the egalitarian principles from the previous chapter that many worked to promote on the site.[52]

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in its particular genre? Does it surprise you? Technique: Was the artwork skillfully created? Does the artist exhibit advanced knowledge of the medium and/or bring special focus to the craft of the medium used? Impact: Does the artwork resonate with you or evoke strong emotions? Does it make you think? Does it blow your mind?" Yet when writing a Critique, the Critic would only see this explanation by following several links to the FAQ .

[50] Some accepted the ratings as a compromise: they liked the feature but only used the ratings because they had to.

[51] There was also some question about whether the ratings went against the community values. A Senior member said that the ratings encouraged people to be "competitive and shallow," counter to her and others' ideals of community.

[52] As one Senior member wrote in her widely read journal, "segregating" critique from comments implicitly

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Staff and other members who supported the feature said that they had not taken away such a chance. People could continue to use the commenting system to get critical feedback if so desired. The FAQ on the Critique Feature read, "No modifications have been made to the comments system on deviantART and it will continue to work as before." Several staff members and others echoed this point in discussions. Yet, many were quick to point out that by eliminating the options to specify comments of a particular kind—"encourage advanced critique" among them—the system had been changed. Why take this away if deviantART, Inc. was not trying to create a system that aligned seriousness with willingness to pay, not simply willingness to take critique? Nevertheless, how it affected the use of comments and criticism in other areas of the site was unclear to me as I proceeded in my fieldwork.[53]

In summary, the Critique Feature was a designed solution in response to a set of tensions concerning how to fashion deviantART as a site for improvement through a means that many embraced even as they conceptualized it quite differently. The feature established a particular definition of critique and a context for it within deviantART, done in a particular way by a particular subset of the site's membership. It provided a space that might reduce some of the uncertainty as to the kind of feedback one might get by opting in. It did so with a model that borrowed elements from school-based critique, public art criticism, and interfaces based around notions of ranking. Site staff positioned the Critique Feature as one that transcended the dichotomy between deviantART as a site for self-promotion and as a site for self-improvement. Yet, in doing so it also illuminated, materialized, and challenged a set of norms for improving one's artistic practice imported from apparently educational environments into an ambiguous context that was as commercial as educational. It highlighted aspects of some art worlds that seemed to fall outside some participants' sense of the purpose of art. According to the feature's promoters, the feature served the interests of art, community, and co-operation. Clearly, many did not see it the same way, perhaps even suspecting that it opposed some of these interests and worked to the advantage of others.

6.3   Tutorials as ambiguous resources

I now turn to another aspect of deviantART that is emblematic of online, interest-driven participation (Ito et al. 2010) and that, like feedback, promises opportunity to facilitate learning and improvement: *tutorials*. But, as was the case with feedback, on deviantART this way of improving was problematic. What appeared on the surface to be the creation of a public resource, upon closer inspection masked significant tensions. This discussion focuses on the purpose of these resources and whether they match a particular ideal of learning: that of self-directed learning, or

discouraged everyone who was not able to use the new feature from using the comments as a space for critical feedback. Even as a Premium Member, she wrote, she would work to counter this possibility by trying to give critique to people who wanted it through comments and comments only.

[53] Despite all these frustrations and criticism of the new feature, little was changed in its implementation following some minor bug fixes. Over the course of the fieldwork that followed, I did not encounter any particular incidents or drama linked to the use of the feature. It was also unclear if it did much to attract attention to Unknown Artists. One person I regularly spoke with told me that he paid for a membership to the site so that he could take advantage of the Critique Feature. The last time we spoke, he had yet to receive any. The only constructive feedback he felt he received were by the same people whom he already knew who were still using deviantART's comments.

"learning on one's own," a romanticization of autodidacticism (Sefton-Green 2008). At the same time, it sheds light on some of the ambiguity inherent in websites that blend ongoing social activity between people with the distribution of "published" material.[54]

Roughly speaking, tutorials on deviantART were submissions that explained or demonstrated some aspect of the artistic process. Anyone could post tutorials, and deviantART had thousands of them. Categorized on the site as "Resources," tutorials were grouped with fonts, textures, brushes, stock photography, and material posted specifically to be used by others. Tutorials on deviantART tackled a range of subject matter. Some were about how to do something with a particular tool, such as how to create an airbrush effect with Photoshop, or how to embed metadata into a photograph. Others were about how to draw or paint in a particular style. Some featured lessons on color theory, perspective drawing, or setting up studio lighting for photography (see figure 6.2).

Tutorials used a variety of media and modes in their presentation. A prototypical tutorial included sequences of text and images arranged vertically. Others were animations with voice-over narrations. There were also video-tutorials. Some of these were actually hosted on other sites, such as YouTube, but linked from a corresponding deviation on deviantART. Some tutorials resembled instructional art books available in bookstores. Others were more like windows into an artist's studio. Thus tutorials varied in how they "taught" the material.[55]

A tutorial called "The Tutor's Tutorial" pointed to some of this variation (see figure 6.3). The author, a teenager, classified tutorials into three categories. First, there were "guides," which "cover whole subjects" rather than provide explicit step-by-step instructions. Next, there were "walk-throughs," which are more of a demonstration or performance or how someone did something. Finally, there were "tutorials" as step-by-step sets of instructions on how to achieve a certain outcome. deviantART's categories did not recognize distinctions along these lines, and the term "tutorials" was used to cover all of these approaches.

Tutorials were not unique to deviantART. Hundreds of other websites featured tutorials, also for many purposes and similarly using a range of media. Torrey et al. (2007) discuss "How-To's" on Do-It-Yourself (DIY) websites that resembled the step-by-step style tutorials found on deviantART. Ito et al. (2010) found that youth producing Anime Music Videos, fan podcasts, video game resources, videos for YouTube, and a variety of other material made use of tutorials in their production processes.

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[54] I owe a debt of gratitude to Becky Herr-Stephenson for shaping my argument in this section with respect to a talk we worked on together (see Perkel and Herr-Stephenson 2008).

[55] Interestingly, what tutorials on deviantART and on other websites do not resemble are "tutorials" in the sense of the "tutorial system" of education made prominent at Oxford or Cambridge. A tutorial in this latter sense involves regular meetings between tutor and one or more pupils; individual attention sustained over time is a core aspect of the method. Mayr-Harting (2006) and Ryan (2007) provide useful overviews about the history and purpose of this method. In reading their accounts, I was struck by the fact that the relationship between Ken and Jessica I presented earlier in the chapter aligns itself more closely with this particular use of the term "tutorial." The use of "tutorial" to describe mass-produced artifacts predates the web, as evidenced by various titles returned by cursory searches on Google Books. The history of the word and its changing use might shed further light on how new media contributes to changes in concepts and related tensions.
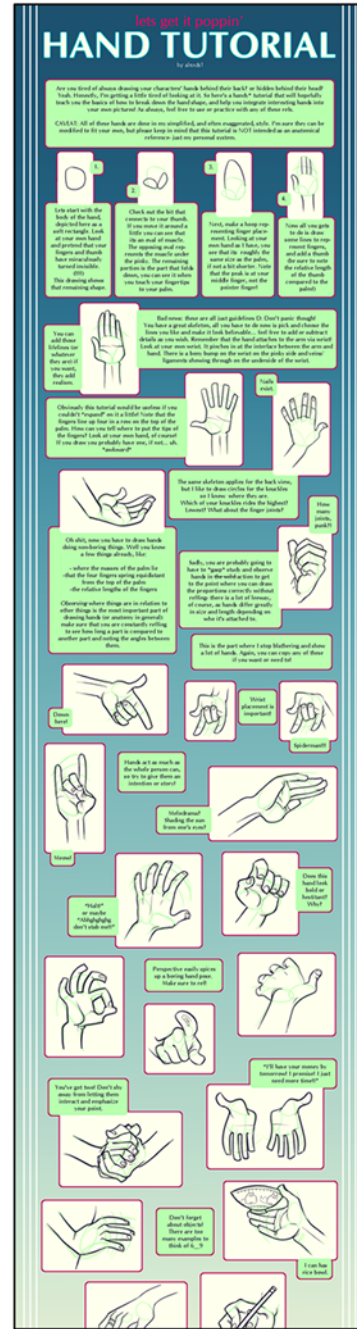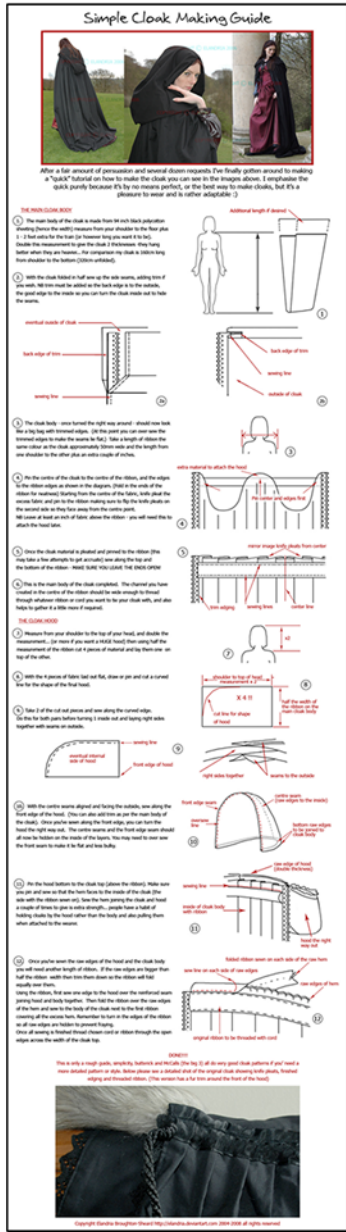
Figure 6.2: Examples of tutorials

From left to right: "Graduated Blur Effect—a Photoshop Tutorial" by rapidograph provides a step by step explanation for achieving a particular effect using Photoshop. "Cloak Making The Elandria Way" (or "Simple Cloak Making Guide") by Elandria includes instructions on how to cut, sew, and construct a cloak. "Hand Tutorial" by alexds1 is a guide to drawing hands in a variety of positions. Reprinted with permission from the artists.

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Figure 6.3: "The Tutor's Tutorial: Part 1" by Eilondril

In this first of two parts, Eilondril differentiates the broad category of tutorials into three types: guides, tutorials, and walkthroughs. Reprinted with permission.

People sought out tutorials. Both on and off deviantART I encountered many situations in which people asked each other for pointers to good tutorials. Sometimes in chatrooms or on forums, people would respond to requests for help on some topic by linking to a tutorial rather than providing their own explanation. Clubs and groups collected and curated tutorials in one place and presented such collections as valuable services they offered. Many of the most popular "collections" on deviantART were of tutorials.[56]

On the surface, then, tutorials as a broad category seemed quite valuable and uncontentious. They fit a vision of what is possible over the web in an era of "Learning 2.0" (Brown and Adler 2008): the creation of widely available and free resources for anyone to use, produced by those with presumed expertise in a particular area, in the context of a communal endeavor. Among deviantART members, however, I encountered a surprising ambivalence regarding their value. First, people's opinions reflected the persistent tension between self-promotion and improvement. They could be seen as more about boosting the exposure of their creators than actually helping their users. Second, there were differences of opinion over the legitimacy of using tutorials as part of one's practice and therefore being a serious artist. These differences exposed the persistence of Romantic ideals of learning and creativity and doubts about whether the use of tutorials lives up to these ideals.

6.3.1   Helping others, oneself, or both?

Tutorial makers described a variety of reasons for making and posting tutorials.[57] These included helping others, sharing knowledge for the benefit of "the community," enjoying the process of making them as an escape from their other projects, enjoying teaching, and cultivating one's reputation from them. These reasons related to the different ways that tutorial makers reflected upon their work and used deviantART.

In their discussion of "How-To's," Torrey et al. (2007) explain that they function as "both a broadcast of the author's expertise and a personal portfolio." I observed something similar on deviantART. For some people, posting a tutorial was as much a demonstration of expertise and a documentation of one's own improvement as a way of helping others improve. Talei, a teenage illustrator and stock photographer, had recently begun putting up video tutorials of her drawing process on YouTube. She told me that at one point she "never thought my work was good enough for making a tutorial" (interview). Yet, she had seen "drastic improvement." Posting tutorials, something she had "wanted to [do] for ages," was both a consequence of seeing that improvement and a demonstration of it to herself. For Talei and others, tutorials were self-induced forms of reflective practice (Schön 1987), the kind of practice that some forms of critique were intended to induce.

A tutorial was also a demonstration of expertise to others. Several tutorial creators told me that they made a tutorial specifically in response to requests from Watchers who had positioned the artist as expert.[58] The tutorial then became a performance of that particular form of expertise to

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[56] A "collection" was a feature of deviantART launched in 2008. They were bundles of deviations that could be commented upon, favourited, and circulated like other objects on the site.

[57] Similarly, Torrey et al. 2007 identified a number of reasons people in DIY communities posted How-To's.

[58] I also came across Artist's Comments on tutorials that included a line such as "In response to numerous

the group and possibly to a wider audience on deviantART. It also helped develop the relationship between the artist and her Watchers by showing a willingness to engage and share some part of their process.

Tutorials could become an integral aspect of one's reputation on deviantART. A popular tutorial, like any popular deviation, could help boost the perceived "popularity" of its creator. I interviewed Joumana Medlej, a professional illustrator who playfully referred to herself on her userpage as the "Self-proclaimed tutorial queen" and as the "Tutorial Maven." Several of her Watchers starting referring to her in this fashion after she won numerous Daily Deviations for her tutorials. She posted a tutorial soon after she first joined deviantART, retrospectively saying "why not post it, it may be helpful" (interview). But "next thing I know, I get a DD on it; was the jumpstart to my 'career.'":

> Dan: In what way?
>
> Medlej: I got attention and I discovered that people wanted good tutorials. I love teaching and suddenly I had an expectant audience, so I was more than happy to embark on this ongoing series.

Similarly, alexds1 had also won numerous DDs for her tutorials in her years on the site. "Helpful tutorials just seem to garner the most attention in these parts," she told me (interview). Yet, unlike Medlej, alexds1 expressed some ambivalence on whether or not this was how she wanted to be known and recognized as an artist.

Tutorials were positioned on the site as resources for use by others, yet the awareness for their power in boosting one's own popularity raised questions about the motivation and authenticity of the tutorial maker. When I posted some of my findings on tutorials to deviantART, one person responded that there was a genre of tutorials she referred to as "bad advice tutorials," produced by "people who make tutorials solely to become more popular, but they don't really know what they are doing yet."[59] Another person picked up on this point and noted that there "are so many crappy manga/anime tutorials here on deviantART," due in part to the following equation:

> Famous theme + getting friends&watchers easily + 'omg, how'd you do that?!!!!
> 111' a hundred times = new tutorial is made…

Therefore, while a tutorial's value may emerge from a relationship between Watchers and artists and might be wildly popular, questions of quality shaped how the category as a whole was valued.

6.3.2   The value of tutorials: resources for "learning on one's own?"

Aside from questions of the quality of any specific tutorial, I learned that some people challenged tutorials' value as resources for improvement. This was even the case among some who created them for others. Talei, for example, told me that if "it's useful to them [other people], then that's

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requests…" or "Because people have asked…"

[59] Some developed strategies for trying to figure out what were good and bad tutorials. They asked people they already trusted or respected (as in the case of several BAAU members who posted to the BAAU forums). Or as one woman explained to me, "Tutorials are tricky things. I usually go through as many as I can find on a topic to get a general consensus."

fantastic." She added, however, that she did not spend much time using other people's tutorials and would "rather not ask for help with something I could do myself…I prefer to figure things out on my own and explore."[60]

Doubts about the value of tutorials extended beyond an individual's preference for using them or not. Elandria, a Senior and stock photographer in her late 20s, told me that she enjoyed both using tutorials and making some of her own. However, objections to the category had been widespread:

> Y'know some people say "Oh tutorials are rubbish. You've got to learn your own way of doing things. It's a learning curve only you can do and you can't copy other people for the rest of your life because that's what a tutorial is, it's just copying how someone else works." … I know I've had quite heated debates in the past with different people on the intrinsic value…is it worth having tutorials and things. A while ago there was a big debate about having tutorials put in with the Resources section of the site or should it be somewhere else and that brought up a huge debate because it was like the ugly-duckling sister and nobody really wanted it.

For some, then, tutorials were copying other people and such copying was not the proper way to learn *art*. I interviewed NEN when one of her teenage Watchers told me that she had created a useful tutorial (see figure 6.4).

> NEN: I made a tutorial because I get questioned on my splatter technique so much. *laughs*
>
> Dan: why laugh?
>
> …
>
> NEN: I just think it's amusing that people are so afraid of making mistakes that they have to ask how someone throws paint on a piece of paper
>
> NEN: instead of going out and trying it for themselves.
>
> NEN: and don't get me wrong—i'm glad that the tutorial has helped people with the technique
>
> NEN: i just don't see the merit in doing something someone tells you to do instead of learning it and developing it on ones own
>
> …
>
> NEN: I figure if people kept asking for it, i may as well deliver.
>
> Dan: How do you think people should be learning?
>
> NEN: By experimenting on their own. That's how i've learned all my techniques. I think if someone tries to learn a technique or media on their own, there's more value—because then they know what will happen when they DO mess up, you know?

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[60] Clearly I cannot say with certainty how often Talei in her past had actually used tutorials and what benefit she derived from them. She may not even know herself. The point is that it was important to her—and/or important for her to tell me—that she had doubts about their value in relation to a different way of learning.
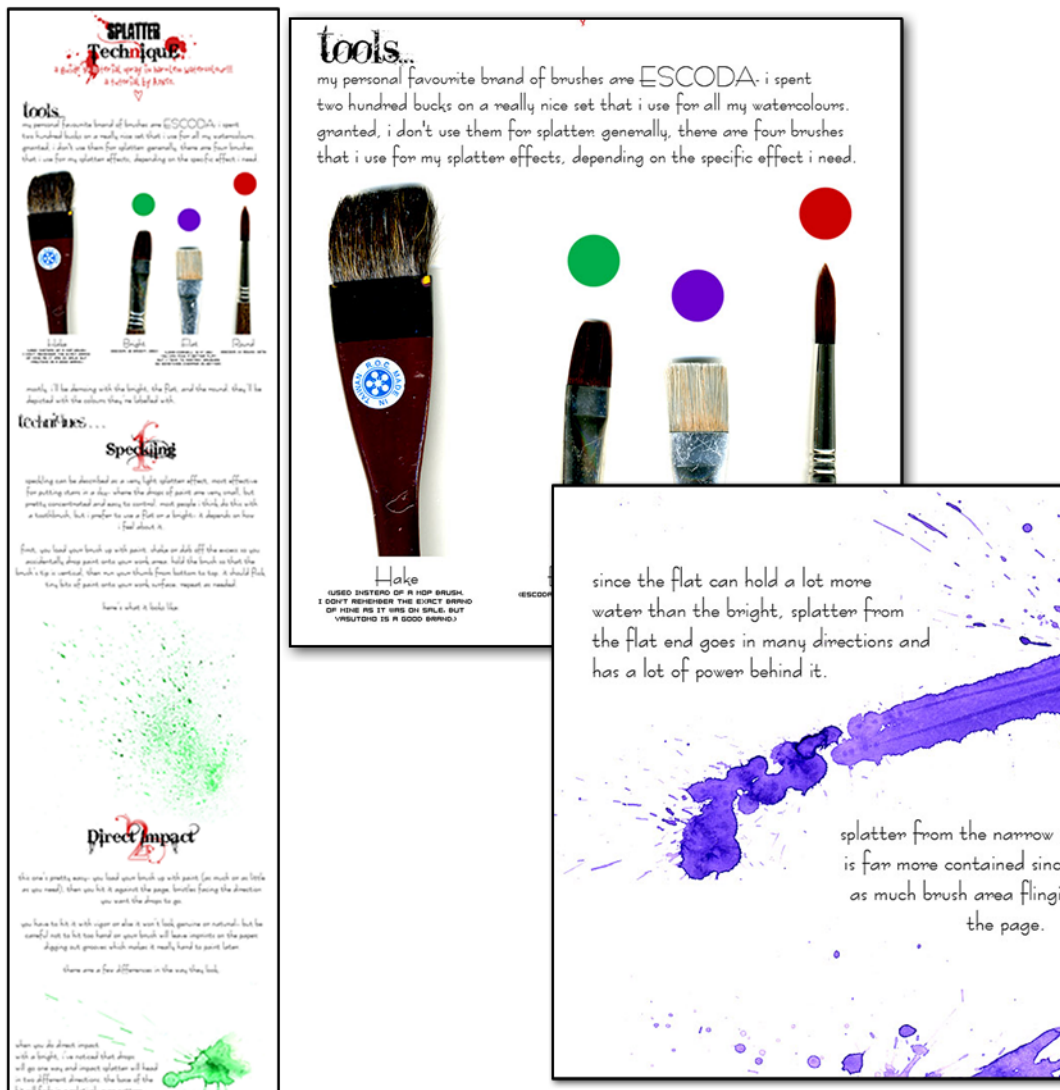
Figure 6.4: "Splatter Technique Tutorial" by NEN

In her "Splatter Technique Tutorial," NEN explains how she achieves various forms using watercolor. She shows which brushes she uses and explains how they differ from on another. Reprinted with permission.

Like Talei, NEN noted that she was happy if others found the tutorial useful but then questioned whether or not they *should* find it useful. Others even questioned the use of tutorials in their own practice. For example, Eilondril, who helped run a club devoted to Photoshop tutorials and had won a Daily Deviation for her "Tutor's Tutorial," discussed earlier, noted that at some point she had her own doubts about the value of tutorials:

> I do remember that I felt frustrated at some point because I felt I was 'dependent' on tutorials to make something 'good'—in my head, using tutorials was a bit like cheating.

She had since "converted" but noted that she had seen many people—on and off deviantART—who posted "'no tuts used' or 'no tutorials'" in the comments on their work. Promoting oneself as not using a tutorial could be a marker of legitimacy.

There are two issues running through these examples. One is (or is the performance of) a preferred style of learning. The other is (or is the performance of) a strong aversion to copying and imitation. What these in combination suggest to me is that for some, tutorials did not fit Romantic ideals of authorship in which authors are the sole originator of a work as inspired by their own individual genius. "Experimenting on one's own," "developing on one's own," difficulty "following by the book," the stated preference to "figure things out on my own," and the concerns over "cheating" are all Romantic offshoots of this view applied to learning.

These findings are unusual in light of other research and the widespread popularity of tutorials on deviantART (even by those who might otherwise have Romantic notions of art). Investigating other forms of "interest-driven" learning and participation online, Ito et al. (2010) identified the importance of a discourse of being self-taught (see also Lange 2007a). However, the participants in their studies did not see being self-taught as standing in contradiction with their discussion of all of the people and media that they used to teach themselves, including online tutorials and books.

Rather, being self-taught is voiced in opposition to instruction in classes or schools and, to some people, is a highly valued form of expertise. Consulting FAQs, finding websites, using tutorials, and forms of trial-and-error were all part of the discourse of being self-taught. Despite those resources being "socially-encoded" products (Lange 2007a), they were not seen as learning from others as they did not connote the kind of formal instruction more associated with other contexts. Similarly, in my study, many who described "teaching themselves" or "learning on their own," also discussed getting a wide variety of help from other people and using a wide variety of resources, including tutorials.

Hearing some people on deviantART employ this discourse was not particularly surprising. In some cases learning "on my own" or being "self-taught" was the same as saying that one had very little, if any, experience taking art classes or going to art school. It demonstrated independence and resourcefulness. What I found surprising was that tutorials, even when part of a seemingly self-motivated practice separate from classrooms or schools, could be positioned in opposition to being self-taught.

Even the same people who had achieved widespread recognition for their tutorials expressed some ambivalence about their value. Some people explicitly tried to position their tutorials to me as resources for learning on one's own. Medlej, for example, aspired to only create tutorials that were similar to what Eilondreil had classified as "guides" (see figure 6.5):

> I never tell people what to do in my tuts. I explain to them the way things are and why they are that way…. These are tools for the user to make their own, not one approach."[61]

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[61] Her more popular tutorials were guides to the human body, animals, hands, flexibility, and others. Examining several of her tutorials reveals that her words partially idealized her own practice, as at times she does seem to point to things that readers "should do." Nevertheless they are quite different than step-by-step instructions, and her idealization reflected what she hoped to achieve and the importance of the ideal.
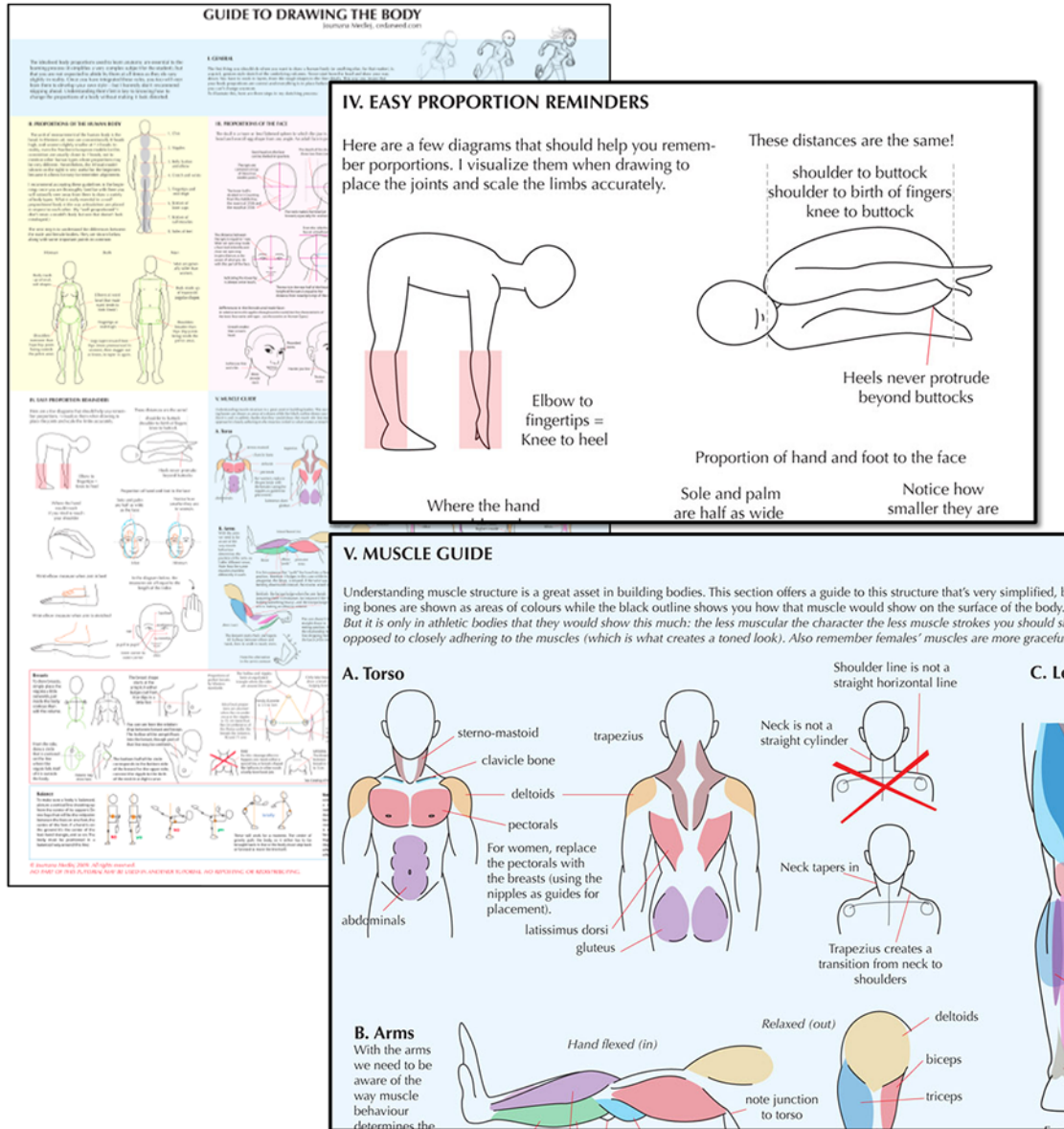
Figure 6.5: Guide to Drawing the Human Body by Joumana Medlej

In her "Guide to Drawing the Human Body," Joumana Medlej illustrates various aspects of the human body, such as major muscle groups, and demonstrates their proportions to one another. Reprinted with permission.

alexds1 explained to me that she valued seeing others' production processes and in being able to learn from their method. But, in her own tutorials, rather than walk through the whole process, she emphasized a thought process in trying to translate her own desire to figure out what she liked about others' work (see figure 6.6):

> I definitely try to incorporate self-questioning. … like asking yourself "what do I like/ hate about _____" be it your work or the work of others. In this context I mean it in the way of whether the hand/foot/expression you're drawing makes sense, and why or why not. … That's the way I've taught myself so I figure it will work on at

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least a few other people.

alexds1 articulated a strategy for teaching people to teach themselves, ways to help induce reflective practice in others, much as they might have been for herself. Despite her efforts, alexds1 added,

> In the end you really have to figure it out for yourself; hopefully my tutorials will give people a starting point on the line of questioning for that body part or whatever.

