'Connect and create': Young people, YouTube and Graffiti communities

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Dominant discourses around young people and social networking in the mass media are littered with negative connotations and moral panics. While some scholars challenge this negativity, their focus has predominantly been upon the formation of friendships, the construction of identity and the presentation of the self online. We argue that as well as engaging in such areas, young people are also appropriating social networking sites, such as YouTube, as spaces in which they can engage in what Jean Burgess terms, 'Vernacular Creativity' – a way of describing and surfacing creative practices that emerge from non-elite, specific everyday contexts. Using case study material we consider the processes of Vernacular Creativity as engaged with by young people in relation to doing graffiti with YouTube. Through this, and given that graffiti is a cultural practise traditionally associated with physical space, we also consider points of continuity and discontinuity in relation to Vernacular Creativity mediated with YouTube and the significance of such things in enabling young people to connect and create with like-minded others.

Introduction

In the context of the growth and accessibility of the Internet,[1] in particular brought about by so called Web 2.0 technologies, young people often engage with an assortment of online spaces to socialize for a variety of purposes. These spaces often take the form of social networking sites[2] and throughout the mass media a dominant discourse tinged with negativity, and relying heavily on moral panics, has emerged in response. Despite the pessimistic column inches that dominate such discussions of young people and technologies more generally, this group are also cast by some as tomorrow's shapers of society (McMillan and Morrison 2006). Clearly such discourses continue to be active and so it is important to unpack young people's relationships with technology and not to dismiss their on-line activities as exclusively unsafe, unproductive and uncreative. In this paper, we focus up the facilitation of creativity via YouTube.com.

Research into young people and their use of social networking sites has covered a lot of ground, for example attending to issues of identity (boyd 2006; Hodkinson and Lincoln 2008; Livingstone 2008), friending (boyd and Ellison 2007; boyd 2008; Joinson 2008), motivations for usage (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2006; Joinson 2008), disclosure (boyd 2008), privacy (Larsen 2007; Livingstone 2008) and ethics (Griffiths and Light 2008). Within this body of work the idea of extending narratives regarding youth's engagement with such arrangements beyond the fear ridden negative ones often portrayed

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in traditional media is a common feature. However, one might ask just what else young people are doing with these spaces? Specifically, in relation to YouTube, Jarrett (2008) argues that 'YouTube wants you to broadcast yourself', and therefore one could ask in what ways, to what end and whether there is more going on with such sites? Additionally, Burgess and Green (2009) suggest that we should not just assume that vernacular video, such as home movies or content on YouTube, is organized purely around a desire to broadcast the self (Burgess and Green 2009). Indeed we should raise such issues given we know that other forms of networking site display high degrees of interpretive flexibilty – Gaydar for example has been argued to be a space for dating, hooking up, coming out and socializing, as well as a place for employment and a vehicle for making money and generating reputation (Light 2007; Light, Fletcher, and Adam 2008).

Sharing this view, Lange (2008) argues that YouTube is more than just a site for sharing video – it something that affords socialization and communication mainly involving video but via other mechanisms such as text and graphics too. In this paper, we argue that, as well as engaging with the preferred reading of these spaces (such as for maintaining friendships, engaging in identity work and in the case of YouTube, broadcasting), young people are also appropriating social networking sites simultaneously in a socio-creative fashion – spaces in which they can engage in, and support, creativity through social networking.

In our forthcoming discussions, we see creativity as the process by which things are combined in novel ways, recognizing that what is deemed novel is a social construction and a relative position. This is particularly important given the integral role of others in the creative process (such as consumers, producers, distributors, editors and critics). In particular though, and consistent with our analysis, we are interested in what Jean Burgess describes as 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess 2006, 2007). Vernacular creativity is way of describing and surfacing creative practices that emerge from non-elite, specific everyday contexts. Vernacular creativity is simultaneously a practice in its own right, yet references and is referenced by more institutionalized forms of creativity – think creating a dance routine in your bedroom after watching a pop video. Burgess situates this in the 'participatory turn' with respect to digital media, a discourse of increased human agency with respect to appropriation and creation. Of course, we have to be careful not to overstate the emancipatory potential of consumer participation in media culture that the associated technologies (such as those defined as Web 2.0) are said facilitate, but clearly it is becoming the case that participation, for some, has been opened up to a greater extent than in the past.