In this view, when created and used in the purportedly "right" ways, a tutorial supported and encouraged what people have to do to learn on their own and be independent.

Tutorials were both a challenge to learning on one's own—and thus a threat to being a serious artist—and resources for learning on one's own—and thus another way of demonstrating seriousness if used correctly. In either case, an ideal of self-directed learning can be part of the judgment of either their value or their lack thereof.

There are two relatively simple explanations for these two simultaneous contradictory positions. The first has to do with the broad categorization of kinds of document and subject matter lumped together as "tutorials." People may have different kinds of tutorials in mind when criticizing or praising tutorials. Here is where the Eilondril's aforementioned distinction between "guides," "walk-throughs," and "tutorials" is particularly helpful. It is possible that the label "tutorials" on deviantART covered too many different kinds of things. Second, also obscured by the label is the way people might use a tutorial. People find ways to draw lines between "copying" or even being instructed in a step-by-step fashion and some other modes of engaging with material.[62] These explanations, however, do not cover cases in which tutorial makers such as alexds1 or Medlej hesitate about the extent to which even their own tutorials can help others improve. In the next section, I offer a third explanation, returning to the theme of the ambiguities of infrastructure and new ways of thinking about art worlds and the web.

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[62] As Schön (1987:121) notes, "inhibitions against the *idea* of imitation are very much at odds with the almost universal *practice* of imitation" (original emphasis).
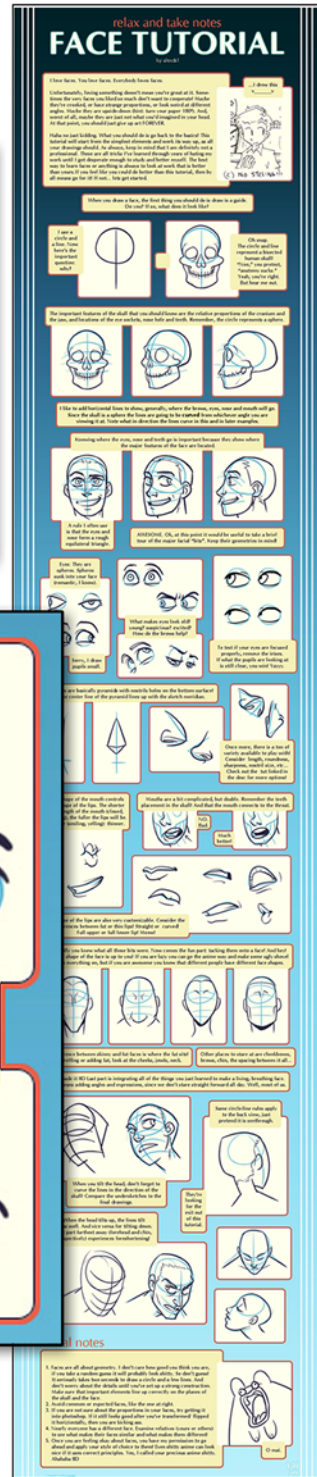
Figure 6.6: "Hand Tutorial" and "Face Tutorial" by alexds1

As in several of her other tutorials, in "Hand Tutorial" and "Face Tutorial," alexds1 shows a number of different views on a particular theme. She incorporates questions that ask viewers to analyze particular aspects of these views. Reprinted with permission.

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6.3.3   Tutorials: human or material resources?

Tutorials on deviantART fit between what seemed like clear distinctions in art worlds without the web. Becker (1982), as elaborated in chapter 3, distinguishes between material resources and human resources (or, "personnel") in the production of artworks. In his account, the difference between the two is more or less clear. The former categorize *things*. They include technologies, artifacts, and supplies an artist needs to produce the work: brushes, paint, canvases, computers, digital tablets, software, instruments, paper, and so forth. The latter categorize *people*: teachers, apprentices, models, suppliers of services, other artists, and others who provision material resources.

Some comparisons to other hypothetical situations clarify the argument. In face-to-face interaction a teacher or tutor is more easily seen as a human resource. Technologies and media that shift this interaction across space and time complicate the picture. When such teaching or instruction is translated into a book or other media object, that object is more easily positioned as a material resource.[63] But, such positioning is neither absolute nor necessarily clear in all situations. As products that may come out of an artist's own reflective practice or out of a direct engagement with her audiences, and with the potential accessibility of artists and Watchers to each other, tutorials can be positioned as *both* human or material resources. And, they can be viewed in either way by both their users and their creators.

Experiencing a tutorial as a material resource means finding it, using it, incorporating it into "one's own" practice while perhaps claiming to be learning on one's own in an auto-didactic manner. Experiencing a tutorial as a human resource involves viewing the tutorial maker as a master or tutor, another person from which one can learn, ask questions, and interact with directly.

If the goal is aspiring to a Romantic notion of learning on one's own, the value of a person providing instruction has to be deprecated. But, this raises problems with treating deviantART and its members as a "community" as opposed to a tool. As a community, deviantART featured tutorials emblematic of the ideals of artists helping each other. As a tool, deviantART featured tutorials used as products: forms of self-promotion for their makers and objects for their users. These two ways of thinking about deviantART co-existed.

6.4   Infrastructure for "Learning 2.0"?

When Brown and Adler (2008) emphasize "how" people learn rather than "what" they learn in their vision of Learning 2.0, they are referencing debates that contrast learning as the transformation of identity in practice (e.g. Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) and learning as the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Web 2.0, they argue, is ideally suited to their vision of "how." In this chapter, I argue that participants in deviantART debated whether the site did in fact support the "how" of learning art and focused on questions of skill and technique—rather than identity—in their considerations of learning. But, in doing so, many members contrasted learning and improving with marketing and self-promotion. Some members believed that these motivations were in

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[63] Creators and users of such material may be engaged "in conversation" with each other, other creators and users, and themselves, as Bakhtinian notions of heteroglossia and dialogism would suggest. But the experience of such conversations is qualitatively different than people communicating with each other, though not necessarily "opposite" (cf. Ong 1982).

opposition or at least were not equally worthy pursuits. The Critique Feature and tutorials implicitly suggested that they were compatible. Either way, the very definition of the dichotomy came with claims about the identity of an artist and implicated identity claims in concerns over learning and improving.

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, much of the excitement about the possibilities of Web 2.0 for learning stress the web's ostensible "informality" in contrast to schools' "formality." Scholars and practitioners looking at people's use of the web to learn outside of traditional educational institutions have framed such contexts as a form of "informal" learning. The notion of "informal education" dates back to at least the 19th century.[64] Then, as now, the typical connotation of "informality" was anything occurring outside of school. As leading scholars have noted, the term "informal learning" is problematic for many reasons (see Sefton-Green 2003, 2006, 2008, Straka 2004, Drotner 2008, Ito et al. 2010, Lave 2011). The term masks a number of related but distinct aspects of practice. One is the setting, its relationship to organizations and institutions, and whether those in turn come with educational missions. Another is how process is organized and who does the organizing. A third is the purpose or intent of the people seeking to learn and those trying to bestow a particular idea of what learning means. A fourth is the voluntary or compulsory nature of the situation and the relative agency between the actors involved. There may be others as well.[65]

Lave (2011) argues that anthropological and psychological research investigating learning outside of Western-style schooling helped contribute to the creation of the formal-informal dichotomy and a valorization of schooling. Much of the recent excitement about Learning 2.0 (and similar ideas) does the opposite. The valorization of Web 2.0 contributes to the valorization of the ostensibly "informal" nature of schooling and *vice versa*.

Numerous examples in this chapter demonstrate how staff and members of deviantART sought to formalize what it meant to learn art and to create formal structures in deviantART for learning and improving. They did so in a number of ways: the forceful elaboration of values and norms, the development of standards and social conventions, and changes to technology. In the process many people imported processes, standards, and conventions from school, professional environments, and other venues (so-called "formal" environments). As a context for learning, the web is *inherently* no more or less formal than these other contexts. The findings I have presented here add to the argument that the dichotomy itself needs to be transcended with other terms (Lave 2011).

"Peer-based learning" (Ito et al. 2010) avoids some of the conceptual baggage of the label "informal."[66] Ito et al. (2010) move the conversation beyond the informal-formal binary. Peer-

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[64] As revealed by cursory searches on Google Books and WorldCat. See also Straka (2004) for a short review of the term's history.

[65] Sefton-Green (2003:46) argues that "the key issue, is to disentangle suppositions about organisations (implying progression, development, intention and structure) from ideas relating to the social contexts (casual, formal or self-directed." In Sefton-Green 2004, he maps these along two orthogonal continua of informal to formal. In subsequent writing, he presents four key axes: "Location," "Process and organization," "Purposes," and "Content" (Sefton-Green 2008). Drotner (2008:15), on the other hand, argues that we would do better to focus on the "family resemblances" that make up notions of informal learning. What they all have in common, she argues, is "two key dimensions, namely the degree to which the context of learning is structured and planned and the degree to which the learner defines, or is aware of, the process going on as an act of learning."

[66] Ito et al.'s (2010) project, in which I was an researcher, started out titled "Kids' Informal Learning with Digital

based learning is meant to signal learning distinct from "institutionalized authorities" (Ito et al. 2010:22), including teachers in schools or parents in the home. By investigating a variety of settings, Ito et al. focus on the social dynamics of friendships, families, and other relationships that foster learning—as both identity transformation and knowledge construction—with digital media. What defines people as "peers" and learning as "peer learning" is "observing and communicating with people engaged in the same interests and in the same struggles for status and recognition that they are" (Ito et al. 2010:22).

Despite this improvement upon the informal-formal framing, my findings suggest that the notion of peer-based learning needs to be further unpacked. This study provides empirical material to think in new ways about the concept. First, the notion of "peers" could easily be interpreted to overlook the consequences of the struggles Ito et al. identify (even if this was not Ito et al.'s intent). Ito et al. (2010) document a variety of situations in which participants produce hierarchies and uneven power dynamics, even when outside of school (see also boyd 2008 and Ito 2010). On deviantART, hierarchies were in part defined by the organization (e.g. "roles" on the site and the status and authority associated with them) and in part defined by its members, based on numerous factors (such as the quality of their art, their feedback, and their tutorials; other recognized contributions to the site; or status in a broader art world). In other words, there is a continual dynamic of people deciding who are peers and who are not. This does not mean that people at different positions in a hierarchy do not learn from one another (they clearly do), but it does mean the persistence of differences in status and power, determined by multiple actors involved. Participants' efforts raise the possibility that differences in authority and hierarchy might be inevitable, perhaps even essential for a practice-based view of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Second, "peer-based" should not always be construed as "self-motivated" (Ito et al. 2010:22). Joining deviantART and using it were not activities foisted on its participants by families, teachers, schools, or the state. But, once involved, there was a whole range of actors involved in providing direction, sometimes forcefully. The examples I have presented demonstrate different ways that members and staff sought to control aspects of what it means to be an artist by trying to shape what it means to learn in the "correct" way and to do so as part of an "art community." In some cases, such direction is what participants looked for: they sought feedback, critique, and tutorials. At other times, they were confronted with attempts to control behavior. The discussion of tutorials further illustrates that what it even meant to be "self-directed" was something that members did not agree upon. It may have started out by referring to some activity not directed by a teacher or other authority figure but then extend further to non-school ways to "formalize" a particular process of context. The ideal of self-direction may be a continually moving target.

Third, while peer-based learning may at times be "loosely-organized" (Ito et al. 2010:22), it is not always so. Ito et al. specifically point to diversity in organization. As they suggest, it is an empirical question as to how organized or "loose" any particular set of practices are. They may be more or less organized than other arrangements. The important question, then, is who is doing the organizing and how are they doing it? The practices that constitute learning online can be quite organized: by the organizations that manage the setting in question (i.e. deviantART, Inc.), by other participants, or by technologies.

Media." The move away from this name during the project and in the final write-up did reflect a shift in thinking about "informal learning."

Finally, taken together, these refinements caution against an easy presumption that the participants under investigation are really engaged "in the same interests" and "the same struggles" simply because they all use the same site or even the same terms to describe their interests and practices. In this case the term "art" masked a variety of differences in practice (as it has for some time). The use of the term "community" further elided such differences. deviantART brought together multiple communities and worlds of artists engaged in different sets of interests and struggles and held them together with elements that could be made infrastructural to each. The attempt to mold deviantART into an art community and a social world based around a set of technologies and activities may have resulted in the creation of commonalities but did not mean that everyone using the site affiliated with it or each other in the same way.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I complicate claims made about the web as a context for learning and improving by examining how deviantART members and designers worked to transform various aspects of the site as infrastructural to various learning practices. These efforts, like those discussed in the previous chapter, reflected tensions in art worlds that changed with the introduction of new technologies and their uses. What I identified as an imperative to improve points to important general tensions within and among art worlds: the relationship between "arts" and "crafts" and the weight placed on technical virtuosity. One of the outcomes of the development of a Romantic view of art was the distinction between art and craft. Those who united various "arts" as "Art" did so by emphasizing originality, uniqueness, expression, and genius, and also by divorcing "artistic" activity from mechanical reproduction, commercialism, utility, and function (see chapter 3). In his discussion of "art worlds" and "craft worlds," Becker (1982:272-299) describes the amorphous boundaries between the two. With respect to craft worlds, Becker describes the "artist-craftsmen" who add beauty and questions of "artistic merit" to the criteria and standards of function and virtuosity. With respect to art worlds, he discusses "academic art" and "commercial art" as two sub-worlds that adhere to well-established conventions, serving a client-defined purpose (sometimes functional), and exhibiting great technical virtuosity as important (and some challenge their status as "art").

The emphasis on virtuosity and technical skill at the ambiguous boundaries of these worlds are a challenge to Romantic notions of art. They are made manifest in the language of improvement. Improvement implies an assumption of an end goal and art as a teleological endeavor. But, the only end-goal offered was to become "better artists" (or reaching one's "potential"). Participants in deviantART seemed to understand that what this might mean was unresolvable, yet they repeatedly made claims about the purpose of various practices (critique), resources (tutorials), and uses of the site that implied an unifying assumption of what "art" was about. As infrastructure designed to serve as much of the "vertical" of art as possible (as Sotira put it to me, see chapter 2), deviantART became the manifestation of these contradictions.

Theoretical discussions of infrastructure point to its inherent ambiguity (see chapter 3). In this chapter I have demonstrated the ambiguity of infrastructure in practice. In the case of feedback I discussed efforts to overcome various ambiguities with notions of "critique." Members attempted to create conventions for this practice. deviantART, Inc. provided the Critique Feature as an additional solution and in doing so surfaced many of the ambiguities and helped to make them

explicit. It transformed feedback into a product that came with a price and material benefits through exposure and self-promotion. Thus, the particular implementation of the feature raised further questions about the standards and the purposes of critique and its relationship to criticism.

Tutorials were ambiguous resources. Being both social and material, they sat between two contrasting ideals of learning: learning on one's own versus learning as part of a community of people trying to help one another. Whether tutorials fit either of these ideals was also in tension. Members positioned them as resources of self-directed learning or as antithetical to this notion.

The implication of these ambiguities is broader than just conversations about learning and improvement. The Internet can be thought of as both culture and artifact (Hine 2000). Although this ambiguity raises numerous methodological and ethical questions for Internet scholars, what I have argued here is that it presents challenges for Internet users and producers as well. It is crucial in shaping the continued development of the web as infrastructure. Looking at "critique" and tutorials side-by-side has pointed to tensions in the creation of "mine" and "other." Members struggled with ways of giving and receiving help in various forms so that they could simultaneously learn from others (the web as culture) and on their own (the web as artifact). The Critique Feature helped transform or affirm feedback between people as products. Tutorials, I have argued, existed as products that could be thought of as corresponding to either human or material resources. deviantART provided the means by which members tried to work out the legitimacy of either combining or separating "yours" and "mine." Ethical questions of how to treat other artists and their work—as people? as "resources"?—come to the fore in crafting deviantART (and the web) as infrastructure for sharing and controlling the distribution of artwork.

Sharing, theft, and deviantART's Share Wars

> Woe to you! You thieves and imitators of other people's labour and talents. Beware of laying your audacious hand on this our work.
> —Albrecht Dürer, on the title page of *Life of the Virgin*, 1511

> Since its inception, the entire premise of the Internet centered on file sharing. Many people don't realize that fact, but if you think about it you realize that the Internet has always existed to promote the sharing of information.
> —Angelo Sotira, "Step 1: What is Gnutella?," 2001[1]

In August 2009 a new set of features appeared on deviantART that made it easier for anyone coming across a deviation to show it to others. Each deviation page now included several items. First, there was a text field that contained a bit of HTML and CSS code that made it easier for people to "embed" the image on another site.[2] There were also small buttons with the logos of several other websites; clicking these buttons facilitated the placement of links to and thumbnails of the deviations on those other sites. Finally, deviantART included an additional link to the deviation that was a shorter alternative URL to the deviation page.

In many ways, these "Share Tools" (as they came to be called) were unremarkable. The development of a variety of web interfaces has helped produce the notion that the web and the Internet are by nature infrastructure for sharing. Similar interfaces to deviantART's new Share Tools had emerged over the previous decade and were widely used by many websites to facilitate the spreading of media content over the web.[3] Discursively framing this activity as "sharing" has featured in much of the academic and vernacular discourse about the web. It might have seemed that by August 2009, when deviantART's Share Tools launched, they would be easily accepted as extensions of conventional and standard practice.

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[1] http://www.boycott-riaa.com/article/4210, December 2, 1001, last accessed September 28, 2010

[2] HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) is the markup language that structures web page content. CSS (Cascading Styles Sheets) is used to style and format that structure.

[3] In fact, several had previously appeared on deviantART before, but somewhat differently.

Within days of the launch of the new Share Tools, however, widespread conflict had broken out about these features. Over the next six weeks, various camps emerged. Some people applauded deviantART's staff for providing tools that made it easier for their work to be seen on other sites. Others advocated what they saw as small changes, such as making the new tools optional or changing the way they were presented to viewers. Some people were conciliatory in their approach. Others directed a great deal of hostility at deviantART's staff. Many people tried to protest through deviantART's forums, news articles, and journals. Eventually, there were dozens of stories of members either leaving deviantART entirely or hiding their work until staff made changes.[4]

People who objected did so on various grounds. Some were upset by what they perceived to be a loss of control. Others saw the features as a threat to the integrity of deviantART as its own space, separate from the rest of the web. There were particularly vocal arguments that with these features, deviantART was promoting "art theft."

Many other users rushed to the defense of the features and deviantART's staff. Some went on the attack against those protesting. They ridiculed objections and dismissed the validity of complaints, most vehemently the accusation that deviantART had promoted theft and had taken control away from its members. The conflict only subsided when the site's staff compromised and changed the features in a way that placated many of the people objecting.

In this chapter, I use the events of these "Share Wars"—as one member dubbed them—to further advance several main themes of this dissertation. I challenge the assertions that a new generation of creators who have grown up with digital media have upended old notions of ownership, property, and rights in their work. Members encountered and incorporated into their practice various ideas about "art theft" and ownership that reflected the persistence of Romantic views of art and the moral grounds upon which they were based. This persistence through the first decade of the 21st century, despite claims and hopes to the contrary, works against the technological and generational determinism and the broad claims of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus introduced in chapter 1.

In addition, I demonstrate how these historically shaped practices of authorship as tied to ownership help to *produce* the contemporary Internet and web, rather than merely existing in spite of these new platforms. Throughout this chapter, I point to the ways in which deviantART's members appropriated various features of the site to influence the norms and practices of the site and to assert the proper ways to use deviantART and the web. At the same time, the Share Wars also illustrate how conflicts and differences among members lead to infrastructures that may resolve them, if only temporarily, in ways that support multiple interpretations and ideological positions but do not necessarily resolve the underlying tensions. Technology comes with historical baggage that matters for contemporary practice (Johns 2009).

Before delving into these details and consequences of the Share Wars, I establish the context for the events that unfolded. In the next section I describe the broader positioning of the web and the Internet as infrastructure for sharing. Then, I describe and analyze the problem of art theft on deviantART. I argue that some saw art theft as a threat because they saw it as an attack on their identities as artists and creative practitioners. Following this discussion of art theft, I discuss some of the ways that members of deviantART sought to address the threat and control the circulation of their work. Finally, I return to the Share Wars. The Share Wars help to illustrate fundamental

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[4] deviantART had a "storage" function that let members upload work but not display it.

problems in the labeling of "sharing" as infrastructural practice. I show how they surfaced deep tensions between the desire to have one's work seen by others, as illustrated in chapter 5, and to simultaneously control the circulation of that work. The web transformed this long-standing tension in creative practice into a new one between sharing and theft. The Share Wars revealed that features and uses of the web that some see as fundamental to how the Internet and web work are contingent to practice. The conflict concerned shifting positions around three related issues of "working": how the new features worked, how the Internet generally worked, and, in-between, how deviantART worked. The compromises in the end supported multiple sides of the debates and reproduced the web as infrastructure balancing multiple views of art and the web.

7.1   "Sharing" on the web

Over the past decade, various interfaces on the web have been developed and widely deployed to facilitate the distribution of content online by readers, viewers, and users. Every article on *The New York Times* website, for example, exposes "embed" code, a fairly typical feature of content sites.[5] YouTube and other sites earlier in the decade. This HTML and CSS code allowed people to embed a piece of media into a social network site profile, blog, or website. The media hosted on one site is viewable on another.[6] Another important technical development over the previous decade was the use of Application Programming Interfaces, or API's, as ways of allowing developers and sites to access and use data and functionality provided by other websites (such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter).[7] On many websites (again, such as *The New York Times*) buttons similar to the ones that appeared on deviantART facilitated the inclusion of a link to an article or a thumbnail of content on a post to one of those other sites. A final important technical development consisted of services that shortened URLs so that they would be easier to include in other applications such as email, Facebook status messages, and services such as Twitter.[8]

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[5] Several years earlier, YouTube was one of the sites that popularized the exposure of a bit of HTML code that allowed others to spread these videos by embedding them in other sites, including blogs and other social network sites. In previous work, I argued that the embedding of content such as videos, photographs, images, and games was an important socio-technical practice of teenagers in their construction of their MySpace profiles and their use of them to represent themselves and communicate with each other (Perkel 2008). The ability to embed YouTube content into MySpace profiles—initially taking advantage of a bug in the MySpace user interface—may have helped propel YouTube's popularity in the first years after its launch (see Thomas, Deepak and Vineet Buch, "YouTube Case Study: Widget Marketing Comes of Age," *Startup Review*, March 18, 2007, http://www.startup-review.com/blog/youtube-case-study-widget-marketing-comes-of-age.php, last retrieved on November 20, 2011). Regarding the bug that allowed MySpace users to customize their pages by pasting HTML and CSS code, including YouTube videos' embed tags, see Carr, David, "User Customization: Too Much of a Good Thing?" *Baseline Magazine*, January 16, 2007, http://www.baselinemag.com/c/a/Projects-Networks-and-Storage/User-Customization-Too-Much-of-a-Good-Thing/, last accessed November 20, 2011.

[6] "Embedding" operates on the principle of "transclusion," in which a link is used to include one document within another rather. Images on the web work in such a manner (the image is actually at a different URL than the page itself, but this is not obvious). Since very early versions of HTML, page designers have been able to transclude images on pages that are hosted elsewhere.

[7] One of the early prominent uses of APIs that popularized them was Google's exposure of the Google Maps API, allowing designers and developers to create sites that relied on maps without having to create or purchase mapping software. Companies that develop applications for Facebook rely on access to various Facebook APIs.

[8] Early URL shortening services included tinyurl.com, which launched in the early 2000s (the Internet Archive's first

On many sites embed code, buttons for other sites, and shortened URLs sat alongside earlier features that made it easy for people to send links in emails or include them in blogs, visually suggesting an association among them.[9] These features can be considered the technical aspects of a complex infrastructure for sharing that seems to have become transparent, standardized, and conventionalized, from both a user-interface and a development perspective. These features rely on a range of institutional and technical preconditions, or as Star and Ruhleder (1996) put it, an already existing installed base.[10]

Co-evolving with these technical features on the web has been a discourse that posits the Internet and web as a medium for sharing. This discourse is evident in language on websites that urges readers of content to "share" articles just as they would share their thoughts and feelings via Twitter or Facebook.[11] Academics have framed content distribution on the web in similar ways. Those examining the rapid changes to music distribution at the turn of the 21st century due to consumers' use of peer-to-peer software framed the exchange of music using the pre-existing technical language of *file sharing*.[12] Lessig (2008) describes much of the activity online as a part of a "sharing economy," in which something other than money mediates the exchange of goods and resources (see also Shirky 2010). He argues that many Internet applications, even the very "code that built the Net," emerged from sharing economies, such as those that supported the development of free software and various open source movements (Lessig 2008:162-172). These sharing economies have persisted, Lessig argues, despite the commercialization of the web, even thriving in various hybrid forms. As described in chapter 1, the emphasis on noncommercial distribution is a cornerstone of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus. Benkler (2004, 2006) describes a model of the "social production" of goods that contrasts with their market-based production in which the sharing of material resources is a central aspect.[13] "Sharing information," argues Shirky (2008), is

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crawl of tinyurl.com was in 2002). A prominent service, as of this writing, is bit.ly. This service not only facilitated "sharing" of links; it also offered tools for people who owned the URLs to track these links.

[9] Also known as "permalinks," another feature developed in the early party of the decade that accompanied the practice of blogging.

[10] For example, consider the practices of copying, pasting, and embedding media. On the side of "copy" there is the rapidly falling costs of storing media, new formats for compressing and streaming media, the de facto standardization of media types and plug-ins for displaying that media, and, of course, the standardization of "copying" or "cutting" as a routine action in the use of word processing and the composing of text for other uses. On the side of "paste" there is the standardization of the routine of "pasting" and then the use of services that provide web forms for the direct "writing" of text or the "surface" for pasting. Rather than having to upload files of content, by the middle of the decade many of the standard websites simply provided space to type, sometimes allowing HTML, though not always. Of course, the language of "copy," "cut," and "paste" evoke even earlier media. With respect to the institutional elements of the "installed base" (Star and Ruhleder 1996) contemporary features of the web rely on court rulings that accepted various forms of "deep linking" and the use of "thumbnails" (e.g. Kelly v. Arriba Soft Corp.)

[11] Many of the artists I spoke with described sharing their work on the web in ways that were similar to sharing their work with other people by different means.

[12] Such framing, as the legal scholar Jessica Litman notes, in turn helped provide some of the rhetorical force to defend these practices, just as framing such practices as "piracy" or "stealing" helps the RIAA and others condemn and seek to clamp down on them (see Litman 2004, particularly 22-29 and footnote 94). The technology and rhetoric of file sharing is another antecedent of sharing via the web.

[13] See particularly chapters 3 and 4 of Benkler 2006.

the foundation of community and collective action. The web, he continues, has transformed pre-existing sharing practices to such a great degree that sharing has also become different in kind.

In earlier writing Lessig (1999) asserted that "code is law," suggesting that digital code could subvert or support legislative code and warning that the web could be used equally for control by corporations and for creativity by users. Based on this formulation, his more recent work sets a normative agenda for policy and law that tries to strike a different balance between various interests.[14] As a guest of honor at the 2008 Free Culture Conference (see chapter 1), Lessig supported his recent agenda by enlisting a discourse about young peoples' use of web. He explained that he had dedicated his then-forthcoming book *Remix* (Lessig 2008) to Jack Valenti, former head of the Motion Pictures Association of America, who had long been an advocate for strong copyright protection, because of Valenti's depiction of kids as "terrorists" and "law-breakers."[15] This portrait of youth raised a question that helped motivate *Remix*: "How are we going to raise a generation to respect the law if they [kids] are going to break the law?" Lessig asked the audience (fieldnotes).

This question echoed concerns Lessig had raised to an audience at the Technology Entertainment and Design Conference (TED) in 2007:

> These tools of creativity have become tools of speech. It is a literacy for this generation. This is how our kids speak. It is how our kids think; it is what your kids are as they increasingly understand digital technologies and their relationship to themselves. …
>
> It is technology that has made them ["our kids"] different, and as we see what this technology can do, we need to recognize you can't kill the instinct the technology produces; we can only criminalize it. We can't stop our kids from using it; we can only drive it underground. We can't make our kids passive again; we can only make them, quote, "pirates." And is that good? We live in this weird time, it's kind of [an] age of prohibitions, where in many areas of our life, we live life constantly against the law. Ordinary people live life against the law, and that's what I—we— are doing to our kids. They live life knowing they live it against the law. That realization is extraordinarily corrosive, extraordinarily corrupting. (Lessig 2007)[16]

In other words, new technologies have produced an "instinct" in today's youth that in turn reinforces a way of using technologies to support creativity, uses that are thoroughly conventionalized and standard, perhaps even a part of a youth *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). This sentiment echoes the technological and generational determinism found in those who most strongly support a digital natives thesis (see chapter 1).

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[14] Lessig here reinforces creativity's warmly persuasive character in contemporary discourse and artificially divorces control from creative practice. Creativity and control are not natural dichotomies that should necessarily require balancing.

[15] The book was also dedicated to legal historian Lyman Ray Patterson, whose historiography of copyright law undermines Valenti's stance (Patterson 1968).

[16] The transcription here comes from TED's posted transcript of the talk (See Lessig, Lawrence, "Laws that Choke Creativity," *TED*, March, 2007, http://www.ted.com/talks/larry_lessig_says_the_law_is_strangling_creativity.html, last accessed November 20, 2011).

In the same vein, Palfrey and Gasser (2008:132) write that "Creativity is the upside of this brave new world of digital media. … The most creative are interacting with news, works of entertainment, and other information that were unimaginable a few years ago." However, the "downside is law-breaking":

> The vast majority of Digital Natives are currently breaking copyright laws on a regular basis… Many Digital Natives know that what they are doing is illegal; others are not so sure. Either way, the practice is pervasive…an entire generation is thwarting copyright laws as they grow up…. (Palfrey and Gasser 2008:132)

While "the practice" Palfrey and Gasser refer to here is the illegal viewing and downloading of media content, this activity is seen as a part of a broader set of practices, the "most creative" of which are forms of interaction and production (see also Palfrey and Gasser 2011).[17] In making this argument, Palfrey and Gasser posit that today's young media makers are immersed in "norms of sharing" that widely ignore copyright law and are themselves new (2008:138).

The claims I have described here are a generationally deterministic version of the position of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus. A new generation of content creators enabled by—even determined by—new technologies are introducing forms of creativity that are paradoxically both new and old. They are new in that they challenge the old and outmoded Romantic notions of creativity. They are old in that they are extensions of the amateur and folk culture that apparently preceded this notion of creativity and have persisted. That this new digital generation threatens the legal regimes of property is rarely questioned by those who celebrate it or those who fear it.

Yet, I learned in the course of my fieldwork that many young creators are in fact very worried about threats to what they see as their property. While the web does make it possible for these artists to get noticed and find audiences, it also comes with the possibility that work will become "stolen" and their very identities as artists will become undermined. In addition to the infrastructure for sharing the web is an infrastructure of theft.

7.2   The Art of Theft

Throughout my fieldwork, "art theft" came up repeatedly on the site, in interviews, and in conversations at meet-ups and conventions. At the time I interviewed her, Crow, a teenage illustrator, had been following the aftermath of an accusation of theft that a popular artist on deviantART, one whom she admired, had made against the Disney Corporation:

> [Theft] is definitely a very hot topic. Like, people talk about it all the time. Almost every popular artist, even some of the unpopular artists, have had their art stolen a few times. Like, every [popular] artist that I watch on deviantART … every single one of them has had their work stolen and used by someone else. I watch a total of like about 200 people. … I'd say at least … I've seen at least like 50 big artists on deviantART have had their artwork stolen, and that's just artists that I know of. (interview)

---

[17] This emphasis on file sharing, and music in particular, is symptomatic of a tendency to use examples from that domain to frame copyright discussions (see for example Palfrey et al. 2009, Patry 2009).

Her language and tone reflected a sense or exasperation and urgency. Being a victim of theft could happen to anyone.

Sharon, another teenager, had been such a victim. She had stopped posting her photography to deviantART because she had seen her pictures "ripped…as in stolen" and posted on other sites. She had also seen other people reuse her work and the work of others to make other things, such as icons, banners for websites, backgrounds on MySpace profiles, commercially published book-covers, and even the packaging for an adult DVD.[18] To Sharon, all of these reuses of her work were forms of theft.

Participants accepted that "art theft" was something that came with being an artist: a threat to address, discuss, fight off, and warn others about.

> Chris Perguidi: Um, I think that's almost like a daily dramatic thing on deviantART. Someone's always accusing someone else of stealing their art or vice versa. Or being accused. It's almost—almost a part of deviantART, to be accused or have accused somebody.
>
> Dan: Is that true of other sites too? Or just deviantART?
>
> Chris Perguidi: Um, I think it's on all the sites too. I think it's just always happening.

But, while theft was a broad concern, there were many differences of opinion as to what actions were tantamount to theft. In this section, I discuss the dimensions that helped demarcate whether an act constituted "theft," discuss deviantART's official policy on the position, and analyze the moral concerns in play.

I frame this discussion with an exchange between a well-known comic artist on the site and someone who had stumbled upon her userpage. An illustrator who went by spacecoyote was "e-famous" (as *The Toronto Star* put it) because of an illustration titled *The Simpsonzu* (see figure 7.1).[19] The work hit the front page of deviantART and soon after was circulating around the web thanks to bloggers and content aggregators such as Digg. Soon after, both Bongo Comics, the

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[18] During the interview, Sharon sent me a link to a screenshot someone had posted as evidence of a book whose cover was a modification of a photograph the artist had taken. I cannot be certain which DVD cover she was referring to. However, the BBC ran a story about a teenage British photographer who, at 17, had been told that a self-portrait she had taken at 14 had been used on a cover for an adult DVD (See "Teenager sues over porn picture," *BBC News*, August 13, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/staffordshire/6943847.stm, last accessed November 20, 2011). The 17-year-old had filed a suit against the production company. The *Times (London)* and the *Sunday Mercury* reported on the story as well. By then, it appeared to have been well known on deviantART. See Malvern, Jack, "Teenager sues over childhood photo that appeared on pornographic DVD," *The Times (London)*, August 15, 2007; and Varma, Anuji, "Teen sues over porn film pic," *Sunday Mercury*, August 12, 2007.

[19] She had already been on deviant for four years and had a large group of Watchers and commissioners thanks to her earlier work as a web comic. Spacecoyote claimed that she posted *The Simpsonzu* to "scare her friends." This account is according to *The Toronto Star*, which might have been getting its information from the Artist's Comments on the work's deviation page. See Mudhar, Raju, "Artist hits a home run with Marge makeover," *Toronto Star*, January 20, 2007.

comics studio of Simpsons creator Matt Groenig, and Fox Studios, the television network that produces the series, contacted spacecoyote to hire her for various projects.[20]

Figure 7.1: *The Simpsonzu* by spacecoyote

The Simpsonzu, a depiction of the cast of characters from *The Simpsons* in anime/manga style, helped propel spacecoyote to fame on deviantART and launch her professional career. Reprinted with permission.

Less than a month after her rapid rise to fame, she posted a journal with the title "my thoughts on art theft." "I've been wanting to post something like this in my journal," she began her entry, "but hesitated because I didn't want to cause any unwanted drama, but it needs to be said at least once."

She then linked to a conversation that had taken place on her userpage the previous day. Someone had left a comment that read,

> YOUR THAT PERSON THAT I SAW IN THE
> NEWSPAPER!!! ... oh wait ... I scaned the picture you did
> of the Simposons and I sometimes use it as a personal display picture ... so if I
> counitue to use it that's stealing ... Mmm

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[20] This is an example of the kind of "bubbling up" discussed in chapter 5. News of her commercial success came to the attention of deviantART staff, one of whom subsequently posted an article to the site about her achievements. According to spacecoyote's journal, this off-site attention, coupled with new attention on deviantART, led to a dramatic increase in her popularity on the site. *The Simpsonzu* is one of the most-viewed deviations on the site, with nearly four million views. It was also selected as one of ten "noteworthy deviations" in the history of the site as deviantART anticipated its 100-millionth deviation towards the end of 2009.

Besides expressing excitement and explaining a use of the work, the comment seems to also be a request for permission, or at least sanction, to continue to use the now well-known picture in a way that might be considered "stealing."

The comment elicited a lengthy reply from spacecoyote that articulated her views on art theft (which she then summarized in her journal entry the next day):

> No, that is not stealing, at all.
>
> Making icons or sigs [signatures] of my art is not stealing.
>
> Posting my art on a forum or blog is not stealing.
>
> Printing out my art and posting it up in your wall is not stealing.
>
> Publishing my art in a newspaper or magazine without asking me, when it's for an article ABOUT my art, is not stealing.
>
> I wish people would stop thinking everything is "art theft." I've gotten numerous "art theft" reports and none of them have been actual stealing.
>
> Stealing is when someone makes profit from my art without permission, or claims to have drawn my picture, or sneaks into my room at night and swipes the hard copies, and that's IT. This is not directed at you; it's something I've been wanting to say for a long time.

In the journal entry the next day, spacecoyote reiterated several of these main points, but added a caveat:

> This is just MY opinion. There is no set definition as to what "art theft" is. Many other artists may consider what I don't consider art theft to be art theft, but I'm not them. When it comes to MY art, go ahead and make icons/wallpapers/forum sigs/layouts/RP characters [role-playing characters]/whatever of it without asking me because I really, truly don't care. :) Credit would be nice, yes, but as long as you don't say "I drew this" when someone asks where the art came from, it's no big deal.
>
> If someone is claiming to have done something I drew, directly tracing/copying my art without credit, or is making profit from my art, then please inform me of it, because THAT, to me, is stealing.

There are three points of interest here. It is important that spacecoyote felt the need to say anything at all. spacecoyote's list of uses that did not require permission and those that might be problematic align almost exactly with the values of "free culture" in contrast to "permission culture" (Lessig 2004).[21] Her detailed itemization of particular uses and her emphasis on her views as "something I've been wanting to say for a long time" reveals her impression that the general sentiment on the site was different from her own; she suspected that many on deviantART held

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[21] Lessig is clear that he does not see all re-uses as acceptable. Some, he argues, should be considered infringing, particularly when someone re-uses another's content to make money from another's efforts without adequate compensation (see Lessig 2008:253-273). Furthermore, he is especially concerned with "Permission Culture" in which all uses require explicit permission (Lessig 2004).

other views (and, as will be clear, views that were less permissive).[22] It could be that *The Simpsonzu*'s status as "fan art," work based on copyrighted characters, shaped her permissive stance here. But, as I discuss further below, I did not find that people who created fan art were particularly permissive when it came to reuse of work.

Still, spacecoyote received considerable support in the comments that followed, agreeing with her stance.[23] But some people were ambivalent, claiming to agree with her in principle, yet still wondering if people should still always ask for permission and give credit. Clearly there is a difference between her position and Sharon's, noted above.[24]

Differences in definitions of theft raises a second point. In her original comment, spacecoyote wrote definitively, "No, that is not stealing, at all." But in her journal she retreated from an absolute position. Instead, she noted that this was all just her own opinion and that there was no "set definition as to what 'art theft' is." She then elaborated what was theft to her and what kinds of expectations she had of people wanting to using her work, depending on what they did with it. This emphasis on her "own opinions" reinforced a sense that artists, whom she notes may differ in their definitions, have the right to set their own terms. I'll return to this point below.

Before I do so, however, I want to draw attention to a final point. In the journal entry and comments, spacecoyote laid out some of the central dimensions by which artists on deviantART defined theft: permission, credit, and the question of money. I examine each of those in turn.

7.2.1   Requiring Permission

Spacecoyote's comments implied that many other members of deviantART did require permission or that many people felt they had to ask for it. One commenter responded that he had been accused of theft several times for referencing others' pictures—basing some part of his work on someone else's—and he now always asked permission. One woman thought that spacecoyote's concept of theft was "pretty accurate," yet also said that she was "pissed" when her own work had "ended up on two blog sites w/o permission."[25] The ambivalence is clear: spacecoyote may have been right that such actions were not *theft*, but the commenter still felt she had a right to be angry.

Like spacecoyote and some of these commenters, I felt that the dominant position on deviantART was that for most uses of someone else's work, permission should be sought. As noted earlier, Sharon told me that *any* use of her work without her permission was stealing. Shelly put it simply to me:

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[22] It could be that *The Simpsonzu*'s status as "fan art," work based on copyrighted characters, shaped her permissive stance here. But, as I develop in the next section, I did not find that artists who created fan art were particularly permissive when it came to reuse of work.

[23] One person noted, "OMG, common sense. So rare…and nice to see." Another member claimed that spacecoyote's definition now informed his: "now I know what's 'art theft'."

[24] The reusing and remixing of Sharon's work in different forms—making icons, wall papers, role playing characters, and signatures and reposting to other sites—were uses that she believed were theft but that spacecoyote found perfectly acceptable. This divergence draws attention to the difference among deviantART members regarding what constitutes theft.

[25] She also noted that she "could let that go since they didn't take credit for it," invoking the link between permission and credit. I return to questions of credit below.

I define art theft as reproducing a work without permission. That could include modifying a work and reposting it as an original without the artist's permission, posting a work as your own work, posting a work without asking permission (even if you don't claim it as your own), etc. (interview)[26]

In terms of restrictiveness, Sharon's and Shelly's positions were among the most extreme I encountered among members. Yet, site policy and recommendations—which I analyze in more detail below—supported this position. The FAQ for the site says that members have to have "written permission from the proper and legal owner of any work which you wish to use," such as other people's "artwork or photographs…screenshots, official artwork from a video game, scans from an art book…"[27]

Other people who were just as concerned about permission were not as willing to equate with theft any use without permission. Aaron described a situation in which he wanted to use someone's work posted to deviantART in a school project and posted a note on deviantART requesting permission.

Aaron: well, they didn't respond for like 4 months and in the mean time i used the icons anyways

Aaron: technically it is legal under fair use i think

Aaron: becuase i wasn't using for profit

Aaron: but letting the artist know and asking permission is a courtesy

Aaron: and i cited it and such

Dan: did the person ever get back to you?

Aaron: yes, they said it was okay

Dan: what makes you say it's a courtesy, even though you see it as fair use?

Aaron: Usually people like to know if you are going to re-purpose their work

Aaron: i know i would like to be notified (interview)

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[26] Shelly was a longtime member, a Senior on deviantART, and a recipient of multiple Daily Deviations. She was a college student in art school.

[27] From FAQ 306, "#306, "Does 'Crediting' let me use whatever I want?": "You must obtain written permission from the proper and legal owner of any work which you wish to use, credit alone does not replace this requirement. Official written permission or license is required whenever you wish to use artwork or photographs created by someone else; it is also required if you wish to use screenshots, official artwork from a video game, scans from an art book, or any other source material which is considered the legal property of another person. Permission is still required even if you have planned to manipulate, color over, blend the original with other images, or otherwise digitally work over the original work. Explicit permission is not required when you choose to use valid stock resources. Please check your sources carefully to ensure that they are valid stock." It is important to note here, especially in light of the discussions about fan art below, that "using" work was interpreted as literally incorporating the material into one's own work, not visually copying or referencing. The question of tracing is something that has long been in dispute and many have argued that dA's own FAQ indicates that tracing is against policy even while dA staff members claim that tracing is acceptable as long as it is classified as "fan art."

Aaron had an impression of what the law allowed, but broad ethical considerations were important: asking permission was the *right* thing to do. It was courteous and what he would have liked if he had been in the position of the other artist.[28]

Before considering the questions of credit and money, I must address fan art. Spacecoyote's *The Simpsonzu* was fan art, a work based on characters someone else had created. She did not have permission from the copyright owners to post it. But, it would be a mistake to assume that fan artists were necessarily inclined to be permissive. Many people who made fan art had strong feelings about art theft in relation to permission to use others' work, even those who *sold* fan art in Artist Alleys at conventions.[29] They sold such works even though it was clear that they did not have permission from the creators of the characters they drew to reproduce them or distribute them.[30] For many, drawing and distributing fan art was not seen as theft, even if copyright law has ruled that this could be considered infringement.[31] Rather, those who posted fan art felt that they had implicit permission to draw and distribute the works created by others, within constraints, depending on the venue.

deviantART's classification scheme (and policies related to it) came with constraints. Categorizing the work as "fan art" made particular uses of work acceptable without written permission. Artist Alleys I attended had different rules that concerned whether the artists' items were "mass produced" and whether their sale was deemed to be in competition with dealers who had obtained licenses to sell the work. Some Artist Alley rules defined particular actions as "potentially" illegal, but then treated these actions as unproblematic on the ground. One participant defined this inconsistency as part of the widely acknowledged "gray market" (fieldnotes).[32] Many others believed that some companies liked the work that fans did in cultivating their characters and

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[28] In this case, though, he still felt he could proceed even without permission, as he made sure to "cite" the work (credit it) and was not making money from it.

[29] Fan art, perhaps unsurprisingly, dominated what was bought and sold in the Artist Alleys at the fan conventions I attended.

[30] When I have described some of these findings to my colleagues and professors, they have observed that fan artists seem hypocritical. I do think there are contradictions in some of their beliefs, but blanket claims of hypocrisy seem both wrong and unhelpful analytically.

[31] Here, my findings were similar to what the legal scholar Rebecca Tushnet (2007) described in her study of fan fiction writers. There is a great deal of uncertainty about whether and in which circumstances fan art (like fan fiction) would be considered infringement. Arguments hinge on interpretations of "fair use" (in United States copyright law), "fair dealings" (U.K. and commonwealth countries), "fair practice" (in the EU), and other analogous framings. Regarding whether fan fiction and fan art should be considered infringing according to United States law, see Tushnet 1997, 2007.

[32] The following quote, from a longtime Artist Alley attendee during a group conversation in a chatroom, hints at some of the issues: "Using copyrighted images or art theft is grounds for immediate expulsion from an Artist Alley. You could just bring it up with the artist alley manager and they will investigate. [Asking me]: Or were you thinking of the gals that sell [buttons based on characters from a video game]? The images were drawn by them, but the subject and symbols are copyrighted. This is a whole different issue usually called the gray market. Art theft isn't too common in artists alleys as many artists know each other IRL ["in real life"] or online and can spot fakes. However, if you mean that some artists tend to just copy famous images from either a professional or other amateur but in their own 'style' it isn't considered theft but it does bother me and I do see it happening more often. Sadly I think a lot of this stems from the fact that people base their style off a popular artist but can't do much more than ape that style. When asked to do something new or original they simply can't."

brands, at least up to a point. Those who seemed to have significant knowledge of the commercial practices reinforced this belief, and this logic was also how deviantART's staff justified the acceptability of its fan art category.

Beyond rules, artists who make and distribute fan art believe that they have a stake *as creators* in the work that they create (as Tushnet 2007 says about fan fiction authors). This stake is marked by careful distinctions, such as that drawn by artists indicating that a *character* is copyrighted (or "owned") by a particular company or artist while the work posted to deviantART is owned by themselves. Yet, even here I detected some ambivalence. One person told me, while we sat surrounded by the buying and selling of fan art in an Artist Alley, that fan art was a "necessity" for artists to make money.[33] However, he added "If a creator told me it's a problem…I'd stop. … It's their right to stop you" (fieldnotes)[34]. To this person, being denied permission or being aware that "the creator" would not allow it was grounds for a fan artist to be considered an art thief. The issues up for debate in the concern over theft, like those considered in legal considerations of copyright law, are extremely complex. It is perhaps not surprising that participants in deviantART are not always clear—even to themselves—where the "gray" area between right and wrong or legal and illegal begins and ends.

7.2.2   Expecting Credit

Closely linked to the question of permission before use is the question of credit after use: either crediting the original or falsely taking credit for someone else's work. False claims of credit did seem to be one of the few acts almost universally considered art theft.[35] As spacecoyote indicated, "Credit would be nice, yes, but *as long as you don't say 'I drew this' when someone asks where the art comes from*, it's no big deal" (emphasis mine).

Yet, in many other cases, participants in deviantART expected others to give credit if they used someone else's work, even for uses spacecoyote and others with similar opinions considered acceptable. Monroy-Hernández et. al. (2011) distinguish between *credit* and *attribution* in their study of Scratch, a system they developed to help kids and teenagers learn to code.[36] By design, all projects on Scratch can be remixed into other projects, and the site designers explicitly encourage members to build on each others' work as part of the pedagogy (and the values of "free culture" the Scratch designers wished to instill). However, even when the software *automatically* provided the

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[33] I heard this assertion from other people as well.

[34] He continued, "There is nothing worse than someone ripping you off. Stealing the idea is really easy. I don't respect it. The person doesn't invest the time." He repeated this point about time and added, that the person didn't put in his "dues" when he rips off a character. Fan art commissions are "a fair way to make money, because you make people happy. But, the creator of the concept gets to dictate the terms of how the idea is being used" (fieldnotes).

[35] Selling someone else's work or a close variation of it without permission is perhaps another of the widely agreed upon cases of "theft," though as I have indicated with the case of selling fan art, there are questions about what belongs to whom such that selling one's own depictions of others' characters is not theft. I have also seen numerous discussions online of whether or not it is "okay" to sell fan art. The question of credit has been taken up in several recent studies by scholars investigating other sites (Luther et al. 2010, Marshall and Shipman 2011, Monroy-Hernández et al. 2010, Monroy-Hernández et al. 2011).

[36] For more on Scratch, as well as publications, see http://scratch.mit.edu/ and http://info.scratch.mit.edu/Research.

name and a link back to the source material, many of the young participants on the site expected others to provide the name and source in their project descriptions. Despite the software-provided name, members of the site still accused each other of plagiarism, piracy, and theft. Therefore, proper *credit* was not merely the presence of the name, which Monroy-Hernández et. al. (2011) subsequently referred to as *attribution*. Rather, credit was "an explicit acknowledgement, an expression of gratitude, and an expression of deference, in a way that simple attribution can not (Monroy-Hernández et. al. 2011:3422)." In my reading of their study, credit necessarily *includes* attribution (i.e. the presence of the name or link to the source). But attribution does not cover all aspects of what people consider credit.

Web sites such as deviantART and Scratch provide spaces for people to provide credit to each other in ways that would not be expected—and sometimes not even possible—in other venues for the display of art. Members of deviantART used the Artist Comments field underneath a deviation to explicitly credit work they had used in their work. People also mentioned work that they referenced (such as imitating a pose or a gesture), tutorials they used, and other resources. These acknowledgments emphasized the intricate social dimensions of credit that went beyond putting down a name. Members saw these forms of credit as helping boost the reputation and recognition of the source of the material used.