Following Burgess and Green (2009) we put everyday creativity centre stage, and provide insights to the question posed by Burgess (2006): which technologies, practices and forms most effectively communicate vernacular creativity? We engage with a study of a group of would be and practising graffiti artists that can be found 'hanging out' on YouTube networking with fellow graffiti artists and engaging in communal and individual vernacular creativity. This activity, we argue, cuts across the vernacular genre's of the 'how to' and 'skill demonstration'. The practice of graffiti on YouTube is particularly of interest in the contexts of young people given the contradictory ways graffiti is viewed, as we discuss later, and how this compares with the discourses surrounding young people's engagement with the Internet.

Graffiti as a youth culture

It is widely acknowledged that, historically, there have been many forms of graffiti, from cave paintings to carvings in Egyptian monuments (Stowers 1997). In this paper, we are concerned with graffiti as we know it today, in the form that it surfaced during the 1960s and 1970s – and

specifically as a youth culture (Lachmann 1988). In this context, Graffiti has, and continues to be, simultaneously interpreted, amongst other things, as an act of vandalism, a mode of resistance for young people, and a form of public art (Docuyanan 2000; Schacter 2008).

For the purposes of this paper, we are specifically interested in the content, context and process of creativity as related to Graffiti. In this respect, perhaps the first thing to do is acknowledge the historical role of apprenticeship. Docuyanan (2000), for example, observed in her study of LA Graffiti artists the growth and tending of human capacities, evidence of collaboration, and the notion of apprenticeship, where the highly skilled and older artists schooled the younger graffiti artists in style technique, proportion of the lettering and cultural understanding. Ferrell (1993) also discusses the notion of apprenticeship as playing a crucial role in the escalation of graffiti in the early 1970s. Graffiti artists tagged subway cars away from their local neighbourhoods and because of the scale of the job in hand, and the need for the task to be done quickly, they recruited novices, referred to as 'Toys' to assist. In doing this, they shared their knowledge and techniques with novice graffiti artists, thus validating and enhancing their reputation. The Toys of course engaged with their own social networks once completing the graffiti, talking of whom they had worked with and upon which piece.

A further part of the creative process that we see as important is the role of mediators. For example, social organizations such as writers corners emerged, bringing together likeminded artists from different neighbourhoods to critique and judge the quality of each others 'pieces' (Ferrell 1993). Yet although learning and knowledge of graffiti was to a great extent geographically bounded, it also spread through organized networks, face-to-face meetings and the mass media of the time – magazines, videos, movies, music, and books. For example, a particular point of mediation and circulation was 'the bench' at 149th Street station in New York:

> During the 1970s and 1980s the bench was where writers would sit for hours swapping photos, discussing tagging missions, the best places to steal paint and watch each other's handiwork go by [as it was painted onto the subway cars thus facilitating a mobility of sorts]. Although
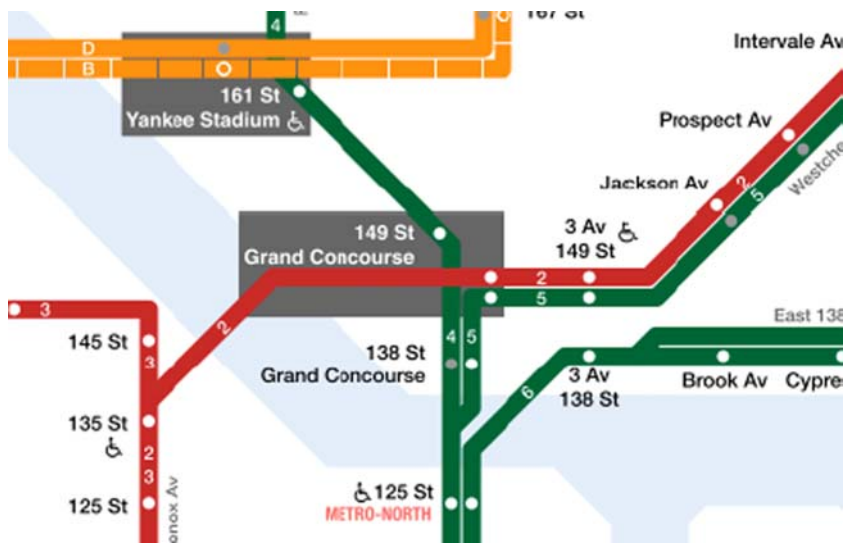

Figure 1.   149th street as a point of Graffiti mediation and circulation.

> there were other writers benches in other boroughs, the convergence of several train lines at the 149th Street Station made this one the most prominent. (Chima 2009: sic)

This culture was embraced in different guises throughout major USA cities and had a resurge in popularity when New York was used as a backdrop for the newly emerging street culture of the late 1980s that focussed on rap music, hip hop and break dancing (Rafferty 2002). Following this, in 1994, the Internet was enrolled with the self-proclaimed first gallery of graffiti art (Art Crimes at www.graffiti.org) showcasing pieces from around the world. This project was started with a handful of photos from Atlanta by Susan Farrell and is still active today. Joining in the assembly of graffiti culture of course, are now other sites across the Internet, which allow for increasingly easier engagement with the creative production of content by those who have and desire access.

Shifting spatialities

Brighenti (2010, 316) argues that defining the boundaries or 'field' of graffiti is notoriously difficult and this is no doubt what is so appealing to graffiti artists when the boundaries between aesthetics, vandalism, politics and self-promotion are inherently blurred. Brighenti, describes graffiti writing as an 'interstitial practice', that is a practice that constantly interweaves with and is structured within various different contexts. Such a concept eludes well to the networked social worlds of young people within which social networking sites can now play an integral role. The notion of boundary-blurring and the shifting spatialities of identity and social interactions are commonplace in many young person's cultural and social landscape – lots of young people are used to 'zoning' in and out of different worlds and spaces all the time (Lincoln 2004) and their social networks are made up of those interactions that are by no means exclusive to one space or another (boyd 2008). For many this is often the further facilitated by portable mobile technologies such as the latest generation of smartphones. Young people can therefore be situated in a culture whereby the uploading of visual and textual material is very much part of their everyday interactions.

More generally, it has been argued that we are becoming a 'confessional society' that want to be observed, surrendering personal and private moments to the masses (Koskela 2004; Fonio et al. 2007). However, such phenomena are not new and pre-date YouTube. Matthews (2007), for example, suggests that the upsurge in first person media in the UK can be pinpointed to a now defunct TV show '*Video Nation Shorts*' which was broadcast for a few minutes most evenings throughout 1994 to 2000. How this TV show differed to other similar ones of that time such as '*You Been Framed*' or in the USA, '*Animals do the funniest things*' is that *Video Nation Shorts* required their contributors to turn the camera on to themselves rather than just observing others (Matthews 2007). Such recognition of the history of first person media is important given the fetish of the new in new media. However, we do believe that the popularity of broadcasting the intimate and mundane has been intensified as a result of inexpensive, readily available and easy to use computer software and videoing technologies often embedded into digital cameras, mobile phones and laptops. In this respect, YouTube was positioned to facilitate and capitalize on these phenomena.

Such discourses informed our engagement with the study of young people's creative practice even though it is perhaps obvious at this point that there are distinct points of departure when comparing engagement with graffiti cultures as solely located within the physical world, with those that are mediated by the Internet. That said, we believe and will move on to demonstrate, that the discourses associated with geography, risk, processes of learning, audience reactions and beliefs about graffiti practices in the physical world resonate with those related to youth, vernacular creativity, the Internet.

Research methodology

The research presented here emerged from another related study regarding young people and digital media (Griffiths and Light 2008). This work was conducted between 2007 and 2008 with the aim of developing an understanding of the lived experiences of young people and those they associate with in digitally mediated environments. During an interview with one of the participants, Schofield,[3] demonstrated much enthusiasm for a group he affiliated himself with – a graffiti group he accessed via YouTube, called 'Wildstyle'.[4] Schofield, a British caucasian male aged 13 at the time of the study, defined himself as a graffiti artist and user of YouTube. As the interview progressed, it became more apparent that while we could interpret Schofield's activity as concerned with identity work and friendship formation (as eluded to by the literatures we refer to in the introduction), he had other agendas related to the development and enactment of creative practice. We thus decided to pursue this line of enquiry with a focus upon what the group did and how this related to discourses regarding young people's appropriation of the Internet.

We engaged in a case study approach and data were collected via a number of mechanisms over a period of six months including in-depth interviewing and observation conducted in Schofield's family home. This amounted to around 30 hours of contact time with Schofield which comprised observations of him producing artwork, informal conversations and detailed discussions, reviewing photographs and videos of artwork that he judged were/were not of suitable quality to be uploaded on YouTube, observations of his YouTube usage more generally and the physical space of his home. In addition to investigating his practices via the Internet, this approach also allowed us a view of the 'backstage' work undertaken.