The practice of providing stock photography illustrates the social and situational importance of credit on deviantART. Stock photography is work intended to be used as source material for some other work. By submitting to the stock gallery, creators are implicitly providing one level of permission—the permission to use the work at no cost.[37] On deviantART, many stock photographers, or "stockers" as some called themselves, accompanied their posted stock with explicit rules that refine what this permission entailed. They provided "terms of use" (as they called them): rules for some uses and against others. Some stockers viewed breaking any of them as theft, but not giving credit was perhaps the most egregious offense.[38] Even the large "Unrestricted Stock" collection came with a collection-wide requirement to provide credit.[39]

Questions of credit gave rise to more nuanced and finer-grained distinctions between acts labeled theft and those not. One popular member of the site posted a journal in which she asked her Watchers—perhaps more than ten thousand of them—for help in dealing with the "misuse" of her work by members of Neopets.[40] She asked anyone with a Neopets account to try to contact the administration to have the offending account removed. When I asked this member why she had used the word "misuse" rather than "theft," she replied that *theft* would have been a situation in

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[37] There are many sites on which photographers sold stock photography, such as http://www.istockphoto.com and http://www.gettyimages.com.

[38] Elandria, a popular stocker and Senior, told me that the "no-crediting" issue is something that "stock providers encounter all the time": "It's [credit] the only thing we ask for. Y'know we don't ask for money, we don't ask for your first born, we don't ask for blood or chocolate" (interview).

[39] The collection began, I think, in August of 2007. The definition of Unrestricted Stock in this collection is: "Unrestricted stock can be used for both personal and commercial projects, but it cannot be redistributed as stock. You are not required to obtain permission prior to using the stock off site or in DA prints. The only requirements are that the stock provider be notified and credited." As of November 2009, there were 274 members whose entire collections were unrestricted or who had folders that were unrestricted.

[40] Neopets is a popular "virtual pet community," a site where members create virtual pets and play games. It features a variety of advertising in various forms, and members buy and sell virtual goods.

which others claimed the work as their own whereas *misuse* is using without permission. Despite this fine-grained distinction, the consequences were similar: the members' Watchers treated this incident as theft. This categorization indicated to me that it was not always the individually provided label that mattered; the socially recognized consequences of the act defined theft.[41]

7.2.3   Commercial uses

Finally, there is the question of money. Even spacecoyote, who was quite permissive in how others could use her work, described the selling of her work for profit without her permission as theft. More than a year after she posted the journal I discuss above, she had to deal with this very situation. She alerted her Watchers that a major retailer in the United States was selling a tattoo that featured one of her tattoo designs. She posted a link to her design and then two photographs of the offending products. She continued, "When someone takes my art without permission and makes any sort of profit from it, that's when something should be done."

The threat of artwork ending up on products that are sold either online or in retail stores was seen as very real. A year into fieldwork, I was hardly surprised by stories about a person on eBay or a retail store selling artwork on products such as coffee mugs, notebooks, dog tags, card decks, or mousepads.[42] People making money from "stolen" work was a threat to artists in the Artist Alleys at conventions as well. I received a voicemail from a participant in my study telling me to go check her deviantART for photographic proof and an account of an "art thief" at a convention who was selling official work in the form of bookmarks. Incidents like those reported on deviantART and at Artist Alleys reinforced the perception of the threat of "thieves" looking to make money on artists' labor as both unjust and quite real.

Yet, while making money from someone else's work was the most important criterion for some definitions of theft, for others it was secondary. Stock photographer Elandria described in her journal a situation in which her work had been used as a banner on a website, in violation of her terms of use. Elandria posted to deviantART a transcript of a conversation in a chatroom between her and the owner of the offending site. She directed readers' attention to the justification of the site owner, who had noted that he was "not making any profit from this board." This particular line angered Elandria, and many of those who commented:

> I'm concerned that most people think like they do, and that's a big problem. That "it's not for profit" is the worse part.
>
> Oh my gosh, it just amazes you how brazen people are ... 'making no profit'.....sheesh!
>
> LOL no profit LMAO no harm done... *shakeshead* I'm not gonna say anything

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[41] Many who commented re-classified the incident as theft, ignoring the the word "misuse." Within two hours, this member had received dozens of outraged replies to her journal, many of which were from people who said they had contacted the Neopets members themselves, and the artwork had been taken down. The sequence of events happened so quickly that I never saw what specifically had been done with the work. I read the journal two hours after it was posted, and the problem had been resolved.

[42] Moreover, many members commented on these stories with a sense of resignation that perhaps it was inevitable though still worth fighting.

else.[43]

To this group, whether the site owner was making a profit was not the point. The re-use of Elandria's work violated her terms of use. "Making a profit" is thus not so much a financial issue as a moral one.[44] Whereas Benkler (2006) may be correct in asserting the potential for the "greater scope for non-market action" possible through the web, it is this scope that helps exacerbate a moral problem for many everyday media creators.[45] Below, I return to issues of morality and moral rights that underlie and comprise these different dimensions of transgression.

There are ways to "profit" from work other than financial gain. As discussed in chapter 5, deviantART provided metrics that some treated as quantifying the value of artists and artwork (how many people watch your work, how many have visited your page, how many comments you receive, and how many times someone marks one of your artwork as a favorite). Some members treated these as quantitative measurements of symbolic capital while others treated them as equivalents to economic capital (see chapter 5). Statistical gains on deviantART could lead to financial gains through jobs, commissions, or sales. In the course of a heated debate about the ethics of posting traced artwork to the site, one member noted:

> What I think is odd is that people don't see it as a gain if they haven't sold it. NO? They're gaining attention, fame, recognition in the art world, connections, favorites, and people requesting and possibly offering to buy work. How do you defend that it has to be monetary when things like that LEAD to monetary gain?

To make the issue even more complicated, there was no consensus about the nature of these gains and whether or how they can lead to financial profits (see chapter 5).

Thus, the issue of making money from someone else's work ("commercial" versus "non-commercial" uses), though seemingly straightforward, is actually quite complicated (see also Creative Commons 2009). All three dimensions—requiring permission, providing or expecting credit, and commercial uses—interacted in situationally specific ways.

7.2.4   The "official" view: theft as infringement

What members saw as theft was not identical to deviantART's official policies about copyright and the re-use of others' material. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that the official view and the users' views were completely independent. For example, a fifteen-year-old girl from the UK told me that she had posted a tutorial on deviantART on how to make signatures with graphics for

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[43] LOL is short for "Laugh out loud." LMAO is short for "Laughing my ass off." Many of the commenters were either Seniors on deviantART or experienced members of the group of stock photographers on the site.

[44] Thanks to Paul Duguid for pointing this out.

[45] According to Johns (2009), it was not until quite recently that "piracy" could be a crime that could occur in the home in non-commercial uses. For much of the 20th century, lawmakers in the United States and the UK resisted efforts to turn "home piracy" or "domestic piracy" into a crime rather than an oxymoron. However, that the law did not recognize this possibility until recently should not detract from the fact that the history of trying to prosecute home pirates goes back much further. Many of the efforts Johns describes—going back to attempts to raid homes for sheet music, "pirate listeners" of radio, and tapers—were couched in moral language. The stock photographers I quote here seem to have inherited the moral argument, at least in their discourse; they argued that those who violate their rules are committing a moral crime, not a commercial one.

forums. She had posted this tutorial on another site, and it had been received well. The tutorial—and the resulting signature—included an image of a character from a popular video game, which she had taken and repurposed. Soon after she had posted it, deviantART's administrators removed it. "It's fine on forums and what not, just not on dA apparently," she told me, "I just didn't understand" (interview).

deviantART's various policy documents emphasized the need for permission.[46] "Copyright infringement," it noted, "occurs when you do certain things with a creative work which someone else produced without first getting the proper permission."[47] As a recommendation, the copyright policy noted, "The best way to avoid infringing…is to use your skill, talent, and imagination to create your own completely original work." The documents described various situations that were questionable, but in all cases "it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission."[48] While "fair use" was "the notion that some public and private uses of copyrighted works should not require the permission of a copyright owner," the situations where fair use applied "are very limited" and "complex under the law." The policy then linked to several sites that readers could consult.[49]

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[46] Here, I draw primarily from deviantART's terms of service, copyright policy, and submission agreement, each of which addressed questions of members' ownership and property rights. The policy acknowledged the "confusing" nature of copyright law and that "rumor and myth" made the "facts" more complicated. The site provided its interpretation of copyright law, fair use, and how to deal with possible infringement in non-technical language. Similar to many other sites, deviantART members retained intellectual property rights in their work, though they granted deviantART a non-exclusive license to use the work in various ways. These policies have a long and complicated history that I do not have room to address here.

[47] Some examples of the copyright policy included were "Placing a photograph or creative work online without proper permission"; "Using a creative work commercially"; "Adapting a creative work of one medium to another, such as making a book into a movie or a photograph into a painting"; and "Modifying or editing a creative work without proper permission."

[48] The full caution note read (in July 2008): "In most cases it does not matter how much of the material you have used. Whether it's a single frame, a few moments of audio, a short clip of video or any other sampling it's still considered to be copyrighted and you still require the owner's permission for use. It doesn't matter how you obtained the material, it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission. It doesn't matter whether or not you've credited the proper owner, it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission. It doesn't matter if you are not selling it or making a profit, it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission. It doesn't matter if you can find other people using things without permission, it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission. It doesn't matter if you've edited it a little bit or made a few alterations, if it's recognizable it's still considered copyrighted and you still need permission."

[49] One of these sites was the "Chilling Effects" website, which, as its name suggests, was concerned about the uses of United States copyright law to suppress possible first amendment rights. I saw the link to Chilling Effects as resisting restrictive interpretations of United States copyright law and, in a sense, subverting deviantART's own copyright policy. I sensed that some staff at deviantART endorsed the mission of this site. Chilling Effects, hosted at George Washington's School of Law, is a project whose collaborators include the Electronic Frontier Foundation; Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society; and the University of California at Berkeley's Samuelson Law, Technology, and Public Policy Clinic. Chilling Effects' front page notes, "We are excited about the new opportunities the Internet offers individuals to express their views, parody politicians, celebrate their favorite movie stars, or criticize businesses. But we've noticed that not everyone feels the same way. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some individuals and corporations are using intellectual property and other laws to silence other online users. Chilling Effects encourages respect for intellectual property law, while frowning on its misuse to 'chill' legitimate activity." See http://www.chillingeffects.org/, last accessed November 21, 2011.

There are three points that I want to highlight. First, despite its restrictive language, as mentioned earlier there were exceptions to this policy that were not specifically mentioned in this document. For example, fan art was not only permitted, it had its own thriving category with several staff members actively managing and contributing to it. Fan art could not include reused actual source material in the submitted work. Thus, while the redistribution of fan art might be considered copyright infringement, deviantART took the position that copyright owners often desired the production of fan art, and when done in certain ways no explicit permission was needed. Exceptions suggested that deviantART's policy, like the views of its members, were attuned to considerations beyond legality.[50]

Second, as a company based in the United States, deviantART was subject to United States copyright law, and a United States perspective shaped the document. Yet, many of deviantART's members and staff were not located in the United States and were operating under different legal regimes. Many members lived in locations where the concept of "moral rights"—as a part of their intellectual property regime—governed the production, circulation, and use of "creative" work.[51] The perspectives on theft outlined earlier resonate closely with these moral rights, a point I return to in the next section. Furthermore, deviantART's copyright policy's repeated emphasis on permission and its downplay of fair use also indicated to me a sense that the policy rested on a common set of principles.

This point relates to a final one. Nowhere in deviantART's copyright policy does it mention *theft*. Rather, the language in most of its documents is about *infringement*. In contrast, deviantART's FAQ does address "theft," and deviantART's staff commonly used the language of theft in discussing its policies and dealing with controversies that arose. Yet, on the question, "What does deviantART consider to be Art Theft?," the FAQ equated "art theft" and "ripping" with "copyright infringement."[52] Some staff members urged this equation of terms and rejected the language of "theft." I spoke several times with Josh Wattles, a deviantART staff member who described himself as the company's "Advisor-in-chief," whose career had gone from artist to copyright attorney for major studios to university instructor of copyright law.[53] Wattles, who shaped deviantART's policies, expressed concern over the language of "theft," arguing that it was similar to

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[50] These may have been commercial interests, ethical considerations, or both.

[51] These moral rights include the right to be credited as author (the "paternity right"), the right to protect the treatment of work from various destructive acts (the "integrity right"), and the right to prevent false attribution. It is beyond the scope here to delve in to a discussion of moral rights. Cooper (2002) provides an excellent introduction to the topic for anyone new to the concept. While there has been a long tradition of codified moral rights in Europe, beginning with France and moving through the rest of the continent and eventually the UK, the United States has only recently adopted some limited forms of moral rights (with the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990). However, Cooper (2002) points out that several states have moral rights provisions in their state laws. As many deviantART members are from Europe or other nations that have signed onto international copyright agreements that have embraced different moral rights provisions, one cannot ignore the fact that there is closer proximity to opposing "theft" of intellectual on moral grounds and legal grounds in a way that may feel unfamiliar to an American reader. That being said, the moral implications of owning property and the prevention of that property and livelihood from being "taken" or "stolen" has a long tradition in the United States going back to the Declaration of Independence and the Enlightenment ideals it embodies.

[52] The answers to this question and related questions in the FAQ more or less echoed the copyright policy.

[53] Wattles had experience both representing major entertainment companies and small Internet firms and acting as lead counsel for LimeWire and for the developers of Gnutella in *MGM v. Grokster*.

what copyright scholar and Google counsel William Patry (2009) described as inciting "moral panic."[54] Wattles told me that he was trying to get the rest of the company to use the word infringement instead.[55] The use of "theft" on the site in his view was understandable but also reflected a certain amount of immaturity on the part of its members.[56]

The equation of theft with infringement has effects in seemingly opposite directions. It works against the different dimensions of theft outlined earlier by attempting to tie them to an internal legal framework. At the same time, this equation adds another dimension of differentiation among the positions on the site. Regardless, I did identify a unifying theme between the different dimensions of theft. In short, the use of the term "theft" implied a *moral* concern rather than a *legal* one. Copyright was not the *reason* that theft was wrong; it was *evidence* that it was wrong.

7.2.5   Theft as a moral transgression, an assault on the creative practitioner

Despite the diversity of deviantART members' positions on theft, what they had in common was a belief that theft was moral concern and that, ultimately, individuals had the moral right to set the terms for the use for their work. One important difference between spacecoyote's reaction to the commenter who prompted her initial reply and her journal entry that followed the next day was a caveat: "This is just MY opinion. There is no set definition as to what 'art theft' is. Many other artists may consider what I don't consider art theft to be art theft, but I'm not them." All of things that she had said were "not stealing," *could be stealing* depending on the particular artist's sense of right and wrong. Comments on spacecoyote's journal echoed this sentiment. As one person noted, spacecoyote was "within [her] rights to request someone to stop using [her] intellectual property for ANY reason."[57] Artists, this person suggested, have the right to control the uses of their work as they see fit. Spacecoyote's journal entry on the matter could be interpreted to support this position.

These comments reinforced a critical point: what makes an act "theft" to some is the transgression of the artist's own rules. Or put differently, the power of an artist to set the terms of use is what

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[54] It was Wattles who introduced me to Patry's book on the topic, *Moral Panic and the Copyright Wars* (2009). While in his office, he eagerly pulled his recently signed copy of the book off of his shelves, which was propped up in front of Patry's multi-volume treatise on copyright—*Patry on Copyright*. Wattles repeatedly suggested that I read it as a way of better understanding art theft and copyright on deviantART. *Moral Panic and the Copyright Wars* is highly critical of the current state of copyright law and the position of the "copyright industries" in pursuing so-called "pirates and thieves." Wattles also mentioned his role in helping read and review the book, and he is reciprocally mentioned in the acknowledgements as a "veteran entertainment lawyer and good friend…whose decades of experience and commitment to fairness saved me from error and overstatement more than once" (Patry 2009, xi). All of these points reinforced to me that despite the seemingly restrictive copyright policies and downplay of fair use mentioned earlier, there were influential people at deviantART who resisted strict interpretations of copyright law (see earlier footnote). What this observation suggested to me is that deviantART's official view of infringement— and thus "theft"—was bound in ways by copyright law and that if United States law were to change, deviantART's copyright policy and, more importantly to this study its position on theft, would as well.

[55] Wattles tried to trace the origins of the word "theft" in deviantART's own FAQ.

[56] Who had not learned either the legal language of infringement or the language of "appropriation" as used in the fine art world.

[57] The context of the comment was a perspective on copyright law, and the person was thus talking about *legal* rights. Whether this was a legally accurate portrayal of copyright infringement is not the issue here.

many saw as the rule that brought all artists together. As one artist explained to me as we sat in the Artist Alley at a fan convention, while the distribution and sale of fan art was acceptable, if there were to be a conflict between a character's creator and the fan's use of it, "It's a no-brainer, you get behind the creator." When you go against the creator, he added, you are "violating the spirit of the creative community."

The concerns central to members were fairness, justice, and morality, even when making money was a key factor in determining theft. Members who drew distinctions between the financial concerns and the moral ones, such as Elandria, discussed above, made this clear. The stock photographers I talked to and observed seemed to have inherited a moral argument: those who violate their rules commit a moral crime, not a commercial one.[58] Crow, who was not a stock photographer, held similar views:

> Artists work really hard to come up with what they come up with. It's a cheat, a taboo when someone steals someone else's work or ideas. Because we put all this time into it. And then someone is just going to take it and pretend that they did it; that they put all the effort in. For nothing. And other people get praised for something they didn't even do. It's just…it's not right. (interview)

Some artists put in the effort and the work, and then someone else gets "praised" for it. To Crow, this describes a fundamentally unfair situation. Elandria told me that her first encounter seeing her work re-posted and claimed by someone else felt "soul destroying." She lamented "having all of your hard work just taken in the blink of an eye and having it made almost irrelevant by somebody who just doesn't really give a damn." As it was to Crow, the exchange between effort of creation and effortlessness in making that work "irrelevant" was immoral. Elandria made the emotional impact more explicit than Crow. Theft was a direct assault on the person.

Finally, a professional game designer and animator in his mid-twenties took this point about the threat to oneself a step further. The "real damage of art theft isn't how it cheats the artist" (fieldnotes), one of the points made by Crow and Elandria. Rather, the problem lies in how it "demoralizes the artist" and "keeps people from sharing their art or making more, or putting the effort in…"[59] Not only is art theft an assault on oneself, it is an assault on one's identity as an artist and creative practitioner. This demoralization was a part of the immoral nature of the act. Fighting against theft was a defense of this social identity.

7.3 Combating theft and asserting control

I have argued that (a) theft is a pervasive concern on deviantART, (b) what constitutes theft varies considerably among site participants (including staff), (c) that these variations are anchored in

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[58] There is a historical legacy at work here. As Johns (2009) describes in his history of piracy, many of the attempts to curtail the activity of alleged pirates—whether those who may have been illicitly reproducing sheet music, those who were "pirate listeners" of radio, or those who were "tapers" of music off the radio—were couched in moral language (see also Patry 2009). "Piracy" connotes both illegality and immorality, and "creativity" may work in the opposite direction (thanks to Paul Duguid for this point).

[59] Note that this is slightly different from many typical claims of people who defend strict copyright interpretations. It is not that the lack of financial or economic incentive will prohibit "creative" activity. It is the moral issues that may have that effect. The ends might be the same, but the means are significant and quite different.

particular practices and shared norms, and (d) concerns over morality underlie discussions of theft among its members. I now highlight some of the ways that members of the site try to combat theft, prevent it, and assert control over their work. This discussion sheds further light on the practices of deviantART members that reproduce the discourse of the theft and socialize participants on the site about the threat that theft entails. At the same time, they also further illustrate differences among deviantART members. Finally, by looking at ways that deviantART members try to control their work as well as some of the tensions these raise, this discussion helps to set the scene for my return to the Share Wars and Share Tools in the final part of the chapter.

7.3.1   Preventative measures

There were several means by which members sought to prevent theft from occurring in the first place. It was common practice to use the Artist's Comments to either remind people of the copyrighted nature of the work, to ward off potential thieves, or both. It was not unusual to see a written message in all capitals that said something like, "DON'T STEAL MY WORK." These messages are perhaps one of the modern descendants of Dürer's warning quoted in this chapter's epigraph. Some interpreted such warnings, though, as a sign of immaturity. One teenager told me it seemed childish (even though she was concerned about having her work stolen). Josh Wattles told me that such a message could come off as arrogant: such a message presumed that the work was worthy of being stolen. I encountered many comments that poked fun of the childish attitude that such a message might imply by mockingly writing "DONT STEALZ MAH WORK!!!" or something similar, in conversations referencing teenagers on the site.

Stock photographers and other resource providers used the Artist's Comments to outline explicitly their terms of use or to link to them. These terms could be quite complex.[60] Stockers borrowed these terms from each other, indicating the terms' status as a product of social conventions.[61] Similar to terms of use, deviantART provided users with the option to use Creative Commons licenses.[62] Yet, many stock photographers intentionally did not use CC licenses. Several stockers told me that they would not use the CC licenses because their terms did not match the specific restrictions they wanted to set.[63] One stocker I spoke with did use the CC license on her work and

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[60] Although many of these terms included a requirement to credit and link back to the stock creator, they varied in other ways. Some terms detailed precisely how work should be credited (e.g. that credit had to be in the Artist's Comments). Others specified whether someone had to notify the stocker as well as give that person credit. Several stockers specified whether the work could be used "outside" of deviantART, an indication that the stock was intended for a member of deviantART and the products of such work were to be uploaded to deviantART and not elsewhere.

[61] I observed a new stock photographer enter a chatroom where I was chatting with several stock and resource providers. She asked the group where she could find terms of service, and chatters in the room quickly pointed her in the direction of what they felt were good examples.

[62] A Creative Commons (CC) allows people to specify different ways that they allow their work to be used, alleviating the need for permission. The Creative Commons license was developed by the Creative Commons foundation under the leadership of Lawrence Lessig for copyright owners to indicate that they would not enforce all of the rights that they are entitled to by default under United States copyright law. The Creative Commons licenses available on deviantART offered a number of combinations of terms under which work could be re-used without further permission. On deviantART users can specify whether they require attribution, whether they allow the creation of "derivative works," and whether the reuse can be distributed commercially.

[63] Nevertheless, the intent of a CC license seems to be to find a way to make it easy to treat every work like stock.

was well versed with the intricacies of both the law and the CC licenses. Still, she added her own set of terms that matched the license. "99% of people who use the stock don't understand the CC licenses, and won't bother to go read them," she wrote to me, "So outlining rules myself is a way of making sure they pay attention."[64]

It was hard to know what to make of CC licenses when they were used. I interviewed one teenager who could identify which licenses he had used on his photography and what the terms spelled out. On the other hand another teenager told me, "it won't stop people from stealing my stuff, but just…I don't know, [it] feels more like it's mine. I guess?" (interview).[65] Another member told me, "I'm not sure what it is but people usually put it on there" (interview). I observed people who both used the CC license and at the same time noted in their comments that they did not want people using their work in any way without explicit permission.

Watermarking a deviation was another preventative measure.[66] Nevertheless, like warning off potential thieves in the Artist Comments, watermarking proved to be a suspect strategy. Several people observed that the most effective watermarks were, problematically, the ones that most adversely distorted the quality of the work. In conversations about watermarks, many pointed out the fact that they were easy to remove if someone wanted to. Some people explicitly said that they did not like to see watermarked images on the site and would refuse to favourite them. Finally, watermarks, like terms of use, were easy to ignore. In one incident that people referenced, the first version of box art for a major video game release included an image in which the deviantART watermark was clearly visible.

A final set of preventative measures could be classified broadly as raising awareness. Such efforts served as ways of trying to remind users of the threat or urging members to be continually vigilant. Members and clubs created or aggregated resources for others to use, such as tutorials, that would help others take the right steps to minimize the risk of theft. These clubs also aggregated news articles that had been written on the topic of theft. Some members created satirical work that mocked art thieves.[67] Finally, both individual members and clubs provided digital stamps for members to post in their journals.[68]

7.3.2   Responsive measures

I now turn to responsive measures.[69] Spreading the word about an incident was perhaps the most typical response. After feeling victimized by an art thief, many members posted to their journals.

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[64] She added, "Not everyone (especially not the 12 year olds doing goth art using my stormy lake picture or such) knows that NC means 'non-commercial,' let alone that 'non-commercial' means they can't sell things using my stock (unless they have my permission). 'Non-commercial' will make them think 'oh, I can't use it to promote something like in a commercial,' or 'I can't put it on a book cover,' but they won't think they're not allowed to sell prints of their art made with it."

[65] She added, "I don't really know what it does. It doesn't do much. It's only 'some rights reserved'"

[66] Watermarking was also a responsive measure. Some people used deviantART-provided watermarks, while others created their own watermarks.

[67] I should note that I also encountered satirical pieces that mocked people who accused others of stealing.

[68] These featured messages such as "I Support Making art Thieves Cry," "Don't Fuck With Copyright," and "Ha, I'm Copyright Protected."

[69] The responsive measures I outline in this section also had the consequences of raising awareness about the

Supporters often posted links to the story in their own journals and encouraged others to take up any calls to action from the victim. If the journal received enough activity, it could get pushed up to deviantART's Today page and boost the chances that even more people would see it. Sometimes a third party reported the incident of theft, either to the member whose work had been stolen or to the site at large. I observed and heard about several situations online in which an artist received photographs of his or her work in a store or on a t-shirt somewhere.[70]

Spreading the word could have contentious consequences. One person who had a history of tracking down and publicizing incidents of art theft told me that to avoid inciting people to harass others, she tried to be careful about what she recommended people do:

> Once the news is out, whether the victims [of theft] says it or not, their adoring fans will haul out the pitchforks and torches and should you bother to go look at the offending member's site in time before DA takes down the content, you'll see the whole strings of flames en masse…Trail those around and watch the fires!

This description corresponded to many situations in which people accused someone on deviantART or on another site of art theft.[71] I observed reports that led to comments on YouTube videos, blogs, or forums that accused the account owner of using stolen images. If the alleged thief were a deviantART member, similar comments might be left on the userpage of the artist and on the deviation page of the offending artwork. Then flame wars and arguments ensued when the friends and fans of the person accused rushed to the defense.

The location of the offending work mattered. deviantART's staff tried to discourage this kind of response as far as it concerned its own members. deviantART encouraged members to report theft through the official reporting mechanisms when the accusation concerned someone on site. Sometimes the site backed up this encouragement with a threat to take action against the group of accusers under the guidelines of its harassment policy. Some Senior members also warned that accusations and inciting comments could backfire and recommended that the right thing to do would be to report the possibility of theft to deviantART's staff.[72] A Senior member who advocated against a mob mentality on deviantART noted that the situation might be different if

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concern, much as some of the examples in the preceding section had done. I first learned about theft because of the ways that supposed thefts were reported and dealt with.

[70] For example, it was someone browsing the retail store who noticed spacecoyote's tattoo design being sold. In one incident, a member of the site who had been playing a popular commercial role-playing game using Facebook realized that she had recognized many of the images in the game from deviantART. Yet, few had received credit. She suspected theft and reported the story as a news article on deviantART. She also asked for help in verifying whose art was being used and whether the images were being used with the artists' permission. She set up a project on her journal in which she kept track of the information. She also posted regular updates to her own investigation to learn more about the company who made the game, her efforts to have it removed from Facebook, and, as it turns out, to alert at least one game studio that some of their images were also being used. Over the course of the following months, she collected increasingly more information and concluded that indeed the work was being used without the permission of most of the artists. It is unclear whether her efforts and those whom she enlisted paid off. Several months later, she told me that she was frustrated about her inability to get the game removed from Facebook, though the story had spread to the discussion forums for the game itself. She had the impression that the game company was shutting down but could not be sure that it was in any way due to the work that she had begun.

[71] Or even "misuse," as described earlier in the chapter in the example regarding Neopets.

[72] However, other Senior members were often guilty of stirring up their followers.

the offending work was off site.[73] I heard mixed reviews on how responsive deviantART was to complaints. Some complainants seemed quite satisfied.[74] One person who thought deviantART's staff responded acceptably noted, "when you're stuff ends up on Flickr, or on international sites, you're fucked" (fieldnotes). However, I heard regular complaints from others that deviantART's staff did not respond adequately to art theft and that their actions were inconsistent.

Some clubs on the site were dedicated specifically to combating theft. They encouraged people to submit the names of alleged thieves—both on deviantART and elsewhere—and then made public lists of the accused. Some tried to follow the approach of not harassing fellow members but rather reporting perceived violations to deviantART. However, these warnings did not prevent many flame wars from breaking out. Some members described these clubs disparagingly as "vigilante groups." (fieldnotes). One told me that "clubs shouldn't police that stuff." They started up "a shitstorm" that in the end was detrimental to the site (fieldnotes). Therefore, like several of the preventative measures, responsive measures themselves were subject to scrutiny and criticism, raising even more dilemmas for site members.

7.3.3 Giving up control?

Despite all of these means by which people tried to control the circulation of their work by combating theft or preventing future occurrences, some members were more resigned or had even given up on trying to control the uses of their art. Wen-M told me that he was informed that a company in the Phillipines had been distributing some of his work on t-shirts. But, he decided not to do anything about it and added, "that popularity is going to come back to me." He did not indicate how that would happen, but a friend chimed in, "basically it's free advertising…. People say 'who drew that? that's pretty nice.' And if they like it enough they'll start to research and if they research it, in the end, it comes back [to the artist]" (interview). A member who was "popular" (as Wen-M was) may have less to lose in some ways than someone who is relatively unknown.[75] Still, after I pressed the point, the artist explained that over time,

> You get desensitized. Your work gets stolen every two weeks and you don't have time to deal with it. I'm not going to be upset about it for another week because it's been done before and it's getting to me. It gets tiring and you don't want to waste your time like that.

This is an alternative to being "demoralized," as the member I discuss above put it. It was hard to tell whether being "desensitized" and "too tired" led to a more cavalier attitude (even a positive outlook) or the reverse, or both.

While some members came to think that they could not control the spread of their work, others clearly thought that they could prevent different forms of theft and spent considerable time either trying to combat theft or helping others. In their view, the web provided the means to assert more

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[73] deviantART's Copyright Policy, as well as various member-posted news articles, instructed members how to file a DMCA takedown notice for work on other sites.

[74] One person told me that "rips" on deviantART were "easy to deal with" because "dA has a copyright team who knows what they're doing" (fieldnotes).

[75] Wen-M was one of the most "popular "members of the site: he had millions of page views and thousands of Watchers.

control than one might have in a different venue by providing space for terms of use and by providing others with the ability to follow these terms. At the same time, the web challenged artists to consider whether theft is, in fact, an inevitability. The extent to which deviantART members could control the circulation of the work and what was (or was not) inevitable when posting work to the web were issues that came to the fore during deviantART's Share Wars.

7.4   The Share Wars

Having established this broader context, I return to the launch of deviantART's Share Tools and the ensuing Share Wars. Prior to the launch of the new tools, deviantART had provided functionality similar to what the new tools offered. The older tools differed from the new features, however, in several important ways. First, the older tools were all optional when submitting deviations. Second, they were separated as different options for separate purposes; they were also presented on different parts of the page and varied in their language (including "blog this" and "promote," suggesting distinct purposes to viewers).[76]

Unlike the older tools, the new Share Tools were not optional. They were consolidated on one part of the page, all under the heading of "Share," suggesting a common purpose.[77] I surmise, but cannot say conclusively, that the new page design was an effort to create a more elegant, clear, and aesthetically pleasing way of laying out existing functionality (see figure 7.2).
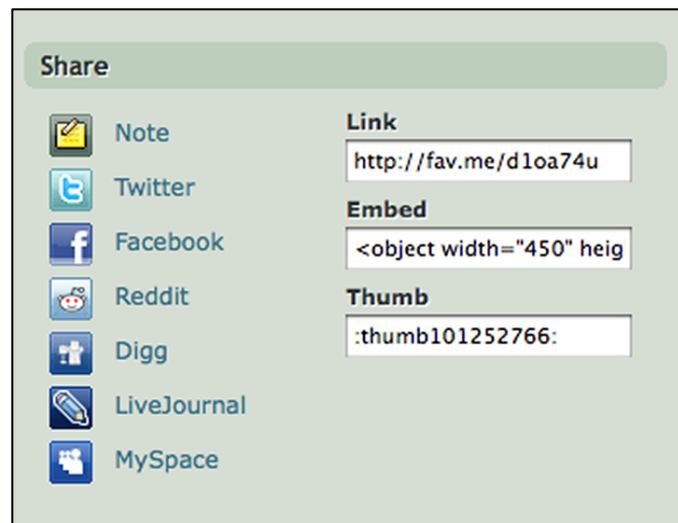
Figure 7.2: deviantART's new Share Tools

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[76] Optional "embed" code had sat alongside a deviation's "thumb" code for use within deviantART's journals and articles. On the other side of the deviation page, there has been a link that read "Share this/Blog it." Clicking on the link opened up a small window with the large title "Promote this Deviation." This title was followed by sub-headers to promote the work "On deviantART," in a note, or "On the Web" via links that accessed the APIs of Digg, LiveJournal, and MySpace.

[77] Gone was the language of "blog" or "promote" that had been a part of the old functionality. When the tools first launched, the embed code was still alongside the thumb code, both of which were positioned close to but separate from the other new features. Soon after, all of these tools for "sharing" were positioned under one "Share" header.

> The new Share Tools included ways to post thumbnails or links of the work on various other sites (via APIs), a link to the work (using a "shortened URL"), and exposed "Embed" code. These features were consolidated with a way to include the work in a deviantART Note and a way to post a thumbnail of the work in journal entries and news articles (using a "Thumb" code).

Diverging from the launch of other new features, including those discussed in the preceding chapters, no news article or other announcement accompanied the launch of these new features.[78] Later, Angelo Sotira posted to the site that the reason that the new features had not been announced was that from his perspective "as a technologist" there was nothing particularly novel or exciting about them.[79] When I visited deviantART headquarters soon after the Share Wars ended, I learned how surprised staff were by what ensued.[80]

Rather than view the Share Tools as sufficiently conventional to be infrastructural, many members saw them as disruptive. Their view might seem obvious given that art theft was such a widespread concern and some members had spent considerable time and effort fighting it and trying to maintain control over their work. But, whether the Share Tools promoted theft and altered the conditions for control were central points of contention. What I highlight here is that the conflict concerned a blurring between technical and ideological, and between descriptive and normative, ways of "working" on three levels: how the new features, the Internet, and deviantART worked.

7.4.1   Questions of control

Within a day, there was resistance, though initially it was not overtly antagonistic. One member who had been using the site for several years started a new thread on deviantART's Suggestions forum and asked deviantART to make the new Share Tools optional:

> I understand there are many reasons why people will enjoy it, and also that people will say 'well even without it people can still link to your work' but because of my career choice and my choice of artistic outlet I would prefer to be able to disable this function.

I later learned that she was concerned about a collision of social worlds between her work practice as a teacher and her creative practices as photographer and a model who sometimes posed nude. She saw her use of deviantART as a calculated but personally valuable risk. Encouraging the

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[78] From what I gathered from the ensuing debates, they had not been introduced earlier to beta testers. I am not certain about this last point.

[79] The distinction between an identity as "technologist" and one as "artist" is significant for what follows. From conversations with Sotira, as well as assertions he made to journalists, Sotira was proud of noting features of deviantART that he had launched on the site before they appeared on other sites (see Wang, "The Deviant Experience," 2011). In contrast, he saw the new features as several years behind what was widespread practice on the web. He appealed to the site, "We should have posted about this in advance of the changes, but the fact of the matter is we should have had those links up ages ago. It's almost out of embarrassment that we didn't formally 'announce' their presence, as to not draw the opposite attention of, 'where the hell have they been!? There's hardly a website left on the web without these types of links!' See it from our perspective, ANNOUNCE share links in August of 2009?" This is an illustration of the tension with deviantART's members' and staff's positions in trying to distinguish deviantART from the web as well as making deviantART a part of the web.

[80] Staff members whom I spoke to kept bringing it up without me asking about it.

"sharing" of her work greatly upset whatever calculus she used to decide whether to continue. She went on:

> It's obviously not going to stop people who really want to 'share' your work, but having it disabled would at least discourage…. It would be more respectful to the artist to have them choose to have it enabled…It still isn't going to stop people from using it but it doesn't put the idea in their heads either.

She echoed principles I outlined earlier in the chapter: disabling was akin to a "preventative measure," and artists should have as much control as possible.

The Share Tools, this person and others argued, would chip away at that control. Another member focused primarily on the issue of control, noting that the sudden appearance of the new features was "a loss of control to us all, on the quiet." The new features took artistic control away from members:

> Part of the appeal for using dA is control—control over what goes where. The way that we can currently use thumbnails in our journals etc is cool, but I do not want my thumbnail images turning up, at someone else's behest, on random websites all over the world, and who knows what other images my own might end up sitting next to? If I wanted to 'take advantage' of Facebook, Twitter, and Digg, I'd just go and setup an account there.

This person was not suggesting that he necessarily had, or should have, control over the site. As he said, "My page belongs to dA," which I read as both acknowledging some lack of control as well as emphasizing that his work was primarily intended for members using deviantART. But, artists on the site should not lose "editorial control of who, how, and where their work gets displayed." deviantART, he argued, "should remain strongly ring fenced as possible." The word "remain" indicates that he saw it as already ring fenced, despite the fact that it was widely accessible to anyone with a web browser.

Finally, the speculation about "what other images" his "might end up sitting next to" suggests a concern over shifts in context in a way that would be problematic. He also commented on the aesthetics and values implied when new buttons with corporate logos accompanied posted work. He added that members already had the choice of whether to have their work appear on "the outside world." I return to this point below as others raised it as well.

Both members whom I have quoted here had been active members of the site for several years, and their posts evolved into two important centers of debate and eventually outright hostility as the "Share Wars" unfolded.[81] As it turned out, many members of deviantART were bothered by the new features.

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[81] It is difficult to trace how the stories spread, whose journals were critical at the time, and so on. The suggestion forum posts generated 100s of comments—far more than typical—and the news article also generated 100s of comments. These discussions contained positions that were representative of most of the arguments and counter-arguments I saw on other parts of the site, but they were not my only source of material. I noticed that the author of the suggestions thread actively promoted the forum in response to comments to the news article in order to get people to read the debate and comment in that venue. My sense was that her main objective throughout was to get the features made optional, and getting more people to echo this particular desire on the forum was the best approach.

7.4.2   The turn to theft

Neither of the people I quote above mentioned the word "theft." However, over the next several days, many who commented argued that the problem all boiled down to theft. deviantART's staff, many claimed, had made it easier for others to steal their work and use it in ways that they did not want. "dA is full of hypocrites," one person said. "They will ban folks if they steal art or plagiarize and yet they are making these very crimes even easier." Some even accused deviantART's staff of intentionally promoting theft solely to profit from increased traffic that the linked work would generate. As I described above, there was a strong relationship between theft, the integrity of the artists' wishes, and the desire to control the circulation of work. The fact that some members felt that these tools threatened the latter two implies a short conceptual leap back to the first. Many suggested that the Share Tools worked contrary to members' terms of use and what they saw as the infrastructural norms and practices already established on the site.

This turn to theft is where the arguments became particularly heated.[82] Staff, friends of staff members, and other members argued vociferously that deviantART was not promoting theft. To suggest that the site or they were encouraging such transgressive practice was a personal and professional insult. In a widely circulated and commented on post to the official blog of the deviantART HQ, Angelo Sotira summed up a position that echoed what many members of the site had said elsewhere:

> The idea that deviantART would take direct action to help others steal your work or encourage this sort of behavior is not acceptable to us. It is offensive to us. It is a contradiction of our core mission; many of us are artists ourselves, and we have zero interest in siding with copyright infringers.

Not only did supporters of the Share Tools reject the idea that the staff or the tools implicitly sanctioned theft, they also spurned the claims that the features had taken away control. In fact, they argued the exact opposite: these features, if used by viewers as intended, could help prevent "theft" in part by guaranteeing credit and a link back to their work. Sotira himself argued in a lengthy news article that disabling share links would "hurt" members and result in less control over one's work.[83] Josh Wattles told me—and other members during the course of the Share Wars— that accusations of the Share Tools being commercial motivated were unfounded. He pointed out several examples in which deviantART by design was not a site that tried to make money by any means necessary (a point echoed in other conversations with Angelo Sotira).

The accusations of theft fueled the conflict, and many members started taking down their work or hiding their galleries, using the "storage" functionality. Some people created stamps to spread the word of this protest, such as one I saw on several userpages and journals that exclaimed, "Don't Share My ART." Attacks back and forth became more personal. There was confusion about

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[82] Over the course of the Share Wars, some of the members trying to lead attempts to change the features, such as the people mentioned in the previous section, repeatedly said that this issue was not about "theft." One did not have to equate "sharing" with "stealing" to want to the features optional.

[83] As it turns out, since these features were launched, I have come cross blogs, particularly professional ones, that embedded deviantART images and credited them but failed to use the Share Tools to do so. As perhaps might be expected, it seems likely that they wanted their own editorial control over how the material was displayed on their site rather than leaving it under the control of deviantART.

whether the features would in fact be made optional and how deviantART's staff was responding. The arguments persisted over the course of the next month.

7.4.3 How the Share Tools work

From the outset there clearly was confusion about what the new features did and the implications of their functionality for ownership and rights over the material. Many members who defended the features, staff included, repeatedly argued that they were *just links*, even referring to them as the "sharelinks." As links, they were fundamental to the nature of the Internet (a point that I return to below). Members taking this stance sometimes disparaged alternate points of view:

> URLs should really be removed from this site altogether!

> Yes of course! Linking is art theft!

Many members who resisted the features felt that these mocking statements had a central purpose: to portray them as ignorant. They countered that these kinds of statements also misrepresented the technical aspects of the features and in doing so misrepresented the problems people had with them. The equation of the Share Tools with "linking" was inaccurate, these people claimed: neither the "embed code" nor the API-enabled buttons were "just links":

> It seems to me that people keep mentioning that it's like posting a link, but actually it's NOT at all. Posting a link to a site forces you to go to that site and see for yourself the context in which it was posted in: artistic. Whereas sharing allows you to see the image without going into the site. Many of my friends share videos from youtube, I just watch them on facebook without needing to see it on youtube so I can't see what kind of comments or site it's coming from, so no it's not the same.

This claim relates back to objections I discussed earlier regarding concerns over the decontextualization of work. Changing the context of the work changed the work itself, transforming it from "artistic" to something else. Thus, "linking" was actually *not* "sharing," contrary to the opposite position.

I also observed that many people did not understand the buttons and the use of APIs. But, several asked pointed questions about the consequences of using these buttons. "What is the written policy/agreement with these other websites on this share tool?" asked one person. Another asked about a possible financial relationship: "What does DA get/pay for this sharing option?…Are fees exchanged for this share linking?" People wondered whether the Share Tools gave a site like Facebook some rights to the content.[84] The terms of service on Facebook seemed to do just that, claimed some members. Was deviantART, Inc. wittingly or unwittingly ceding control to Facebook?

Finally, deviantART's new URL shortening confused some people. While clever—the base URL was deviantART's own "http://fave.me/"—some thought that this was a URL on another site, as nowhere did the URL include the name "deviantART." This lack of connection was positioned as

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[84] Someone claimed that he had consulted a lawyer and learned that Facebook's TOS implied that any "shared" work could end up in advertisements. Even if these terms might not hold up in court, he continued, the hassle of going to court would prohibit individuals from taking action.

proof that deviantART had gone against the wishes of its members. That some people would even suspect the use of such a tactic, on the other hand, was in the view of the opposition proof of ignorance.

7.4.4   How the Internet works

The argument that the new Share Tools were "just links" was making a broader point. Linking to other people's content was simply how the Internet works. "It's the nature of the net," one person put it. Another wrote, "I don't use a browser to protect my artistic rights. in fact, I don't use the Internetz at all." Someone joked that, "The site should be removed from the Internet!" Describing resistance to the feature, another noted, "There's vast misunderstanding about the basics of how the interwebs works."

But these "misunderstandings" were not just about the Internet and links but also about what it meant to post to the Internet in the first place. Many artists I spoke with used the term "sharing" when describing putting work online, much as the people I observed would when they passed sketchbooks around at meetups. As noted earlier, the same language is commonly used in academic discourse as well. That the Pew Center has phrased its survey questions in the language of "sharing" speaks to both vernacular and academic uses (see Lenhart and Madden 2005, Lenhart et al. 2007, 2010). This common use of language reinforced the premise that "posting" artwork to the Internet was the equivalent of "sharing" it. As one person noted to a staff member, "If people are worried about their work getting shared...they shouldn't, you know, put it on the Internet." Another member argued that indeed, "the net was originally about sharing," a perspective that corresponds to that of Lessig (2008) and was argued by Sotira earlier in his career when he was involved in promoting music file-sharing software. As the quote in the chapter's epigraph indicates, to Sotira the whole point of the Internet from its origins was sharing.[85]

In response to this position, though, some members pointed out that "how the Internet works" is quite different depending on what part of the Internet one engages with:

> Speaking of 'how the Internet works,' Blogger and I believe also LiveJournal allow for various 'share' options. All we want is a "yes/no." And quite ironically Facebook offers a large number of privacy settings for THEIR people. Yes it seems that FB is not so intent on 'maximizing exposure' outside the community for those who don't want that…Don't they realize that once they upload to the Internet their images are mine mine mine?! Mwhahaha…[86]

In other words, the Internet is made up of distinct political spaces as much as it might appear to be a unifying technological framework. It comprises different sites governed by different policies, rules, and features, in a sense echoing Lessig's (1999) equation of code and law.

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[85] I chapter 8 I conclude by commenting of the significance of the elision of "art" and "information."

[86] Note that this comment was made before a series of changes to those very privacy settings later that year and in early 2010, when many people thought that Facebook was steadily taking away that very control (changes since then have raised questions about whether Facebook is adding control or obfuscating it). Similar arguments were made about the nature of "sharing" and how the Internet works, but once public outcry reached a particular level and the federal government began to step in, Facebook revised its features.

The argument in this last quote also contains a response to a statement made in defense of the features: their ability to help "maximize exposure." As I argued in chapter 5, many members saw deviantART as providing an opportunity to get attention and gain recognition. One staff member in the course of the debate posted a journal entry noting that he did not understand why, on a site where people seemed concerned about getting their work seen by as many people as possible, there would be such an outcry over any feature that supported this goal. This sentiment provides some sense of what some on deviantART's staff saw the site's basic purpose: to give artists as wide an audience as possible. Many members echoed this point: the Share Tools on deviantART were ways for creators to promote and market themselves. As many supporters of the features noted, the tools were means for people to "share with your friends" and "drive traffic to your work." Of course, these were not necessarily the same thing.

Yet, as I argued in chapter 5, while many members were deeply invested in getting noticed, not everyone necessarily wanted to get noticed by as many people as possible, or by any means necessary. In chapter 6, I pointed to a tension between trying to make deviantART a learning environment and trying to make it an environment for marketing, reinforcing a binary between these two goals. Concerns over marketing and popularity echoed the aforementioned comments by Wattles and Sotira that while deviantART was profit-seeking, it was not necessarily seeking to maximize profits at any cost. Clearly then, this battle concerned not only the technical details of how the Internet works but also ideology. The naturalization of "how the Internet works" helps to hide the controversy's ideological dimensions, which were at play as people argued for and against the features.

7.4.5   How deviantART works

The ideological and normative arguments about deviantART became clearer as supporters of the tools explicitly posited a relationship between sharing and the values of deviantART as a community. Those who resisted did so as well, but they presented a different understanding of the boundaries of "the community."

The Director of Community Operations, when questioned as to whether these features would be made optional, replied that she felt that "disabling links goes against everything we stand for." The "we" here was ambiguous, referencing the values of the deviantART staff, the site as a whole, or both. One person said that not only were the new tools "very useful," they also were improving deviantART as community, and "community…invokes sharing" and "help[ing] each other out." deviantART's Share Tools were provided in service of these community functions.

The objection to this argument was neither to question deviantART as a community nor to challenge the relationship between community and mutual help. Rather, the relationship between "sharing," broadly construed, and the other elements at play in "community" was questioned.[87] As one person argued, sharing broadly may be *contrary* to deviantART's stated mission as a community:

> If you poke around the FAQ you can actually find something about what dA is

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[87] The point about "helping each other out" and being a part of a community of artists echoes those made in chapter 6. The relationship between "sharing" and "helping each other out" is new, though it relates, in a sense, to one view of tutorials.

trying to do…'deviantART is an online art community for artists and art lovers to interact in a variety of ways…In its purest form, deviantART is a means for expressing yourself in a variety of ways.' The impression *I* get from this is that dA is a self contained community. My artwork posted here are meant for people ON THIS SITE.

If deviantART was a community, which would imply sharing, the community in question was one of "artists and art lovers," not the wider public.

7.4.6   Resolving the Share Wars

"You were right," the Director of Marketing wrote on deviantART's HQ blog. After six weeks of discussion, debate, insults, threats to leave, artwork pulled from the site, "deliberation with both staff members and community members," deviantART, Inc. made the features optional. One member told me that even though he liked the features, he had advocated for such a compromise.[88]

In making the changes staff went beyond giving members the choice of enabling or disabling the new sharing features. For the first time (as far as I am aware) the site gave members the option of making each deviation visible only to other deviantART members.[89] When uploading a deviation, members now had three options: Encourage Sharing, which would enable all of the Share Tools on a deviation; Discourage Sharing, which would disable the Share Tools; and "deviantART Members Only."[90]

Thus, the Share Wars resulted in increased options for its members and, to some extent, increased control as well. But, these options came under the guise of the importance of sharing within the community. This compromise over a new set of features, like those discussed in previous chapters, helped to maintain arguments on different sides of the conflict. A web user could go to the site and see many deviations that include the Share Tools, just like so many other websites. The Internet for some could continue to be seen as an open space for sharing in a manner that some would see as conventional—the way the Internet works. At the same time, the compromise solution reinforced a boundary around deviantART as a unique space separate from the rest of the web. Sharing on this site takes on a different form than sharing elsewhere. The solution also contributed to the idea that deviantART was a medium for trying to control one's work and a site that supported the norms of respect for artists' moral rights in their work.

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[88] This person pointed me to a debate that he had gotten into in which there was a discussion over several days about the merits of the feature. He took the position that he liked the features, but they might as well be optional. The other argued repeatedly that the new features were not promoting theft and that the opposition was delusional about what kind of control they could have on the web. Yet, by the end of the discussion the latter also said that the features might as well be optional, a point that surprised my informant given the persistence of the argument.

[89] Although "deviantART only" was an option members implied they might like, as it was not part of the status quo, I was surprised to this option appear when suggested in a journal entry by Sotira and later as a part of the solution.

[90] The language of "encourage" and "discourage" seems to be taken right from the posts of people who raised objections to the features when they were first launched as non-optional.

The Share Wars is a powerful example of how in the effort to establish their identities as creators through the assertion of authorial (moral) rights, members sought control over their work and the technologies they were using. Many members—paid staff and volunteers, Seniors, long time members, and even relatively new ones—sought to shape the normative and technical production of deviantART. These events illustrate what is just a part of the nature of the web to some people but what presents serious problems to others. They constitute another case of something being perceived as infrastructural to some people becoming viewed by others as problematic (Star and Ruhleder 1996). The Share Wars surfaced tensions between circulation and control in art and reproduced a web-related tension between sharing and theft (as well as one between sharing and marketing, though perhaps to a lesser extend). The compromises resolved the Share Wars, but not the deeper tensions.

7.5   Infrastructure for sharing?

Many scholars have concluded that the web and the Internet provide infrastructure for sharing. The range of projects that Lessig (2008:162-172) and Benkler (2006) draw from illustrates the variety of activities in which people engage and the variety of things exchanged. Sometimes the study of exchange refers to non-commercial exchange. Lessig (2008:147), for example, describes much of the shared products in terms of gift-giving.[91] In Benkler's (2004, 2006) examples (later re-iterated by Lessig), sharing refers to many people's use of a common, or "shared," resource, such as computing power in a distributed computer network.[92] Sharing also can mean contribution to a common cause or project, the product of volunteerism.[93] Similarly expansive, Shirky's (2008) accounts include a range of information being shared, from political news on Facebook that stimulates social movements to family photographs using Flickr (see also Shirky 2010). Unlike Lessig and Benkler, Shirky (2008) distinguishes "sharing" from "collaborating" and "collective action," though Shirky sees the former as the foundation for the other two (sharing is the easiest of the three to accomplish). But, Shirky expands the use of the term in other ways, such as when he speaks of people "*unknowingly* sharing" (2008:49, original emphasis) information with organizations like Google. [94]

While the meaning of sharing slips among these influential thinkers, what does not slip is the term's positive connotations. Such connotations are even present in Shirky's aside about "unknowingly sharing." He adds, "These users are helping create a communally available resource, as Flickr users are, but unlike Flickr, the people whose work Google is aggregating aren't actively

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[91] Here, Lessig notes that the discussion of gift economies has long been part of studies of social life and bases most of his discussion on Lewis Hyde's *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (2004).