We have also watched 50 graffiti-related videos and reviewed the associated comments. As appropriate, we then tracked specific comments back to user profiles to gain further information that enabled us to understand further the creative practices of this network.

Create and connect: A case study

Schofield lives in a suburban area and although his parents come from working class backgrounds, they would see him as having an economically privileged upbringing. Schofield said that he's not sure about this, but that 'he does have stuff other kids don't'. He has a high degree of access to a variety of digital media including an iMac, a Mac Book and a personal computer. He also shares a PS3 console, an X-Box console and a Nintendo Wii console with his 16-year-old brother.[5] His other interests include playing football, skateboarding, and music.

Observing Schofield at work, he would locate himself in front of his PC or Mac with the keyboard pushed back to create space in front so that he could draw while simultaneously using the Internet. The desk would be littered with an array of markers, pens and scraps of paper and here we are reminded of the historical role of productive play, performance and, of course consumption in young people's bedroom cultures (Lincoln 2004, 2005). In discussions Scholfield said that he usually got motivated to do graffiti when he discovered a new technique on YouTube. He would repeatedly play the video until the technique was mastered, illustrating the learning potential of technologies derided by some mainstream media as merely 'entertaining'. He would also assemble sponge mops, homemade ink and a laptop to work in the cellar of his home or a wall in the garden that he had been given to practice on. We thus saw Schofield engaging with YouTube as a learning device, but also one that prompted him to undertake activities beyond the space, in the cellar or garden.

Schofield is an active YouTube user who would come across the graffiti videos when randomly searching and watching videos. His three YouTube accounts demonstrated how

Figure 2.   Schofield's workspace in his home.

he managed his different identities. For example, one account was dedicated to his graffiti activities proving information such as who he subscribes to, who subscribes to him, his favourite videos and his YouTube activity statistics. This was very much Schofield's exclusive space that he does not want to share with just anyone. He told us: ' . . . none of my mates are into graf it's kinda my thing and that's how I like it . . . ' This offers an interesting point of comparison to studies of graffiti solely located in the physical world. In these studies, anonymity from peers was not necessarily viewed as desirable because the notoriety obtained from, say, tagging could be used navigate safely through aspects of life, such as high school (Lachmann 1988; Halsey and Young 2002; Rafferty 2002). In contrast, Schofield operated on the basis of widening his circle of creative practice and thus benefited from this in terms of the development of social capital with respect to his creativity and community involvement. Such findings resonate with other studies of young people's social networking practice regarding the motives for sharing information (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2006; Donath 2007; Joinson 2008). Additionally, Schofield's experiences resonate

Figure 3.   Schofield's Garden Wall.

Figure 4.   Examples of how Schofield remains anonymous in his videos.

with those of the muralists of writers corner, who via 149th street, constituted an audience with the experience and discrimination for bestowing fame for style (Lachmann 1988).

In our observations of YouTube videos, we noted a distinct aesthetic. Key features are the use of hip-hop/rap of music, a monotone voice over describing the on-screen action and the anonymity of the artist. provides examples how Schofield stays anonymous in his uploaded YouTube videos and can be seen as a form of 'privately public' approach as articulated by Lange (2007). The images illustrate elements of role play and of being part of an exclusive club that is viewed by the establishment as anti-social. But because of the YouTube setting members are able to express themselves in relatively safe spaces such as their bedrooms.

A huge incentive for the novice graffiti artist is the sense of belonging and the opportunity for scholarship from more practised artists. The established practices of doing graffiti in the physical world, for example, sharing expertise and passing on guidance and advice persist with many of the graffiti artists uploading 'How to' style videos, some of which obtain over 100,000 views. Indeed, in the same way as Lachmann (1988) discusses how novices would accompany a mentor who would show them how the audience could distinguish between artists, YouTube facilitated the process for Schofield. In one interview he told us of a trip to New York where he took lots of photos of tags and throwies and was able to identify who they were because of what he had seen on YouTube.

We also observed a genuine ethos of a desire to share information, provide support and engage in critique. Moreover, such is the capability of YouTube, these feeds into vernacular creativity often happened simultaneously as the following comment from Schofield's YouTube profile shows:

> man you look like ur set to graff . . . oi your pretty good i personally dont like throwie but your gud as at it . . . um do you do ne wildstyle start doing some . . . gud as mate . . . p.s this is completely irrelevant but im frm Australia anyway catch.

Here we have comment on one of Schofield's uploads, reflection about the preferences and capabilities of the person posting the comment and information about their geographic location. In other areas we noticed further intertwining social relations and creative practice. For example, a would-be graffiti artist posted this message asking for advice:

> im 12 and heavly inot graff but was banned from paint and i live in the middle of know were in the country i wanna be a writer but wat shall i do?

This very public disclosure could have resulted in the individual being dismissed or ridiculed, yet it received the following comments:

draw om scrap pal' I do cos Im in a wheelchair!" and "If you are stuck in the middle of nowhere, just get a black book[6] and start working on ideas in there . . .

Indeed, there are many videos of young graffiti artists spraying on large pieces of cardboard. We found very few were ridiculed for doing this. This indicated to us that many of Wildstyle were limited in the ways they can create graffiti. When asked about such comments, Schofield said they made him feel part of the gang. 'y'know, it's just what we do . . . you've gotta help people out and make them feel welcome'. We noticed that much of this interaction with was other 'novice' users. However Schofield would comment on established artists work and this usually resulted in a comment back from that artist, thanking him for the input and often offering encouragement about his work and how he needed to keep doing it to get better. This process of mutual assistance and encouragement is by no means restricted to the community we are discussing here. For example, Jean Burgess makes a similar point with respect to online Garage Band application communities where 'good citizens' help and encourage each other to make better music, and crucially, help each other become better consumers the Garage Band product (Burgess 2007). Burgess' point regarding consumption is also applicable to Wildstyle, as embedded in YouTube usage, but also perhaps more explicitly in the 'how to' demonstration and product review videos where, for example specific brands of paints and pens are centre stage.

We asked Schofield about his motivations for selecting particular technologies in order to understand the role of these in shaping his activity, particularly around creative practice. However, Schofield found it difficult to articulate this responding:

> . . . . can't remember if used them before or coz of the graffiti but I don't just video my graffiti, I vid me dog, my mates skateboarding and other stuff.

At the time of the study, Schofield had been an unofficial part of Wildstyle for the past eight months. When asked at what point he went from being a spectator to creating content, he was unsure. However in other areas, participating in the network was clearer. For example, over the period of the study, a collection of graffiti books appeared in his home and he recalled a visit to museum exhibiting graffiti work. Schofield explained how he had also gained a detailed knowledge of graffiti history by researching other graffiti websites. In addition to this his graphic and graffiti skills had also improved. Such evidence seems to contradict earlier views of the educational potential of YouTube:

> We found that just what defined YouTube as good entertainment – its compelling lack of depth and expertise, and it's all but disappeared procedures of coherence, order, and forced attention – made it poor for education. (Juhasz 2008, 139)

Continuing the education theme, Wildstyle additionally, facilitates an understanding of the expected behaviour of graffiti artists when they eventually enter into public spaces. For example, Schofield talks about tagging or bombing in physical spaces:

> schools, old peoples homes, hospitals, houses and private property, anybody who tags those places is a Toy!!! and . . . yeah I think it is okay in fact it looks better when concrete bridges and walls have throw-ups all over them, yeah why not it is better that just plain dark grey, even my granny thinks so . . . . .

Such a mechanism perhaps hints at the aims for YouTube more generally to be regulated by users (acknowledging of course that the extent of user agency is also mediated by the artefact itself (Light and McGrath 2010). As Kylie Jarrett notes, the 'fuzzy' YouTube community guidelines on the site are organized around and echo what Henry Jenkins describes as a 'moral economy' which refers to a sense of mutual obligations and shared expectations regarding good citizenship (Jarrett 2008). Yet, although Schofield talks about tagging or

Figure 5.   Schofield's Graffiti approach in the physical world.

bombing in physical spaces, he is also aware that if he gets caught, there will be implications for his future in the physical world and so he tends to keep such practices limited to his garden wall and cardboard. However, we did discover that he bought small stickers on which he wrote his tag then stuck them to street furniture. While this activity could be interpreted as antisocial, it was not seen this way by him. Besides, as he told us the glue is weak and the rain will wash it away anyway, so it is by no means a permanent tag.