[92] Benkler's (2004) account of SETI@home is an example of the former (as well as various other "@home" projects). SETI stands for the "Search for Extra-Terrestial Intelligence," and SETI@home is a project that relies on volunteers donating idle computing time on their personal computers to helping the project. It is an example of "distributed computing."

[93] SETI@home is also an example, as are Wikipedia and Project Gutenberg.

[94] In contrast, Lessig uses Google as an example of a commercial, rather than a sharing, economy. Still, he also describes a search as a "gift" to Google as well as something "valuable to you." But it is a strange gift: "You don't have a choice about helping Google when you use Google's search engine…The company efficiently serves you a product, and very efficiently learns something in the process" (Lessig 2008:136).

choosing to make their contributions" (2008:49). Whether knowingly or unknowingly shared, the "communal resources" are positive outcomes.[95]

Considering deviantART and the Share Wars in the broader picture of the web points to another slippage—that between sharing and marketing. The different tools used on the web to promote sharing are also the same tools that allow content creators and distributors to market themselves. Through the distribution of different forms of embeddable "widgets" (such as YouTube's movie player) or the easy linking of content through popular sites like Facebook, content distributors promote their brands, bring people to their own sites, and attract advertising revenue. URL shortening services offer a range of services for people to track the use of their links and market their content or sites more effectively.

As I describe above, one of the arguments made in support of the Share Tools is that they would help to increase members' exposure. This point corresponds to a view I describe in chapters 5 and 6: that deviantART was a site for marketing oneself. The Share Tools could be a boon to such efforts. Not only would these features increase members' exposure, the argument went, all of the tools, including the thumbnails and embed code, could actually help members by guaranteeing that they received attribution and a link back to their art on deviantART. Without using these tools members' work would continue to be used in ways they did not want, but without any guarantees of links back to their work. The distinction between attribution and credit (Monroy-Hernández et. al. 2011), discussed above, illuminates why an automatic link back would not be sufficient for many members. An automatically inserted link may help efforts to control and to market, but it does not address the moral question: no links may actually force members to grapple with the difficult questions more often.

While the language of "sharing" can obfuscate the sharing-marketing relationship, the use of sharing in the service of marketing is not a hidden capitalist agenda. One of the stated premises of Web 2.0 is that there is money to be made from people's desire to share (see chapter 1). As noted earlier, Lessig (2008) describes examples of businesses that are leveraging "sharing economies" and argues that there will be even more sharing-commercial hybrids.[96] Recent work has extended the possibilities for sharing-based business models. [97] Yet, whereas "sharing" has overwhelmingly positive connotations, ideas of self-promotion and marketing were treated more ambivalently on the site, even as many members saw deviantART as a good tool for marketing oneself. Maximizing exposure might not be such a universal goal to people who seek the mantle of "artist" (see chapter 3). In fact, some principles of artistic legitimacy rest on notions of some art being intended for a restricted audience, particularly when the goal is the accumulation of symbolic, or reputational, capital. The material I present in chapter 5 demonstrates some of conflict in how best to assess recognition, as well as ambivalences in attitudes towards "popularity." During the Share Wars, some members reiterated that "maximizing exposure" was not what drove their use of deviantART.

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[95] Therefore, if Raymond Williams were to include "sharing" in a re-write of *Keywords*, he might include it on a short list of "warmly persuasive words."

[96] Note that his main goal in *Remix* is to promote both legal reforms to the law and cultural reforms "to us." See the final chapters of *Remix*.

[97] For example, Lisa Gansky's *The Mesh* (2010).

Describing either sharing or marketing in the language of "theft" is of course highly derogative but no more or less laden with moral beliefs. Many members of the site saw the web as a medium that was just as infrastructural for "art thieves" as it was for their own "sharing" or "marketing." Combating theft meant trying to change the balance between these infrastructural positions.

7.6   Conclusion

A decade before the coining of "Web 2.0" and several years before the widespread use of the Internet or the web in everyday life, influential scholars at the intersection of technology, history, creativity, and the law were speculating about new technologies' consequences. The literary and legal scholar Martha Woodmansee discussed the collective nature of authorship in online discussions that may "reverse the trajectory of print": "In a variety of ways, electronic communication seems to be assaulting the distinction between *mine* and *thine* that the modern authorship construct was designed to enforce" (1994a:26, original emphasis). Such claims and others like it have since been echoed to the point of cliché in the fifteen years since. Perhaps it is the very force of this "assault" that has resulted in such a vocal defense on deviantART of the "distinction between mine and thine," which is couched in the moral language of theft and the assertion of the right ways to use the web to prevent and combat it. But it remains far from clear at this point how much the distinction has been eroded by the web.

Addressing questions of control over the circulation of work, debates over theft and sharing were about asserting and defending one's very identity as creator. Participants in deviantART vociferously asserted a defense of authorship and the identity of the author as proprietary creator. This is not to say that deviantART members did not recognize their sources of inspiration or in some cases the source of material in their work. Indeed, participants in deviantART saw the site as providing ample space, material means (through links for example), and opportunity to acknowledge other sources—rather than simply make use of other sources—and to explicitly point to "mine" and "thine," all of which may have been otherwise obscure. As I have presented here, there are social pressures that members *must* make use of this space in such a way.

Many members of deviantART, then, were working to create norms other than those of "sharing" that many scholars of the Internet suggest are inherent to the medium (and a new generation's use of it). Permission culture thrived on deviantART. It was embedded in the emphases on permission both in deviantART's copyright policy and in the norms and practices of its members. Such was the case even on a site where many young creators experienced with digital media not only posted artwork, but helped each other improve and worked to establish particular ideals of community. As the various definitions of theft used illustrate, some argued that standards implied that asking for permission was simply the morally right thing to do. Those who used the term theft on deviantART emphasized a strong proprietary and moral relationship between those labeled as "creators" and their creations. Many asserted a wide range of property rights to account for both the opportunities and the risks of posting work to deviantART and the web. It may be a paradox of a "remix culture" that claims to authorship and indebtedness to sources are perhaps more important to assert explicitly than they have been before. Rather than living in the age of remix, we may be closer to what Van Houweling (2010) describes as the "age of the author" where some feel more empowered and others more panicked in the face of insecurity to assert a new degree of authorial control over their products.

Nevertheless, deviantART's members' ideas of theft, like the idea of sharing held by those who promoted it as a norm, also slipped and were inconsistent. These differences themselves have a historical lineage. Lütticken (2002) notes that Reynolds' sixth *Discourse on Art* (published in 1774) warned painters and poets against vanity if assuming that their work was "original" and therefore not indebted to the "Old Masters." Rather, like the Renaissance masters, Reynolds argues, artists should be embrace imitation. However, Reynolds also noted that artists had to avoid charges of "plagiarism," "stealing," and "theft." Accounting for these seemingly contradictory recommendations, Lütticken says that Reynolds advocated borrowing from the "Old Masters" liberally while avoiding doing the same for contemporaries as "'the works of the moderns are more the property of their authors'" (quoting Reynolds). But then Lütticken turns around and notes that Reynolds said that as long as the works produced were "new," even borrowing from the "moderns" was acceptable. Reynolds, he argues, was right on the cusp of the discourse of Romanticism—at the end of one tradition and the beginning of a new one. Lütticken's difficulty navigating Reynolds' text emphasizes the long history of difficulty in making sense of what is and is not stealing (see also Johns 2009).

Perhaps, as the Web 2.0 creativity consensus has suggested, we are at the end of one era and on the cusp of another. But, such ideologically based assertions are themselves working to bring about the very changes that they describe. If the web continues to be conventionalized and naturalized as infrastructure for sharing, it will be because of continuing technical and ideological work to make it so.

Conclusion: how art and the web "work"

In response to debates about creativity and the contemporary web, I have investigated deviantART—its use and production. I have examined how participants collectively shaped the process of artistic recognition through the site and created deviantART as infrastructure spanning multiple creative worlds and practices. I argue that people participating in creative worlds, making and distributing their work and becoming socially recognized creative practitioners, produce the web in ongoing social practice.

I have focused on tensions in practice as they emerged on the site and on their role in producing both creative identities and infrastructure. Chapter 5 studies site participants' efforts to define artistic recognition as members sought to get noticed and become popular on deviantART and elsewhere. There, I examine tensions between visibility and popularity and between both of these and quality, and then examine all three in relation to what it meant to be an artist. Chapter 6 investigates how participants positioned deviantART as a site to improve as an artist. I discuss tensions between marketing and improving, among different notions of *critique*, and among different ideas of what it meant to be self-taught with respect to the web. Chapter 7 concerns efforts to control the circulation of work on the web and tensions between *sharing* and *theft*. Throughout, I have looked at these concerns in artistic recognition in relation to others that came with positioning deviantART as corporation and as community that historically have contributed to the production of the web and Internet.

deviantART's tagline was "where ART meets APPLICATION." I have argued that this meeting was a far more complex proposition than might appear. deviantART was a website and web application where historical tensions in art and creativity met historical tensions in the Internet and web and subsequently produced new tensions at the intersection. At the intersection of art worlds and web worlds, participants in deviantART reproduced and transformed these tensions through reifications of how art and the web "work."

How *do* the art and the web "work"? These are big questions beyond the scope of a dissertation, but they were crucial to deviantART participants in practice. Anthropologist Jean Lave argues, "Social inquiry is always a matter of looking at any object of analysis…*with respect to* whatever else we are interested in that makes it what is it" (2011:155, original emphasis). deviantART was a manifestation of how participants established the relationship between art and the web. But, the website was not just a product of this relationship: it continued to produce participants' understanding of art and the web. Through deviantART, the "working" of art constituted the "working" of the web and *vice versa*. Participants' reifications (Wenger 1998) of these different forms of "working" were material and discursive, technical and ideological. Moral and ethical

arguments provided foundations for claims about the nature of the web and of art, conflating descriptive claims—how things *do* work—with normative claims—how things *should* work.

Similar blends and conflations of working also mark the writings of the scholars who contribute to what I have dubbed the "Web 2.0 creativity consensus," a collection of viewpoints that suggest that in a world with the web, creativity has been democratized, is anchored in community values, is non-commercial, and has been revolutionized. The same can be said about claims scholars have made about the intersection of new technologies and a new generation of content creators. These scholars have provided some of the most influential depictions of how creativity and the web work. But, their assumptions and conclusions are in turn rooted in arguments about the inherent nature of web technologies, web culture (often tied to youth culture), or some mix of the two.

My findings run up against claims about the inherent nature of the web. Creating knowledge of how the web works is not just an outcome of using the web or theorizing about it. It is a part of what is helping to produce the web in practice, whether theories come from influential academics, technology designers, or everyday users. Both the subjects of social research and scholars conducting analyses reflexively construct theories of the world and thus shape the world in practice (Giddens 1979). This knowledge construction is not always intentional, nor do people always self-consciously build the world or technologies through which they work. But, they nevertheless play active roles.

I conclude by discussing the consequences of these tensions and clashes of "working" by taking two different perspectives on my findings. First, I examine my material in light of my research questions and the theory that I employ. Then, I consider my findings with respect to the empirical phenomena under investigation—Web 2.0 and the creativity consensus. I discuss what might be new about contemporary art worlds and the web. Finally, I offer directions for future work by reconsidering this study as a starting point for a broader inquiry about the dynamics of creativity and of the web in the "information society."

8.1 The mutual production of identity and infrastructure

I began with a pair of theoretically informed research questions. One question concerns the shaping of identity as creative practitioner through participation in deviantART. The other concerns the shaping of deviantART as infrastructure for creative practice. Taken together, to what extent and how in practice are these identities and deviantART mutually constituted?

8.1.1 Shaping identity as creative practitioner

deviantART exposed artists and art worlds to one another and served several distinct functions. The site provided rough equivalents for a wide range of distribution mechanisms that operated at various scales: sketch books, formal portfolios, published media about art, and galleries. deviantART was also a medium for everyday communication between artists. Through deviantART, newcomers to art worlds gained access to old-timers, who in turn could serve as role models, sources of inspiration, mentors, and even fans. Reciprocally, members with more experience could find new audiences for their work, cultivate existing fans, become mentors, discover new distribution outlets, and continue their artistic trajectories. Finally, the site provided analogs for other art-world institutions: awards, ranking systems, and mechanisms for critique and

sharing—all features that mediated the relationships among artists as individuals and between artists and art worlds. To summarize, deviantART provided a new distribution system for artwork and artists. It served as technical and ideological infrastructure for new art worlds and for connecting existing art worlds, such as those oriented around comics, photography, stock photography, anime/manga fandom, and design. The site provided new resources for practitioners in these worlds. Distribution systems and resources play central roles in the constitution of art worlds and the identities of practitioners within them (chapter 3).

Forming any identity is about moving away from positions of peripherality to mature practice (chapter 3, Lave and Wenger 1991, Lave 2011). This movement involves engaging with historically constituted ideas and conflicts. deviantART played a role in shaping some of the concepts and tensions people have historically engaged when becoming recognized as an artist. On deviantART, these included questions about the relative importance of broad visibility, popularity, and quality (chapter 5); "right" ways of improving at art (chapter 6); and concerns over theft and property (chapter 7). deviantART supplied resources to work through these tensions and demonstrate artistic "seriousness." Participants used deviantART to observe and participate in the construction of social conventions that may otherwise have been hidden. For some people the site was among the first encounters with such concerns. For others it was an arena for issues encountered elsewhere. Encountering these issues on deviantART changed some people's ways of thinking and reinforced others' beliefs.

This understanding of identity transformation draws from Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), people's changing understanding in practice as they go from newcomers to old-timers in social worlds (chapter 3). This project provides the empirical grounds to address unresolved theoretical questions about the role of the web in LPP left open in chapter 3. To summarize, the problem is that in theory LPP concerns the reproduction of *practice* through participation and reification, a process that in part involves the construction of tacit knowledge (Wenger 1998, Brown and Duguid 2001, Ellis et al. 2004). The emphasis on the tacit typically connotes face-to-face, embodied experiences (Duguid 2005b, Wenger 1998), but Lave and Wenger (1991) note that communities of practice—the social locus of LPP—do not need to be face-to-face. One way to resolve this seeming contradiction would be to refine the concept of LPP and limit is applicability (as Brown and Duguid 2001 and Duguid 2005b do).

Another possibility, however, concerns the term "legitimate" in LPP.[1] The material I have presented speaks to participants' ongoing use of deviantART in relation to what counts as *legitimate participation* in different art worlds. Participants used deviantART to make some art-world practices legitimate and others illegitimate by claiming worth, distancing, theorizing, and standard setting (Strauss 1982) through technology, debates, and practices. The research also addresses *legitimate peripherality*, which Lave (2008:285) argues is problematic because of peripherality's ambiguity. Peripherality can be empowering or disempowering: "When peripherality is enabled, it suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through

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[1] While Lave and Wenger (1991:35-37) argue that legitimate peripheral participation is a concept to be taken as a whole, they do in fact break it down into different pair-wise combinations. See also Lave (2008:285) who writes, "we said [legitimate peripheral participation] was to be taken as one indivisible concept. Or at least its parts should never be taken one at a time." I read this as implying that the combination of its paired permutations (peripheral participation, legitimate participation, legitimate peripherality) add up to the whole concept.

growing involvement" (Lave and Wenger 1991:37). Participation in deviantART provided its members with openings *and* closings, enabling *and* preventing access to further participation in various art worlds. The site established new means for participants to reify their participation as artists. It also allowed people to observe more-or-less unobtrusively—though only partially— others' ways of engaging in art practice. Finally, its features materialized ways of thinking about art. Yet, all of these forms of codification of practice are not quite reducible to either explicit or tacit knowledge. The site gave participants the opportunities to tacitly construct positions of legitimate peripherality and participate legitimately as they formed shared practices with some participants and worlds and, *just as important*, distanced themselves from other participants, practices, and worlds.

This discussion of LPP returns us to the concept of infrastructure. If legitimate peripheral *participation* is the link between the individual and the social loci of practice, infrastructure is the complementary and reciprocal *reification* of practice over time. As infrastructure for and between worlds and practices, deviantART was a site where participants materialized the struggles for legitimate participation and legitimate peripherality.

8.1.2   Shaping deviantART as infrastructure for creative practice

Infrastructure is a socio-technical assemblage of materials, policies, institutions, and social conventions (chapter 3). These elements are as ideological as they are material. They are made to be infrastructural *with respect to* particular practices and worlds. deviantART's members and staff collectively—though not always collaboratively—produced social conventions and technical features that reflected different ideologies even as the site's technologies, the term "art," and the rhetoric of "community" all provided semblances of commonality among members and uses. Through these social and material arrangements participants provided the grounds to assert and recognize individuals' identities as creative practitioners *and* produced the site as infrastructure for creative practice.

deviantART seemed on the surface to be an ideologically open and participatory environment, but participants in practice worked to establish boundaries. As a result of both corporate goals and community ideals, deviantART Inc. maintained an inclusive definition of art. It had few restrictions on who could join and what members could post. Like the notion of "art" itself, deviantART brought together different social worlds of creative practice. By surfacing historical tensions in artistic practice in new ways, both site staff and members unintentionally made explicit long-standing issues in art that had always been unsettled but otherwise coexisted. Participants transformed these tensions into objects of scrutiny and debate. Staff developed policies, some of which were tied to broader legal frameworks (e.g. copyright policy). Other policies were tied to ideas about how the web "worked": what people should expect from particular features and these features' purposes. Still others were tied to ideals of community and ethics of fair practice. Meanwhile, members tried to shape policy implicitly and explicitly as they worked to develop site-wide norms, values, and conventions (e.g. how to favourite, how to comment, how to critique, the definition of theft, and so forth). Staff and members' efforts were anchored in ideals of art, the web, and community.

While staff implemented features, deviantART's members played crucial roles in shaping the technical aspects of the site. I have described several features that changed or were first introduced

during fieldwork, such as the popularity algorithm (chapter 5), the Critique Feature (chapter 6), and the Share Tools (chapter 7). In each case, I have argued that changes and reactions to them emerged out of a set of debates at the intersection of tensions in how art and the web could and should work. Just as the site helped make explicit unsettled tensions or even long-standing hidden compromises in creative practice (Jenkins 2006), the feature changes I analyzed were the material enactment of new compromises that may be exposed again in the future. I do not know how staff translated debates into technical implementations nor about all of the concerns motivating staff decisions (e.g. revenue goals, economic pressures, deadlines, technological interests). Still, it was clear that the staff fostered an atmosphere that embraced member input. They cultivated relationships with site leaders, gave some of them particular powers as volunteers, and used the site as members did to gather feedback and learn about each other. They demonstrated a willingness to change their minds, and members seemed to have few qualms about vociferously expressing their views.

While power and control over the ongoing shaping of deviantART was distributed, it was not distributed equally. There were limits to the effects of members' agency. Suchman (2009:2) writes, "Human agency is always inextricably tied to the specific sociomaterial arrangements of which we are part." deviantART, Inc. established the framework and terms by which its members could shape the site, and staff acted as though they had a great deal of authority in shaping deviantART. While embracing some participatory ideals, site production was neither democratic nor egalitarian. The agencies in shaping the development of deviantART as infrastructure were tied to historically constituted and diverse practices that in turn came into conflict with one another through a new configuration of infrastructure.

Just as this study of deviantART helped extend and reconsider the concept of LPP, it also helps extend the application of infrastructure as a way of analyzing social life mediated by the web and Internet. The "community/network paradigm" (Postill 2008) provides two conventional concepts used to analyze social life mediated by the Internet and web (chapter 3). A deeper consideration of infrastructure leads to a useful response to Postill's call for alternatives.

Postill himself suggests a version of field theory as one option.[2] Similar to this study of deviantART, Postill considers the importance of the intersection of different domains of life—and their accompanying "socialities"—particularly on the Internet. The Internet in turn plays the role of a quasi-public *arena* where such intersections occur and differences are contested. Postill mentions, the Internet's technical affordances (2008:427), but says little about them. Infrastructure adds to Postill's framing, and it leads to a different way of thinking about technology than simply the language of affordances. This study of deviantART shows a way of examining how Postill's participants position websites alongside institutions, discourses, and practices to help create the socialities he describes, and further, how participants position these elements to connect these socialities in ways that seem stable and conventional. If and when there are breakdowns, one could then look to the disruption of infrastructure, consequences and efforts to "rebuild."

Infrastructure also adds another lens with which to consider another alternative to the community/network paradigm—"networked publics" (Varnelis et al. 2008, boyd 2008). According to Ito (in Varnelis et al. 2008:2), networked publics "reference a linked set of social, cultural, and

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[2] Here he draws from Bourdieu as well as Victor Turner and the Manchester School of Anthropology.

technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media." These developments are characterized by overlapping and simultaneous places where people and corporations "traffic" in different forms of media. boyd (2008:15) extends this account by describing networked publics as both the "space constructed through networked technologies" and "the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice." boyd (2008) outlines a set of properties and dynamics (26) that help constitute the Internet as a "restructuring force" (19).[3]

Infrastructure is a useful extension to both of these conceptions of networked publics. Varnelis et al. (2008) emphasize the role of individual users and media consumers in their theory. But, with "infrastructure" as simply the technological backbone upon which culture rests in their account, there is little sense of how people shape the social conventions and institutions of networking technology and the importance of practices shaped by history (their arguments come with a revolutionary tone). Similarly, in boyd's account, there is a sense that the properties and dynamics of networked publics accompany digital networking technology. Although boyd shows how people wrestle and reshape technologies in practice, she does not explore how her properties and dynamics are made to seem natural, conventional, and taken-for-granted in the first place. Rather than a list of properties and dynamics as being *of* networked publics, my study of deviantART suggests that value of an analysis as to how participants produce these properties and dynamics and cause some of them to be *infrastructural* for some practices and publics but obstacles for others. An infrastructural perspective would, for example, look to how things online are made (or not), in practice, to become "searchable" or to "persist" (two of boyd's properties).[4] The deviantART Share Wars, for example, illustrate concerns about "invisible audiences" and "collapsed contexts" (two of boyd's dynamics), yet the Share Wars also demonstrate that these had as much to do with tensions in artistic practice, when brought together with tensions related to the web, than with the specifics of networking technologies.

A limitation of the use of the term "infrastructure" is the conceptual distance between the theoretical use here and everyday vernacular use. With a vernacular meaning in mind, there is nothing novel about talking about the web as communications infrastructure. Yet, taking into account a much different sense of the concept yields different ways of understanding the social production of the web. An understanding of the ongoing transformations of deviantART as the continual positioning and re-positioning of the site as infrastructure provides a powerful way of connecting questions regarding the recognition of practice-based identities with the ongoing development of particular sets of socio-technical arrangements. This is a novel way of addressing the symbolic, discursive, ideological, and material constitution of the web in practice.

Finally, this project offers a twist on the theory of infrastructure from which I have drawn because it addresses a markedly different set of phenomena than most studies do (chapter 3). A different

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[3] The properties are "persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability," and they produce the dynamics of "invisible audiences, collapsed contexts, and the blurring of public and private." In applying her concept to teenagers' use of large-scale social network sites, she shows how teenagers confront and struggle with the consequences of these properties and dynamics.

[4] How and in what circumstances objects and conversations on deviantART persist and are searchable is much different than on Facebook or MySpace; and of course, part of this difference is based on different kinds of technical features, social conventions, and business models (if and when there is a business model).

application of the concept has helped me to highlight different aspects of infrastructure than those found in studies where the concept has been used previously (Bowker et al. 2010, Edwards et al. 2007). Whereas previous uses of the term assume that elements of infrastructure are intentionally designed, and may be "redesigned" or appropriated by users with other intentions, I argue that elements that combine to constitute infrastructure with respect to particular worlds and practices *emerge as infrastructure* unintentionally as well as intentionally. I also emphasize how infrastructure embodies historical tensions and can give rise to new ones (rather than only accommodating tensions or helping people coordinate or collaborate around tensions). Standards and conventions hint at consensus, but they do not necessarily resolve tensions. As they emerge, infrastructures may furnish new resources that change or further contribute to older tensions. As I have shown in the case of deviantART, such tensions are made manifest in practice and can continually contribute to breakdowns even as participants from very different positions struggle to resolve them.

8.2   Revisiting Web 2.0 and the creativity consensus

I have looked at young artists' content-creation practices on deviantART to investigate claims about the contemporary web and creativity. Although broad claims blending technical and generational determinism have been debunked, softer and less universalizing versions persist (chapter 1). The most common are those that hold up youth "content creators" as exemplars of best practices and "new media literacies" (e.g. Palfrey and Gasser 2011 following Jenkins et al. 2006). This study of deviantART provides new material with which to consider these claims and debates.

With respect to claims about a democratized and ubiquitous creativity, the picture I have presented is quite complex. deviantART provided almost anyone with an opportunity to express themselves, have their work seen, and be artists—regardless of age, career stage, and choice of medium, style, or genre. But, while policy set few restrictions, members proposed, enacted, and tried to enforce other limitations. Not all members (or even staff) embraced the full implications of a democratic vision of the web with respect to creativity and art. Participants patrolled the borders of art and deviantART. Through practice, they continually addressed questions of what kind of work was "artistic" enough to be posted to deviantART and what kind of dispositions an artist should embody. The focus here is whether the use of the site violated moral principles of practice rather than on arguments based on the substance, style, genre, or medium of work (e.g. "high" versus "low" art forms). Members and staff asserted which kinds of practices should merit recognition as artistic and creative and, in doing so, how deviantART should be structured—technically, ideologically, normatively—to fairly distribute such recognition.

A second theme of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus concerns the social and communal nature of creative production. Regarding the "social" part of this theme, art and creativity are collective endeavors, as the scholars who constitute the creativity consensus rightly argue. At the same time, how participants in practice viewed art is critical to understanding its collective nature (Becker 1982, Bourdieu 1993, 1996; see chapter 3). Participants positioned deviantART to fulfill the ideals of art as an individual activity. They did so when subscribing to the idea of ranking art and artists via algorithm or award (chapter 5), emphasizing the importance of learning "on one's own" (chapter 6), and separating "mine" and "yours" in debates about theft and sharing (chapter 7).