   This last comment prompted us to investigate further the norms of tagging and mural making as related to Wildstyle and it presented notions of passing and identity tourism (Nakamura 2002) in relation to Schofield, and others like him in the group. As shown Schofield emulates the need for anonymity alongside place-based graffiti practices however, he doesn't deploy the tools that are used in the physical world apart from on his garden wall. He uses stickers that allow him to operate, from his perspective, safely and ethically. Yet, on YouTube, there are those who do engage in the practice of graffiti in a similar fashion to those involved in Lachmann's (1988) study. While they may not be part of the seemingly middle class Wildstyle group, Schofield knew about those who engaged in graffiti in the physical world and his vernacular creativity was informed by their practice in terms of what might make an authentic performance as a graffiti artist and the methods for graffiti production. Therefore, although vernacular creativity exists in relation to graffiti, it would be wrong to cast it as solely as an art form and modality of creative practice education mediated by YouTube, as our interpretation of Schofield and his associates focuses upon here.

   Moreover, more generally, the case of Schofield and his engagement with the YouTube network reminds us of the inherently collaborative nature of creativity, vernacular or otherwise. Although, some might argue for the innateness of the flow of creative juices, in this case at least, there is no such thing as immaculate creativity.[7]

Conclusion

We have here a case of mediated youth identities that adds to extant work regarding young people's engagement with social networking sites to incorporating the potential to connect for the purposes of engaging in creative practice. Such an exposition of the modes and content of vernacular creativity as we provide here, we argue, reinforces the critique of the moral panics discourse surrounding young people's engagement with the Internet in two ways. First, it rebuffs the association of Internet use for leisure purposes as solely resulting in a lack of intellectual and creative stimulation and second, it counters the discourse that the only things that can happen to young people via the Internet are 'bad things'.

   Complimenting Jean Burgess' work, we stress that the classification of vernacular creativity is subject to interpretation and is relational to the institutionalized form/s to

which is it being compared. However, institutionalized forms can be flexibly interpreted and display relationality which further compounds the 'problem' of classifying something as vernacular creativity. Such a problematic is highlighted by our study. One might, for instance, question that the activities Schofield and the rest of Wildstyle are engaged with (e.g. drawing tags on cardboard in their bedroom) are actually graffiti. They are not doing graffiti outside on a bridge, it is not the same as 'proper graffiti' and thus we are dealing with vernacular creativity – it is not part of the elite but it is enmeshed in everyday norms surrounding youth leisure such as drawing and painting, playing and experimenting. However, we do see this as graffiti and those in Wildstyle as well as the established graffiti artists that interact with them do so too. Therefore, the question becomes one of whether graffiti is an 'elite' institutionalized form which is part of the artworld? Clearly it can be seen as that. Ergo, does that mean that what these young people are doing can be seen as vernacular creativity work or are they participating in cultural production that is part of an art world. The answer we think – is to some extent yes, technically, as they are regulated by particular cultures of that system – specifically in terms of aesthetics. Yet, also the answer is no, as we are talking about such practice as grounded in the everyday leisure practice of young people, a more grown up form of doing some drawings. And yet to complicate matters further, there is the question of whether even that graffiti produced by adults is art or blot on the landscape. Thus, if Schofield's activity is compared on these terms, again we can see this as vernacular creativity that might be seen as resistance against notions of ideal systems of citizenship. Our conceptualization then of Schofield's engagement in networks of vernacular creativity, as previously defined, points to an intricate assemblage of activities, relationships, sites and contexts. Such assemblages, we argue, provide points of discontinuity and continuity as related to our understandings of vernacular creativity as experienced by young people with specific reference to graffiti culture, and beyond.

In terms of discontinuity, YouTube has facilitated a remediation of vernacular creativity, in the area of youth leisure with respect to common activities such as 'colouring in', painting and an engagement with arts and crafts more generally. But crucially, such a remediation has facilitated an engagement with graffiti cultures that would have been difficult prior to this because Schofield does not live in 'the ghetto' and we know that physical world graffiti practices are relatively localized. Such a remediation thus allows Schofield (and others in Wildstyle) to interact synchronously and asynchronously with people around the world. Some of these people may live in physical spaces where graffiti practice is engaged with outside of YouTube but also many do not and thus a further space is created for the network with YouTube. Further the mere existence of YouTube is the reason that Schofield decided to engage with such vernacular creativity, but crucially, this was not pre-planned. Schofield, was a 'general' user of YouTube and came across the network by accident. Where Schofield lives, makes it is unlikely (though not impossible) that he would have had such a serendipitous experience in the physical world. Further to this, YouTube has allowed Schofield, and other members of the network, to mediate their identities across various spaces as necessary. For example, Schofield talks of keeping his graffiti profile hidden from his classmates (and is effective in articulating a privately public strategy through the use of multiple accounts and careful editing of video as we show in Figure 4). In sum then we see how the remediation of vernacular creativity has facilitated an engagement with graffiti in ways that would have been less likely had such remediation not occurred.