Regarding the "communal" aspect of the second theme, many participants embraced communal ideals. Still, not everyone shared the view of deviantART as community, particularly members who saw deviantART as a platform for self-promotion, marketing, and becoming "popular."[5] Even members who embraced ideals of community on deviantART differed on what the implications of those ideals actually were in the context of art and the site. Two specific examples are the relationship between community and sharing (chapter 7) and that between community and particular forms of feedback (chapter 6). Perhaps among the strongest contenders for a communal principle, ironically, was the sense that individual recognition was a critical aspect of art and violating this principle would be in breach of an important communal ethos on the site.

Furthermore, differing community ideals circulated on this thoroughly commercial site. With respect to the commercial goals of deviantART Inc., the site was a collection of products and services sold to some members. It was also a way of selling and publicizing art and artists to advertisers and other "outsiders." Corporation and community were not *necessarily* oppositional to one another in theory or practice. There were occasions when participants in deviantART showed how they could be reconciled (even implicitly). But perhaps unsurprisingly, community and commerce were also held apart as working against one another. The discussion of the Critique Feature illustrates both situations. Site staff promoted the feature as a way for people to provide quality feedback to one another. The feature was, on the one hand, ostensibly essential to members of an *art* community and embodied the community values of mutual help; on the other hand, the feature was a service exclusively for paying members. The strongest reactions to the feature came from members who complained that it was available only to Premium Members, implying that deviantART cared more about making money at the expense of community (and possibly of art as well) than about providing a service so important that all artists should be able to use it.

Another commercial slant to deviantART was its promotion of itself as a way for members to sell their work to each other and to broader audiences. Even without deviantART's prompting, many members used the site for commercial purposes. These points directly relate to the third claim of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus: the purportedly non-commercial motivations of "ordinary" (i.e. non-corporate) contributors of user-generated content. Some members I interviewed were clearly interested in professional careers in art. In some cases even those who were not interested in a career in an artistic field were still interested in the money that came with commissions (perhaps as a way of supporting the hobby). I even observed a commercial career "find" an artist who had previously claimed to be uninterested in one. Even if I could somehow pull apart different motivations in practice, it is clear from my findings that commercial and non-commercial practices impacted each other. Finally, even if not all of deviantART member's practices could be deemed commercially *motivated*, they were commercial *in consequence*. The site itself was of course part of a commercial endeavor. Not only was it commercial by design, but site staff and many members perceived broader commercial worlds as interested in what occurred there. Commercial forms of recognition were important for both the company and the site's members.

Related to questions about commerce, my findings speak to debates about the broader socio-economic implications of the contemporary web (even if not the focus of the study). Neither empowerment nor exploitation is a suitable description for what I have described and analyzed

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[5] Unless they equated community with "group of other artists," which I suspect many did.

here.[6] But, there is more to consider than questions of exploitation and consumer agency. Debates about the societal consequences of the contemporary web often focus on changes in the relationship between media consumers and producers and between social processes of consumption and production. These debates deemphasize a third term of the relationships in question: distribution. This study emphasizes the significance of distribution systems in shaping art worlds and the recognition of artists and shows that deviantART, like the web more generally, provides a new distribution system for art and artists.

In debates about Web 2.0, authors clearly address some of the activities of distribution (or "circulation"), yet none of the new hybrid terms such as "produsage" or "prosumption" seriously focus on the historical importance of media distributors and the necessary identification and separation—for analytic purposes—of the social process of distribution.[7] Hartley (2009) argues that the "locus of power and profit" in media industries historically has been in the distribution of media content, not in its production. Similarly, Breen (Breen and Forde 2004:82) suggests, with respect to popular music, a critical set of societal changes that accompany Internet and web concerns: "the struggle over the distribution and circulation," which is "in short, a struggle over…control." To downplay distribution is to overlook the importance of seeing changes that have come with the web as increasingly infrastructural. Contrary to the notion that the web "disintermediates" consumer-producer relationships, "Web 2.0" marked the rise of new intermediaries.[8] deviantART, Apple, Amazon, Google, Facebook, and a whole host of other web business small and large are the new intermediaries and distributors of media, services, and products. Going forward, it will be crucial to consider the role of the web as infrastructure for distribution rather than as a set of systems that blur the boundaries between consumption and production.

This discussion of new distribution systems brings me to the final claim of the Web 2.0 creativity consensus: the arguably revolutionary nature of today's media landscape. Neither the ideological positioning of new technologies nor the artistic issues with which deviantART members engaged was particularly new. With respect to the web and Internet, tensions between community, corporations, and commerce have important precedents in histories of media in general and the Internet in particular (chapter 2); with respect to art, the tensions in artistic practice go back several hundred years (chapter 3). But, even if we are not witnessing "epochal" or "tectonic" shifts as some argue (e.g. Shirky 2008), there is still the lingering question of what, if anything, has changed and what role the web has played. I suggest that one new phenomenon is that tensions in art and in the web intersect to create new tensions. For example, prior to the web, tensions between "sharing" and "theft" were unlikely, even if tensions in control over property go back centuries (Johns 2009). Additionally, prior to the web it is unlikely that there would be an ambiguity between human and material resources (chapter 6, based on Becker's [1982] distinction). That deviantART and the web

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[6] As Banks and Deuze (2009) and Beer and Barrows (2010) argue.

[7] Perhaps "co-creative labour" (Banks and Deuze 2009) is general enough to bypass the problem (though not the positive connotations of "creative"). My point is not that scholarship has not covered how people play a role in distribution (particularly in studies of fans); rather, it is that distribution as a social process is implicitly, even if unintentionally, made subservient to consumption and production.

[8] On this point, as a precursor to debates now common about Web 2.0, see Brown and Duguid (2000). Looking at "Web 1.0," they acknowledge the fleeting nature of distintermediation in particular situations and draw attention to the rise of new intermediaries.

signal changes in the process of distribution signals changes in artistic recognition and the functioning of art worlds. Next, I provide more details of these arguments and speculate on further answers to the question of newness in art worlds.

8.3   Change and continuity in art and art worlds

Too often, the question of "what's new" is answered based on only a superficial glance at history.[9] The historian of science and technology Adrian Johns (2011:257) argues that what is new about the contemporary era is that "moral commitments and practices that [had] become commonplace" by the end of the 20th century, "now *seem* inextricable from the technologies" (emphasis mine).[10] I emphasize the word "seem" because it strikes me as a critical qualifier that leaves out the question of "to whom." To rephrase Johns' argument, I describe the contemporary age as one in which moral commitments and practices have become *infrastructural*—seemingly part of the way the web simply "works." But, after adding the relational dimension of infrastructure—to whom? to what set of organized practices?—which seemingly inextricable moral commitments and practices appear more diverse.

The question with which I contend here—more modest that Johns' questions—is whether and how deviantART in particular and the web in general might be changing the worlds of art. These changes are the result of the clash of moral commitments, practices, and tensions in the history of the Internet and web and in the history of art. In turn, these commitments, practices, and tensions rest on the fact that deviantART and the web have brought together multiple social worlds into a common techno-social "setting" in ways that elide important differences. deviantART placed considerable stress on the spatial, temporal, and social dynamics of artistic recognition. Different art worlds and participants at different career stages intersected on the site, and subsequently participants tried to resolve the stresses that came with different grounds for artistic recognition.

8.3.1   Upholding and undermining Romanticism

I persistently encountered ideals of art and creativity that reflected two hundred years of Romanticism, sometimes held by some of the youngest people in terms of age and experience whom I encountered. But, participants did not simply reproduce old ideas. My findings speak more to a conflict between Romantic and other notions of art than to a universal adherence to a particular set of ideals. Debates about the location of artistic recognition in relation to popularity, exposure, quality; pageviews; the popularity algorithm; and Daily Deviations revealed how some participants tried to uphold a version of artistic recognition tied to ideals of individual genius and art for art's sake. But, concerns over egalitarianism and seeking recognition through an ethical (and community-oriented) form of networking contended with the idealized figures of the Unknown Artist and creative genius (chapter 5).

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[9] It is certainly among the most difficult empirical question for me to address, as my methods were not primarily historical.

[10] Here, Johns is talking about moral commitments and practices associated with "digital libertarianism." He argues that his history of British radio (2011) and piracy (2009) should be read alongside that of communication scholar Fred Turner (2006) in understanding this ideology and its relationship to old and new media.

The imperative to improve invoked a goal of improvement for its own sake while separating learning from self-promotion and marketing. People who saw the value of tutorials and those who questioned them invoked an ideal of "learning one one's own." Yet, the repeated emphasis on feedback and critique as a community-oriented way of improving emphasized a sense that improvement, like art, was a communal endeavor in which artists drew on the active help of others in a school-like environment. Attempts to enforce an imperative to improve, coupled with the idea that artists could become "better" through continual hard work, stood in tension with at least two Romantic concepts: (1) the distinction between art derived from inspired genius and craft as mechanical skill and (2) art as an individual practice derived internally rather than a communal practice influenced externally (chapter 6).

The widespread notion of "art theft" as a transgression that violated the moral rights of creators was tied to Romantic notions of authorship and authorial property. But, even in these discussions of theft—where Romantic notions of authorship were perhaps most pronounced—I also found, on the one hand, a community-oriented imperative to share and, on the other hand, a realization by some people that audiences and other artists inevitably could and would transform work to suit their own purposes. Perhaps such reuses were not morally transgressive acts of "theft" but something else. *Theft* for some was the theft of commercial opportunity while for many others it was the theft of artistic identity. This distinction is tied to two distinct ways of valuing artistic products and the figure of the artist (chapter 7).

Art world boundaries, like those of any social word, are porous even as people try to patrol them (Becker 1982, Strauss 1978). deviantART added to the porousness as worlds, practices, and ideals that had coexisted suddenly came into contact with one another. Artistic practices clashed even as participants also were struggling to negotiate tensions between commercial or corporate concerns and those of the "community." deviantART changed the dynamics of the "circles of recognition" (Bowness 1989, Heinich 2009) that artists pass through over the course of their careers.

8.3.2 Collapsing the "circles of recognition"

The changing tensions described in the previous section relate to possible effects of deviantART and the web on the spatial, temporal, and social configuring of recognition in art worlds. As briefly mentioned in chapter 3, art historian Alan Bowness (1989) argues that famous artists pass through four sequential circles of recognition: (1) peer recognition, (2) critical recognition, (3) patronage by dealers and collectors, and (4) public acclaim. These "circles" imply nested social worlds. Moving from one circle to another is to become a peripheral participant in a wider art world in which more people and practices constitute that world. In her review of Bowness' model, the sociologist Natalie Heinich (2009:91) notes that over time the order and participants in these circles can change; with a shift in an art movement, she moves merchants and collectors into the second circle while combining experts, critics, curators, and directors into the third as "specialists." What is important to the study of deviantART is the analytic construction of these separate circles or worlds of recognition, the idea that they may shift over time, and the implication that different kinds of art worlds may in fact have different kinds of sequences. Also crucial is that Bowness' model brings together three dimensions of art-world activity (after Heinich 2009:91): (1) a spatial dimension, who knows whom based on spatial proximity; (2) a temporal dimension, when recognition is conferred; and (3) a dimension based on the "competence of judges"—what counts as recognition,

at which stage in the process, and how this competence itself is recognized.[11] deviantART strained the relationships among these dimensions.

In chapters 5 and 6, I argued that "peer" is overly broad when used to refer to all of deviantART's artists. In contrast, Bowness uses the term narrowly, specifically referring to artists in a specific cohort.[12] But, by focusing on peers in this one sense, he fails to address other people who shape the process of recognition and the age at which such recognition can begin. I frequently heard stories of other people who shaped recognition at an early stage: friends, family members, teachers, and even older established artists.[13] Many people sought recognition from their immediate circle of artists—some from deviantART, others elsewhere. Yet, they also described seeking or receiving recognition from others, such as teachers or more experienced artists.[14]

Bowness and Heinich omit other early audiences for work: fans. Not including fans ignores forms of recognition that occur over the course of an artistic career and play out on deviantART. Bowness implies that peers are the primary audiences for artists' work, which makes sense in the context of worlds where "producers produce for other producers" (Bourdieu 1993:39). As a corollary, Heinich (2009:91) notes that artists probably do not know their fans (in contrast, they know their peers and dealers). deviantART established situations in which people produced for other producers: other artists were the audience for other members' work.[15] Many of these other people, however, are artists who are not—or not *yet*—peers in terms of experience or age. Some members are passionate fans with whom members build different kinds of relationships. These different audiences do not "recognize exceptional talent" (as Bowness puts it) *in the same way* as artistic peers.

In general, the application of the term "peer"—as applying to almost any "other artist" or as applying only to a small co-located cohort—either ignores or elides the differences between *certain types* of newcomers and old-timers in art worlds. Who is considered a peer is contingent on the researcher's perspective rather than participants. People who might seem like peers to an analyst might not be to the people involved; or people may only become peers over time. My observations of deviantART suggest that becoming a peer of some artists and not others is either a goal or an after-the-fact accomplishment.

The category of fan and fan recognition on deviantART introduce more ways that deviantART strains Bowness' model. Many fans develop considerable expertise in how to appreciate certain work.[16] In some ways, these fans would better fit into Bowness' circle of critics or Heinich's experts

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[11] The third dimension, to put it rather crudely perhaps, is a "social" dimension: the critical judgment of others across the movement through each circle across space and time.

[12] A cohort here is an experience-based generation who are spatially close. Bowness writes that it is "always the artists themselves who are first to recognize exception talent" (1989:16).

[13] In addition, friends, family members, and teachers may also have been older and more established artists.

[14] For example, participants in art school described seeking recognition—or happily receiving it—from their teachers and saw these events as opening up career possibilities. The same can be said with respect to more experienced artists. I observed mentor-mentored recognition play out both on deviantART and in Artist Alleys and heard accounts of it in interviews.

[15] And even established or "popular" artists did become fans of less known artists on deviantART.

[16] As fan studies have demonstrated (e.g. Baym and Burnett 2009, Hellekson and Busse 2006, Ito 2010, Ito et al. 2010, Jenkins 1992, 2006).

or collector (two different circles in her model). Jenkins' (1992) account of television fans implies that fans occupy a number of positions in the circles of recognition. Thus, fans are not simply part of the "public acclaim" (the fourth and broadest circle). Sometimes, they are like critics, people who are "parasitic" (Bowness 1989:28) yet essential in producing the figure of the artist and the language with which people talk about art. The fan or critic as parasite is a plausible metaphor, but a symbiotic relationship between fan and artist might be more appropriate in other circumstances, even when it is an agonistic relationship (see also Jenkins 2006, Green and Jenkins 2009). My findings lead to a hypothesis that infrastructure such as deviantART helps the emergence of both "artist" and "fan" from "audiences" and "peer."[17]

Locating the activity of "publishing" and the role of "publishers" on deviantART further demonstrates ways that deviantART complicates the model and suggests changes in art worlds due to uses of the web. Like fans, publishers are another group of actors who are difficult to locate in Bowness' and Heinich's description of circles of recognition. Getting published was certainly on the mind of the illustrators, comic artists, and photographers with whom I spent time. Also, I observed professional publishers networking via deviantART and in the Artist Alleys. They were looking for talent and negotiating with other publishers. There is an analogous relationship between such publishers as Bowness' "dealers" and also Heinich's "merchants," who occupy different temporal positions in each of their models. Bowness observed that new dealers form symbiotic relationships with new artists, something I observed as well in one case.[18]

To some extent, deviantART as a website displaced some of the functions of a publisher—helping make artwork "public." But, publishers of course do much more. deviantART members invoked this fact when they contrasted "self-publishing" with "being published." Neither equated to "posting work online," and they were distinct from one another. "Self-publishing" a printed book—which implied being able to afford to have it printed—could lend support to claims of "seriousness" by the artist. But, having someone else do the publishing was generally worthy of more respect. Posting work to deviantART was neither self-publishing nor being published, though doing so generally came with more respect and recognition than not posting anything.[19]

If providing publishing infrastructure was the only role that deviantART played in the process of recognition, not much more would need to be said about its location in the circles. As noted earlier, however, deviantART also provided functions that were analogous to ways in which people show their work to others (e.g. sketch books, art books, galleries, etc.), and it provided marketers and prize-givers. The differences in these forms were enough to cause confusion about how to fit the site into the models I have described. Yet, there is more: by providing artists with access to fans, artistic peers, more established artists, less established artists, collectors, and even critics, deviantART as a whole contributed to the creation of the language of talking and debating art, performing Bowness' function for "critics." deviantART participants used deviantART to establish

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[17] This is likely to be true of Artist Alleys as well, though perhaps in a different way.

[18] In chapter 5, I described alexds1 "bubbling up" from deviantART. Her publisher had broken onto the scene when his company brought an already popular web comic into a broader market by publishing the work as a book. He found other artists, like alexds1, who had achieved some measure of popularity online.

[19] However, there were people who said that they did not take deviantART seriously (and knew others who would not post to the site at all). The implication was that posting to deviantART could undercut recognition.

a "critical consensus that sets the restricted limits for the rise and fall of artists" (Bowness 1989:28).[20]

A reasonable proposition is that when deviantART was smaller and less well known, it functioned primarily as a space for bringing together people who Bowness and Heinich identify as "peers."[21] But, with (a) an increase of members from tens to 100s to millions, (b) the increasing importance of the web in all aspects of everyday life, and (c) the site's increasing importance and changing position within various art worlds and commercial industries, there also were changes in the spatial dynamics of these circles of recognition, or what boyd (2008) refers to as a collapsing of contexts. This collapse was also temporal in at least two ways. First, deviantART brought together people of different ages and experience levels who might otherwise be kept apart in the worlds that Bowness and Heinich discuss. Second, the site collapsed the sequencing of the circles. Looking across the site, these circles all operated simultaneously: any given artist may have been operating within multiple circles' conferral of recognition at any given time. People encountered other people who occupied different circles or became unknowingly exposed to them in different temporal orders.

To conclude, there were are spheres of judgment operating on deviantART that resembled the circles and worlds of recognition that Bowness and Heinich describe. But, deviantART fit into multiple distinct trajectories of recognition. And, there were deviantART-created ambiguities as to where, when, and how those circles of recognition operated, and thus how people could be recognized for their work and legitimated as artists.

8.4 Looking ahead: creativity in an "information society"

"Creativity is on everyone's lips these days," write anthropologists Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam (2007:1):

> In a global commodity market with an insatiable appetite for new things, where every aspect of life and art is convertible into an object of fascination or desire to be appropriated and consumed, creativity has come to be seen as a major driver of economic prosperity and social well-being.

Whether it is the case that *every* aspect of life is or can be "convertible" into a commodity, the web, user-generated content, and networking technologies add to the set of conditions that make such a sweeping statement seem plausible. Some business models driving social-media companies rely on the commodification of everyday conversation (e.g. Twitter and Facebook); other models capitalize on people's movement in geographic space (e.g. Google, Apple, and any "app" that relies on "location based services").[22]

At the same time, the links between creativity, information technology, and economic prosperity drive public funding in the arts:

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[20] For example, these efforts surfaced in intense debates over the term "popularity" and the metrics used to measure it as well as in tensions around the ranking algorithm and the giving of awards.

[21] These also could be artists at different levels and not necessarily peers in all cases.

[22] While these facts do give rise to concerns of exploitation, I tend to agree with de Certeau (1984) that ordinary users and consumers can find ways to negotiate and move (literally and figuratively) out of the gaze of corporations.

> There is an emerging, global race to establish effective, sustainable clusters of IT-enabled creativity…. The rewards are high; such clusters are engines of economic growth, or enhanced quality of life, and of cultural and political influence…. Success in launching and sustaining them depends on capacity to attract and retain creative talent, on establishing the conditions and incentives necessary for that talent to flourish, and—increasingly—on the effective exploitation of information technology….

> The interactions between [the domain of art and design and the domain of information technology] are important not only for their mutually beneficial effects, but also because they help to energize larger systems of interconnected creative activity. (Mitchell et al. 2003:27)

The key drivers in this "race for creativity in a networked world" (Mitchell et al. 2003:27), according to scholars of the "network society" and "information society" (Castells 1996, Webster 2006), are the "media industries" (Holt and Perren 2009), "cultural industries" (Hesmondhalgh 2007), and "creative industries" (Caves 2000, Hartley 2005, Hartley 2009).[23] These industries are deemed important because of their impact on the transformation of technology, their prominence as an economic sector, the creation of new forms of labor and divisions of labor, the consequences of their work on geography and globalization, and their role in shaping global and local "culture" (Webster 2006).

deviantART was located at the intersection of these industries and technology sectors, between the "domains of information technology and the domains of art and design" (Mitchell et al. 2003). Many members worked to become professionals within these sectors. deviantART staff members already were. Most, if not all, participants were emblematic of the creative consumer (Hartley 2009) who helps to drive these sectors. Therefore, not only is deviantART a "strategically situated single-site" (Marcus 1995) to look at claims about the web and creativity, it is a strategically situated *entry point* (Burrell 2009, Couldry 2003) for an examination of central issues concerning the dynamics of the "information society" more generally.

The themes explored in chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide first steps for further research in three areas. Using the web and information technologies to "get noticed" and "become popular" generalizes to other worlds in which free-lancers, app developers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses all wrestle with problem of "discovery" (an industry term). Different worlds each have different infrastructures for facilitating such discovery. Search engines and app stores bring many of these worlds into contact with one another in new ways just as deviantART has here. And, there are contradictory dynamics of "opening up participation" and "democratization" at work that are similar to those described in chapter 5. As Alan Liu (2004) details, the rise of digital networking is the combination of two simultaneous and contradictory philosophies: decentralization and "distributed centralization." The latter seemingly paradoxical philosophy concerns how organizations of any kind exercise control through conformity to standards, conventions, and protocols in the interfaces between systems and organizations *and* in user interfaces. A direction for future work is the investigation of the design and appropriation of these interfaces across practices, worlds, and sectors relating them to questions of distributed empowerment and control.

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[23] Here, I gloss over distinctions between these framings.

Tensions between empowerment and control point to a second line of inquiry that concerns "21st century skills" and "new media literacies" that are said to be essential for "life-long learning," continued employment, and productivity in knowledge and information economies (Colardyn and Bjornavold 2004, Drotner 2008, Jenkins et al. 2006, Straka 2004). In debates about learning, scholars and policy makers have made "creativity" a central concern because of the importance of learning to "create" with a variety of media and to learning to be "creative" (in terms of innovative). Many see the web as providing evidence of the flourishing of such learning (chapter 6) that should be integrated back into educational policy and practice. While deviantART seemed to be another example of learning online—to create and to be creative—by technically savvy and engaged youth, there is a great deal of heterogeneity in practice. Some members certainly created and used collectively developed resources, collaborated, networked, argued over moral and ethical dilemmas, and learned to be a participant in art worlds. Yet, it is not clear whether these phenomena add up to some set of 21st-century skills or new media literacies that can be abstracted from practice and easily translated.[24]

Perhaps more important, it is not clear that incorporating a creativity agenda into schools is the right goal. Just as literacy came under the domain of school-based education in the 19th century at the intersection of competing moral, economic, and ideological interests (Cook-Gumperz 1986, Lacqueur 1976, Stone 1969), so might creativity. As Hirsch and MacDonald (2007:187) warn, "A key aspect of this 'creativity explosion'…is that creativity comes to be expected and even demanded, widely, and coercively." The question that my study draws attention to is not what are the core skills, competences, and dispositions that add up to creativity and literacy, but how are particular literacies around the uses of new media standardized and conventionalized as infrastructural practices for some social worlds and not for others? What are the consequences of this "infrastructuring" of certain creative practices?

A third line of inquiry concerns the contentious debates about the relationship between networking technologies, digital media, and intellectual property, a relationship many suggest is one of the central challenges of the global information economy (e.g. Benkler 2006, Lessig 2008, Zittrain 2008). As Johns (2009:5) illustrates, debates over theft and property "impinge on the basic ways in which ideas and technologies are created, distributed, and used," and they "force contemporaries to articulate the properties and powers of communications technologies themselves—the printing press, the steam press, radio, television, and, now, the Internet." "What is at stake," Johns concludes, "is the nature of the relationship we want to uphold between creativity, communication, and commerce." Attitudes about intellectual property are not simply reflections of generational differences. Arguments over "sharing" and "theft" on deviantART led participants to make statements about the apparent "nature of the 'net,'" such as how links work and how the Internet is "about sharing" (chapter 7). But, to contradict both proponents and opponents of stricter intellectual property laws, to "kids today" there is no single understanding of creativity, the web, or property. Many people who form identities around their creative practice reinforce rather than undermine very traditional and strict notions of intellectual property. The portrayal of the powerful business at loggerheads with a teenage culprit or victim is a myth. Many independent artists of all

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[24] To be fair, Jenkins et al. (2006) and like-minded advocates walk the difficult line of supplying recommendations flexible enough for educational practice without being too specific. But, even an argument for "new media literacies," when carefully defined as "social skills and cultural competencies" (Jenkins et al. 2006), looks differently in light of the work presented here (e.g. "the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content").

ages and levels of experience, professional and amateur, contend with other independent artists and small entrepreneurial businesses.

Perhaps Lessig (2008) is correct to suggest that what might be needed are concerted efforts to reform both law and norms. When he discusses the latter under the heading of "reforming us" (see his chapter 10), however, there is the question as to whom the "us" refers. Questions of practice and identity are critical to understanding participants' sense of fairness and rights, which makes the goal of finding an "us" and then mapping policy to "social norms" extremely complex. As policies change—whether radically or conservatively—it will remain essential for scholars and advocates alike to understand how such changes are shaped and interpreted with respect to different social words, practices, and identities.

Finally, as part of each of these three lines of inquiry the word "information" itself—in "the information society" or "the information economy"—needs to be further interrogated. My hypothesis is that sitting alongside networking technologies, the web, and digital media, "information" is part of the conceptual infrastructure that enables the convertibility of "every aspect of life and art" to which Ingold and Hallam (2007) point. Information is a part of what enables the detaching of things in the world from the worlds and practices that produce them (Nunberg 1996). It is a term, like "the web" and "art," that in practice obscures the kinds of differences that I have argued are so important.[25] The reduction of art to information and the web to a medium for the distribution of information further underlies the tensions raised in this dissertation. With the web as information and art as information, the blending of the two appears seamless. But, as deviantART and its participants have illustrated, the blending is fraught with difficulty and tensions: the historically reproduced tensions that come with different domains of life as well as the tensions that arise from their new intersections.

Some scholars have argued that informational media "flatten" the social worlds these media describe (Nunberg 1996:118, following Agre 1995). This "flattening" has led others to warn that the web's key impact on literature and the arts has been to take semi-autonomous and competing areas of social life and work and "suddenly…fuse them into a single, parsimonious continuum—so-called 'worldwide'—able to afford just one global understanding of understanding" (Liu 2004:7). By investigating creative practice in relation to seemingly infrastructural interfaces, practices, and ways that the web and Internet "work," this dissertation demonstrates the consequences, appearances, and experiences of this flattening, or "one global understanding," of art and the web. At the same time, it reveals efforts to resist or undermine these consequences. The World Wide Web, like the world itself, is not as flat as it might appear. The hopeful news that deviantART's participants bring to the conversation is that many people whose identities are at stake creatively undercut these forces of cultural flattening.

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[25] See Srinivasan (2011) and Finn (forthcoming) for detailed studies that explore the consequences of "information" in contexts substantially different from this dissertation and each other.

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Appendices

Surveys of youth content creation

Over the past decade, a number of surveys have reported findings regarding some form of "content creation" by kids, teenagers, and young adults apart from commenting on forums, blogs, articles, and so forth. Even when not considering comments, there is a wide range of activities subsumed under the word "content" in these surveys. Other than two German studies (BITKOM 2011, MPFS 2010), no study I found asked about youth "content-creation" hobbies in general (e.g. drawing, painting, photography, music, and writing apart from whether they posted work to the web or distributed via electronic media). Even the two German studies did not explicitly relate sets of findings about "creative" and "artistic" hobbies and to the distribution of work online (the surveys did not even ask about the exact same kind of content). The surveys, in other words, did not relate use of the Internet and web to everyday practice. There may be existing data sets that do ask about youth creative/artistic practice; if these exist, a useful future research project could bring them into conversation with the technology-focused surveys I discuss here. This brief review is limited to the United States, Europe, and Australia.[1]

UNITED STATES. Recent surveys by the Pew Internet and American Life project (Lenhart et al. 2010) report that among teenage Internet users: 38% post "self-created content" including "photos, videos, artwork, and stories," 21% "remix" existing content, and 14% post to blogs. Regarding young adults Internet (18-29 year olds in their survey) Pew reports: 37% post original work, 19% "remix," and 15% blog. In these two age cohorts, the numbers regarding self-created content and remix activities have been consistency from previous surveys (Lenhart and Madden 2005, Lenhart et al. 2007), but blogging has been on the decline. In contrast, adults over 30 have seen a rise in all three forms of content creation to 28%, 13%, and 11%.

Hargittai and Walejko (2008) found that among respondents from an American university, which they view as broadly representative of young people at that age, 61% engage in at least one of four "creative activities." These activities include creating "music" (34.2%) "artistic photography" (27.6%), "poetry/fiction" (25.9%), and "film/video" (22.6%).

EUROPE. Livingstone et al. (2011) report that among 9-16 year olds in 25 European countries, 39% post "images" online and 11% blog (a part of the comprehensive EU Kids Online project). The OECD (2007) reports that among 16-24 year-olds in 17 European countries, 25-50% blog and between 5-50% have created a webpage.[2]

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[1] I was unable to find comparable data from Asia, South America, Central America, or Africa. The OECD (2007) does report some numbers of Internet users in Japan, Korea, and China who engage in some comparable activities. In Japan, 8.7 million people were "registered as bloggers." In Korea, 50% of Internet users report "managing homepages and/or blog." In China, 24% of Internet users blog.

[2] The data is from 2005 and comes from various "imperfect statistical proxies." The OECD does not provide the exact percentages for more than a few countries from which they report data, though they do provide a chart (see

A survey of Italian students at one university describes 26% as in the "active and creative" category: people who have a "high propensity to create content," some of which are "new and original contributions" (Ferri et al. 2009). One German survey found that 21% of 10-18 year-olds in Germany reported "sending own photos or posting them online" while 9% blogged (BITKOM 2011). Another German survey of 12-19 year-olds found that only 7% reported posting their own photos or videos and only 4% blogging (MPFS 2010).[3] In Estonia, one study sampled 11-18 year-olds and described percentages of them who reported engaging in various activities: 41% post photos and pictures; 18% post videos; almost 5% post stories or poems; over 6% update a home page; and over 5% post to a blog (Kalmus et al. 2009a).[4] Another study in Estonia found that 30% of all 15-19 year-old Internet users, and 27% of 20-29 year-olds "updated a blog or homepage" at least several times a year, with 14% of 15-19 year-olds and 7% of 20-29 year-olds doing so several times per week. This study also reports that 84% of 15-19 year-olds and 79% of 20-29 year olds "upload photos" several times per year, with 47% of 15-19 year-olds and 31% of 20-29 year-olds doing so several times per week (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2008).[5]

AUSTRALIA. Corrin et al. (2010) surveyed first year students at an Australian university and found that 50% "share photos online with friends and family," almost 17% "build or maintain a website," almost 16% use a computer to edit audio or video, and just over 7% "write a blog."[6]

For some interesting clustering analysis of Internet activities and users, which include media production and distribution activities, see Livingstone and Hesper (2008), van den Beemt et al. (2010a, 2010b), and Kalmus et al. (2009b). These studies try to identify patterns of content creation and identify those young people who are the most active and, at least in the case of Kalmus et al. (2009b), most likely to be considered a part of "Generation C."

OECD 2007:9-10).

[3] Thanks to Juliane Stiller who translated and helped me understand the two German reports.

[4] These are the numbers for those who report doing those activities "often."

[5] In the UK, a survey of the adult population (Dutton et al. 2009) found that 44% of all adults "posted photos" online, 22% "maintained a blog," and another 20% "maintained another website." They report that "young people" (and also "students") engage in these activities more than others, but do not offer detailed statistics.

[6] Also from the Australian context, Ewing and Thomas (2010) found that of all adults using the Internet, almost 15% "work on a personal website," almost 10% "work on a blog," almost 50% "post pictures or photos," and almost 12% "post videos." This study also reported on respondents' attitudes towards the Internet on encouraging or discouraging their production and distribution of their work (see pp. 35-36).

Ethical considerations in Internet research and notes on quotations

All research poses ethical dilemmas. As Markham (2005:811) notes, "any method decision is an ethics decision…. The process of studying culture is one of comprehension, encapsulation, and control." Over the past two decades, many scholars have noted that studies on, of, and with the Internet have further complicated matters.[1] There has been considerable debate and disagreement as to how researchers investigating Internet activity or using Internet technologies should conduct their research. Particularly vexing have been questions of participants' consent to participate in a study and concerns over privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of study participants. These questions are further complicated by the fact that notions of publicity and privacy are historically intertwined with the use and institutional organization of media. Many have argued that participating in online engagements blurs boundaries between publicity and privacy for everyone, researchers included.[2] The Association of Internet Researcher (AoIR) guidelines emphasize "ethical pluralism" notes that each site of research forces a consideration of issues based on site policy and expectations of participants.[3] That said, it proved difficult to understand the diverse expectations of participants until I was well into the research.[4]

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[1] Hudson and Bruckman (2004) provide a an useful review of early literature. Markham (2005) adds to their account. A review of many of the major issues can be found in a set of presentations by Buchanan and colleagues to the Secretary's Advisory Committee to the Office of Human Research Protections (see http://Internetresearchethics.org/blog/9-blog-events/40-ire-at-sachrp-presentations.html). Recently, there has been a revisiting of many of the key issues. In 2009, as I was wrapping up fieldwork and beginning writing the dissertation, the National Science Foundation invested in an initiative based at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to revisit the ethics of Internet research in light of new technologies and practices associated with Web 2.0. See: "Internet Research and Ethics 2.0" (NSF Award Number 0924604) and www.Internetresearchethics.org. Internet research ethics have been the subject of several recent conference workshops and panels (e.g. Bruckman et al. 2010).

[2] Bakardjieva (2003) provides several instructive illustrations of how Internet users continually combined "privacy and publicness in different proportions." This notion of the private-public continuum has been an important topic for discussions about the web and researcher ethics. See Bruckman (2002) for one of the earlier discussions of this point.

[3] In this project I have followed the Association of Internet Researchers' (AoIR) ethical guidelines published in 2002 (see Ess and the AoIR, http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf). While I was completing this dissertation, a draft of an new set of guidelines was publicly circulated.

[4] I did not have to address the issue of violating site policy or terms of service, though there are considerable differences of opinion as to whether researchers should feel compelled to abide by them in all circumstances. This issue may be even more complicated going forward due to a recent announcement by the United States Justice

One issue is how researchers represent themselves as a participant. I was as straight forward as I thought I could be about the fact that I had joined deviantART in order to conduct research on the site and its members. I posted a journal entry about my study and later a personal "FAQ" that tried to summarize key points in response to questions that I had fielded from participants. I made sure to include links to both the journal entry and FAQ wherever I could. I also used the signature space in my comments to explain that I was a researcher and linked back to my journal.

A second issue is how researchers represent those they have been studying. Like the artists Bruckman (2002) discusses, many of the people I interviewed or observed were specifically trying to get noticed (see chapter 5). Many of the people with whom I spoke (in interviews of informal conversations) seemed to suggest that they wanted more publicity and felt I might be able to provide it. This in itself was a useful finding, but I tried to lower their expectations of the readership of a dissertation or journal articles.

With respect to questions of confidentiality and anonymity, I gave all participants whom I interviewed the option of using a screen-name, their real name, or a pseudonym that I would supply.[5] In the consent materials, however, I informed interviewees that there were situations that I could not anticipate that may require me to treat them anonymously or pseudonymously, even if they had opted otherwise.[6] I wanted to make sure they felt comfortable telling me things they may not want publicly attributed to them. In several cases I have used pseudonyms even when participants opted for screen-names.

I collected data using a variety of modes of communication (see chapter 4). With respect to informal conversations (as opposed to formal interviews) that took place via modes that felt private—deviantART's Notes, chatrooms, over IM, in email, face-to-face, on the phone, via Skype—I asked informants how they wanted me to refer to them. If I felt there was any ambiguity on this point, I left them anonymous or pseudonymous in the text.

Perhaps the most difficult decision I faced was how to treat the material online that was both the most public and was produced without any "intervention" on my account. With respect to material that I collected from areas of deviantART that were accessible to anyone and indexed via search engines, I opted to use verbatim quotes and, occasionally, the usernames of the people who wrote them. Given that much of the content on deviantART was widely accessible to anyone online and searchable by Google, I decided that it was reasonable to approach the site with the understanding that members might expect that what they said to be quotable by others.[7]

The ethical questions I have brought up here became increasingly difficult as I engaged more in the fieldwork and the question of ethics and morally appropriate ways of engaging on deviantART became a focal point in my analysis. There were times when something that seemed straight-forward one day, suddenly seemed quite muddled and complex the next (and *vice versa*).

Department that some have read to imply as indicating that violating terms of service may be a federal crime (see, for example, Felten Eric, "Are We All Online Criminals?", *The Wall Street Journal – Postmodern Times*, November 18, 2011, last accessed November 29, 2011.

[5] This followed the approach adopted by my earlier research (see Ito et al. 2010).

[6] Only one participant refused to be interviewed unless I guaranteed the use of the name she provided. I conducted the interview and have obliged her request in the text.

[7] This decision, like all of the others I made with respect to research ethics were quite difficult ones, particularly

This research was approved by the UC Berkeley Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), though I do not see such approval as demarcating the final determination of a research practice's ethical merits.[8] With respect to the consent process, I applied for and received various waivers. I went through the full consent process for all interviews with both adults and minors. With regard to informal conversations I conducted as part of online and offline participant-observation, I did not ask for documented consent, and I used what I said about myself on the site as part of the consent process (or in person through how I presented myself and with fliers).

I want to conclude by discussing how I represent quotations in the texts. Researchers often differentiate between quotations gathered from interviews and those from informal conversations. One reason this is done is to indicate the quotes that came from a distinct interview situation, a distinct research-oriented practice separate from a participant's typical everyday practice. Another reason is to indicate whether a quotation should be treated as an exact transcript and when it should be treated as a close approximation based on jottings in a field notebook (researchers sometimes use single-quotation marks or italics in the latter situation). What adds to the complexity in this case is that quotations from interviews and from participant observation were both a mix of oral and written texts. For reasons concerning participant privacy, I did not want to indicate the exact medium I used in all situations and therefore opted to not make fine-grained distinctions (e.g. between face-to-face, IM, a deviantART Note, etc.) in any circumstances. I have indicated all interviews as such. All quotes that are from face-to-face conversations and may be paraphrased are indicated as "fieldnotes." All other quotations are verbatim quotes from other written texts gathered in the course of participant-observation and are not marked as either interviews or fieldnotes. Finally, with only a few exceptions, I left in misspellings and incorrect English grammar.

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[8] For example, the difficult question of when and how to quote from documents on the web that are "public" and produced without any researcher "intervention" is, from the perspective of many institutional review boards, a rather straightforward issue. As I have indicated here, it was not for me and has not been in the aforementioned debates about research ethics.

Collecting and analyzing online material with Zotero

Participant-observation involves extended time hanging out in a setting or with a group and: observing what they do, their interactions with each other, and their interactions with me; having conversations with participants; and participating in their activities. When possible and practical, a researcher will take down notes, or "jottings." Then a researcher will write up fieldnotes from these jottings and memory, or perhaps from audio and video if possible. Adapting this process to online research raises pragmatic questions: How does a researcher track her/his experiences? What kind of "description" goes in a fieldnote? How does one store the multiple forms of media that might be on any web page? What is the way to capture the "context" of online material as experienced by the researcher, particularly taking into account the dynamic nature of websites?

In the exploratory phase of research (see chapter 3), I developed a list of a minimal set of requirements for research, as I viewed artwork; read journal entries, news articles, forums, and comments streams; and talked to members myself:

- Access to a record of how the web pages and online documents looked as I had read and experienced them
- Annotate material in order to inform the writing of fieldnotes
- Code documents for issues and themes
- Relate documents to one another
- Search documents' text or other metadata (e.g. document titles or codes)
- Update document codes, notes, and other metadata later in time
- Search and sort material by different criteria, including a simple way to organize by time[1]

Many of these requirements are standard in the several existing qualitative data analysis (QDA) software packages. When I began my research, however, there were no tools designed for qualitative research that made it easy to take complete snapshots of web pages, organize them, annotate them, code them, and do all of this in a database that was searchable and sortable. Most scholars I knew of, at the time, saved web pages to their computers, took screenshots, or cut-and-pasted text as a way of recording their observations. They then relied on completely separate documents or other applications to analyze and code the material.

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[1] I developed more requirements as I proceeded through fieldwork, such as being able to retrieve documents by different people related to the document in question (i.e. a person may have written a document or commented on it, or there may have been something in the document that reminded me of someone or contained an issue about which I wanted to talk to that person). I also realized how important it was to be able to be able to visually group material by day of the project, but at the same time, not have organizing by day limit other retrieval criteria.

In order to meet these requirements, I adapted a tool called Zotero to serve as a field notebook for my online participant observation. Zotero is an open-source bibliographic reference tool, created at the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.[2] It was designed to make it easy to store and save references found online, including books, journal articles, web pages, and other documents. Zotero is an extension to the Firefox web browser whose feature-set met many of my research needs.[3] Using Zotero, I saved views of pages as I saw them, annotated them, and coded them. When I went back and did deeper analysis, I was easily able to change codes, add codes, re-organize the coding, and re-annotate the documents in light of issues raised later in my research.[4]

In figure C.1, I provide a snapshot of Zotero in the context of a browser window. The Firefox browser window is divided up into two sections. The top section is displaying a snapshot of how this particular page looked on the day and time that I visited.[5] The bottom section houses the Zotero pane. On the left of the Zotero interface are collections of documents organized here by the day that I went online. In the middle section are the documents/pages and jottings recorded in the context of fieldwork. On the right is an area that is further subdivided up into several sections. In figure C.1, I am displaying the "Tags" panel which is a way of coding the documents. I could either create new codes on the fly or choosing from already existing codes. Not shown, there are also panels to record the basic metadata for the page, such as title, author/creator (in my case study participant), date accessed, URL, and others. Finally, there is also a way to attach notes to the page. I used this both to cut and paste text from the documents and to annotate the pages.

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[2] See http://www.zotero.org

[3] Wikipedia describes a browser extension as "a computer program that extends the functionality of a web browser in some way." (see Wikipedia contributors, "Browser extension," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Browser_extension&oldid=457656032, last accessed November 29, 2011.

[4] The way I wrote fieldnotes changed over time. At the beginning, I still used a word processor to write up longer narratives. Over time, I used Zotero's built-in "notes" to write stand-alone fieldnotes as well as write notes that were directly linked to particular documents.

[5] There are a few minor differences due to technical issues with the way that Zotero stores all of the files associated with a given page.
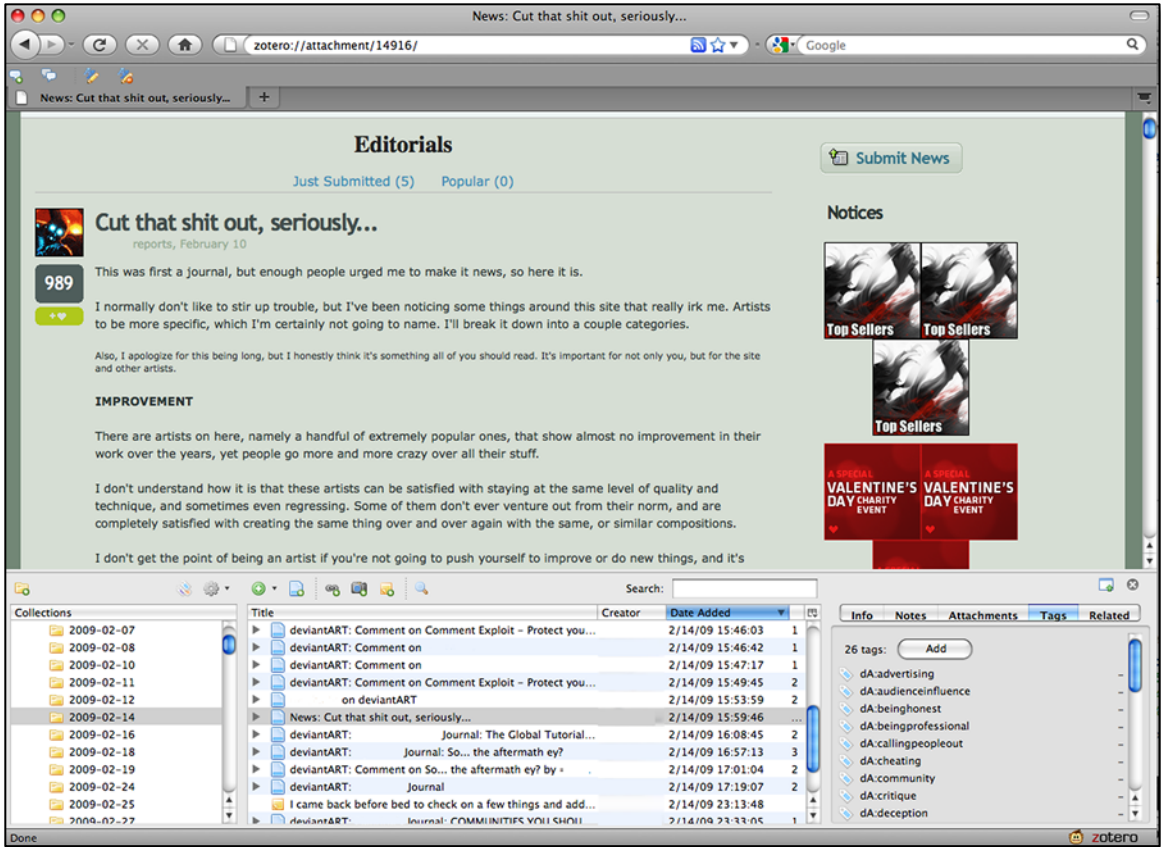
Figure C.1: Screenshot of the Zotero interface in the Firefox browser window

On the compatibility, in theory, of social worlds and communities of practice

In chapter 3, I argued that communities of practice and social worlds were compatible theoretically and at times could be used interchangeably. There is an important theoretical objection that concerns the underlying social theory of these two concepts that I need to address (though only do so briefly here). Strauss' social worlds perspective emerged from symbolic interactionism (Clarke and Star 2007). Several practice theorists or commentators on practice theory draw hard distinctions between a practice perspective and symbolic interactionist perspectives. Bourdieu (1977), for example, positions interactionism as the theoretical opposite of structuralism, with the former as entirely subjectivist vs. the latter as entirely objectivist (he then goes onto to outline a complex way of transcending this opposition). Ortner's (1984:159) relatively early synthesis of practice theory describes a practice perspective as one where, "…society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction." She goes on to distinguish this view from interactionism by noting that various practice theorists (such as Bourdieu) see elements of social structure as "determinants" rather than "constraints" (Ortner suggests that Herbert Blumer, one of the central theorists of symbolic interactionism, had argued in the softer language of constraints). Yet, more recent accounts and elaborations of practice theory (e.g. Wenger 1998) differ in how powerful these determinants are and how much room there is for human action and interaction in shaping the broader system. Or, as Couldry (2004) wonders, whether "system" is even an appropriate term (for similar reasons, Edwards [2010] questions the use of the term "system" when describing infrastructure, a point I addressed in chapter 3). Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), from whom I primarily draw, are ambivalent on these last several points. While influenced by Bourdieu, they world they describe is somewhat different (see also Lave 2011).

Moreover, Strauss' (1978) formulation of social worlds was also an explicit challenge to symbolic interactionism. Strauss describes social worlds as spheres that includes "the phenomenon of men participating in the construction of the structures which shape their live" (1978:123). Such a perspective clearly resonates with Dreir's (2007:22) "basic contentions" (see chapter 3) of practice theory. And Strauss's point also is markedly similar to Giddens' (1979) account of the "duality of structure."

Wenger (1998:283n8) notes the overlap between his own position and Strauss and other interactionists (including Susan Leigh Star whose work is also important for my research). Wenger (1998) contrasts his work with theirs with some very fine-grained distinctions in emphasis. Wenger also suggests that a "social world" is what he describes as a "constellation of practices." Brown and

Duguid (2001) actually equate social worlds with their notion of "networks of practice," an extension to the communities of practice construct (see also chapter 3, footnote 27). Meanwhile, Bowker and Star (1999) equate social worlds with communities of practice for the purposes of their discussion of infrastructure (as Star does elsewhere). Bowker and Star's rich analysis of classification as an infrastructural practice combines elements of symbolic interactionism with Foucault (who several describe as a practice theorist).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a rigorous comparison between these broad theoretical perspectives. But my contention is that there may be as much in common between Strauss and some versions of practice theory (those discussed here and in the text) as there are between those who are lumped together as practice theorists (e.g. de Certeau, Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens).

deviantART: numbers and demographics

Numbers of members and submitted artwork referenced in chapter 2 (see 2.1) come from deviantART, Inc. as posted to deviantART itself or as reported in news publications, which in turn seemed to rely on deviantART issued press releases.[1] As with any such claims, it is difficult to know whether the number of members referred to individual people or user accounts, or how many members were active.

I was not able to obtain detailed demographics of deviantART's members or its visitors. The United States had the most members of any country. When the site's CEO and Director of Marketing went on a highly publicized "World Tour" in the Spring and Summer of 2009, they organized events in ten of the cities around the world that had the highest concentration of members. They included Sydney, Australia; Singapore; Warsaw, Poland; Istanbul, Turkey; Berlin, Germany; Paris, France; London, England; Toronto, Canada; New York City, USA; and Los Angeles, USA, where deviantART, Inc has its headquarters. Throughout my fieldwork I also encountered members from other countries and observed a variety of non-English languages used on the site, though English was the site's primary language.

Descriptive statistics of site traffic mentioned in the text come from various news sources as well as Quantcast.com, an Internet traffic and measurement company.[2] It is always difficult to know how to assess the accuracy and validity of the numbers that web analytic companies report, a point later made to me by one of deviantART's staff members. Quantcast combines two typical approaches using (1) site metrics using a "tracking pixel" on each deviantART page along with (2) panel data to estimate United States demographic numbers. deviantART partnered with Quantcast before I joined the site, embedding the traffic pixel on the site. Quantcast provided a sense of the demographic breakdowns among United States *visitors*, though not its *members*. Quantcast's reports during this time matched what participants told me: that much of deviantART's membership consists of a mix of both men and women and younger users (teenagers and mid-20s).

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[1] Numbers of members and other statistics from mid-2010 come from: Fried, Ina, "deviantART tried its hand at software," *ZDNet*, August 11, 2010, http://www.zdnetasia.com/deviantart-tries-its-hand-at-software-62201986.htm, last accessed August 22, 2011. See also "deviantART Reaches the 10 Year Mark," *deviantART*, company press release, August 5, 2010. As of mid-2011, there may be as many as 18 million members (Sotira, interview with Eric J. Lawrence, *Guest DJ Project*).

[2] See note 1. Details of Quantcast's methods and model can be found on its site on various pages. For a general description, see "About Our Data," *Quantcast*, http://www.quantcast.com/how-we-do-it (last accessed November 19, 2011). For more about its model and its attempt to more accurately map cookies onto unique people, see "Cookie Corrected Audience Data," *Quantcast*, http://www.quantcast.com/learning-center/faqs/cookie-corrected-audience-data (last accessed November 19, 2011).

Quantcast compared the site's demographics with those of the rest of the Internet. I periodically checked the site and noted that the site's members were mostly between the ages of 13 and 34 and that consistently, when compared to other sites, deviantART featured more minority populations, more people from lower income households, and people with fewer college degrees.

The site ranking mentioned in the text come from Alexa, an Internet traffic measurement company and is current as of August 2011. Thelwall (2009) cites deviantART's Alexa rank in May 2008 as the 77th most heavily trafficked site. Quantcast ranks deviantART as the 140th most trafficked site in the United States, but based on January 2011 numbers ranks it in the top 40 for people aged 13–24. These rankings include sites such as Facebook that are not Quantcast partners. ComScore reports from 2009 rank deviantART in the top 10 of all social networking sites in the UK and Australia. Another ComScore study of online advertising in the United States placed deviantART in the top 10 of all sites in their social networking category.[3]

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[3] See: "Nine Out of Ten 25–34 Year Old U.K. Internet Users Visited a Social Networking Site in May 2009," *ComScore*, July 20, 2009, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/7/Nine_Out_of_Ten_25-34_Year_Old_U.K._Internet_Users_Visited_a_Social_Networking_Site_in_May_2009; "2 Million More Australians Go Social in 2009," *ComScore*, August 14, 2009, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/8/2_Million_More_Australians_Go_Social_in_2009; "Social Networking Sites Account for More than 20 Percent of All United States Online Display Ad Impressions, According to comScore Ad Metrix," *ComScore*, September 1, 2009, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/9/Social_Networking_Sites_Account_for_More_than_20_Percent_of_All_United States_Online_Display_Ad_Impressions_According_to_comScore_Ad_Metrix.