We also see striking points of continuity in our study. For example, YouTube circulates the creative outputs of the network and Schofield reports this as a motivation to engage. Such a circulation is not too dissimilar to the assemblage of participants, the bench at 149th street and the passing subway cars that afforded a meeting point and view of

different pieces. Graffiti in the physical world is still remediated though in somewhat different ways compared to YouTube. Moreover, and perhaps most obviously, graffiti practice is still learnt in very similar ways, irrespective of how it is done. Schofield has his network and links to established graffiti artists in much the same way as other studies of graffiti in the physical world evidence strong themes of mentoring and apprenticeship. Either way communities of practice exist. Further, we see similar genres of participation that interweave with both forms.[8] Both share the opportunity to be consumer, producer, distributor, editor, mentor, and critic. Moreover, the possibility for such modes of participation, particularly for our purposes here as related to young people's engagement with the Internet, articulates a discourse that goes beyond the slack jawed teenager staring at a screen. For Schofield, our study reveals a facilitation of his creative practice and an increase in his knowledge base – he can tag, he has attended museums and has read about graffiti culture. Moreover, it brings to the fore that it is not just that things 'happen' to Schofield. He and the participants in his network do things to/with each other. Wildstyle are active participants in the creative process and, as we have alluded to, processes of education regarding the rights and wrongs of graffiti, and ultimately, notions of citizenship. As Schofield says 'y'know, it's just what we do'.

In conclusion, if we agree with the idea that deviance and artistic creation can result in labelling by others, usually via 'the media' as espoused by Becker (1963, 1982), then one might ask, in this case, does YouTube mediate the potential for this and allow for labels to be claimed and defined by the protagonists rather than those seeking to thwart what they see as unseemly? This may be the case, but we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of viewing the Internet as a vehicle that guarantees emancipation. In the same way as the absence of sites outside ghetto neighbourhoods in New York had the effect of narrowing and reproducing the existing ethnic and class distribution of the writers (Lachmann 1988), one might argue that the mechanisms which afford Schofield, and those of his ilk, such abundant access to YouTube, so that they can engage in vernacular creativity, operate similarly. You can only play if you have the right socio-economic resources, and even if you do, you might not change anything. This discussion of course raises questions regarding the politics and perceptions of the networking activities of young people and offers potential for future study in the areas of creative practice and beyond.

Notes

1. Of course, we recognize not everyone has or desires access to such technologies.
2. It is perhaps necessary at this early stage to point out that we are aware of the debates e.g. boyd and Ellison (2007) and Beer (2008) surrounding what constitutes a social networking site, and indeed whether it is appropriate to use this term or that of 'social network site'. We are purposefully using social network*ing* as we prefer the suggestion of a dynamic network rather than solely representation that this term implies.
3. A pseudonym.
4. A pseudonym.
5. We are not blackboxing young people's experiences of and with digital media. We do not see them has 'hard wired' as related to digital media. However, in the case of Schofield he did fit in with contemporary discourses of young people that situate them as surrounded by digital media and having the affectivities to enacts their affordances. Clearly, this has some bearing on our study and we pick this matter up in the discussion of our data.
6. Black books are: 'the recipe books, the practice sessions, the calculations before executing a masterpiece'. http://www.graffiti.org/blackbooks
7. Here we use the term 'immaculate creativity' as a take on Fine's (2003) notion of immaculate perception where he argues that innate perceptions of the value of art by those in the artworld are

not possible. In the same way, we argue that in this case, vernacular creativity is not innate. Indeed, YouTube makes such influences very clear as it renders explicit some of the processes of creative input by others.

8. We are aware such a demarcation is problematic and do not wish to set up a dualistic relation between graffiti done in the physical world and that which is digitally mediated. It is quite clear that the two can be implicated in each other.

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