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The academic online:
Constructing persona
through the World Wide Web
by Kim Barbour and David Marshall

Abstract

This paper explores the way individuals are part of the prestige economy generated by universities as institutions. It explores how the construction of online identities or persona is now an essential activity for the academic both from the perspective of university value and individual/career value. Five distinct types of academic persona are explored primarily through academics working in digital communication areas; through these cases and examples this new communication environment is explored. This paper concludes that institutions and individuals need to develop in the most pragmatic sense, online academic persona and ensure that these online 'selfs' are connected with authenticity to the professional work of the academic.

Contents

Introduction

In 2001, the *Minnesota Review* (Williams, 2001) published a special section of its journal on 'academostars'. In the interviews with the famous in the humanities and associated articles that were trying to interpret how fame and prestige operated in universities, it emphasized that a star system was in full force. Certain individuals with influential publications and presence at critically important conferences occupied center stage while universities more or less bid up their salaries to ensure their reputations became melded to a given university's reputation. The analysis was very Americanocentric, but nonetheless revealed that universities both perform and produce a prestige economy through their academics. At the core of that prestige economy was an elaborate discourse of persona and personality, generously developed and cultivated by graduate students, acolytes, fawning or critical literature reviews and academic gossip. A kind of celebrity system has been operating in universities and disciplines for some time so the phenomenon is not new, just perhaps more focused on salary differentiation than ever before.

Much has remained the same since that analysis of over a decade ago. Much like the United States, there are national systems in both the U.K. and Australia of increasing systematization of prestige, in terms of ranking of academic journals and their relative value, a systematization which has been conducted from disciplinary locations in the past and now generalized and connected to funding regimes. However, some elements are shifting and identify a change in the way that academics present themselves publicly. Some of these changes fit into the logic of 'academostars'. Other changes are in the way that information and publications are moving differently through and beyond the academy. This article explores the new dimensions of academic persona. How should one present oneself as an academic in the era where the presentation of the self has moved to center stage? This paper describes a somewhat normative position about how academics should engage in a quite shifted professional and public sphere.

We are not investigating in this paper the role of identity as a holistic ideal — a single, shifting identity for each individual. Instead we are focusing upon constructed persona through which academics presents versions of their identities to the world. That said, research on online construction of identity is useful in order to frame this discussion.

One of the key influences in the study of online identity construction comes from Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of self in everyday life*. The idea of online identity as a performance, utilizing Goffman's dramaturgical analogy, holds a particular attraction for many theorists (Buckingham, 2008; Donath, 1998; Hogan, 2010; Kashima, *et al.*, 2002; Pearson, 2009; Zhao, *et al.*, 2008). Persona creation is a much more conscious process in online settings as opposed to off–line. Stearn (2002) commented that the "strategy and intentionality behind self–presentation is

illuminated in online settings, because communicators must consciously *re*-present themselves online" [1]. It is this idea of intentional presentation of a specific identity from the 'composite of multiple selves' which exist in all of us [2] that forms the basis of persona studies.

Another important consideration within studies of online identity creation is that of authenticity, an issue discussed, for example, by Turkle (1995) on persona presented in anonymous MUDs (multi–user domains) and online bulletin boards. Donath (1998) discusses the problems with maintaining a 'fraudulent' identity online, by considering the relationship between Goffman's discussion of 'expressions given' and 'expressions given off' (or more simply, intentional and unintentional messages), stating that "One can write 'I am female', but sustaining a voice and reactions that are convincingly a woman's may prove quite difficult for a man" [3]. Although there are opportunities for identity play online, what we discuss below is the creation of authentic, intentional, constructed personas that extend the boundaries of an academic's individual influence beyond institutional boundaries, and allows them to work more effectively in the radically changed worldwide academic environment.

The changes

Along with many other industries deeply embedded in what has been called the knowledge economy (Rooney, *et al.*, 2005; Neef, 1998), universities and their academics have been profoundly affected by the digitization of culture. On a very fundamental level, there has been a migration of academic research into online settings. Online journals of increasing standing have emerged in virtually every discipline. The *Directory of Open Access Journals* (*DOAJ*), the 2009 recipients of a SPARC Europe award for outstanding achievement in scholarly communications, included 5,013 journal titles, all peer reviewed, as of May 2010 (*DOAJ*, 2010). These titles cover a comprehensive range of academic disciplines. Moreover, many prestigious print journals have migrated to online status. In the last five years the downloading of articles has become the norm in the circulation of academic information by both students and researchers alike (King, *et al.*, 2003; Luther, 2002).

Paralleling these shifts are the workloads connected to the teaching, research and administrative culture at universities. A growing proportion of teaching work is done on online, from e–mail messages to students to structured Web resources for courses that either stand–alone or function as parts of larger, classroom–based courses. iTunes is now a regular component of university teaching materials and lecture podcasts have become a ubiquitous learning tool. Many universities have expanded their presence into virtual worlds such as Second Life with a variety of educational experiments (Foster, 2007; Herold, 2010). In a similar vein, editorial work and review for academic journals, research grant writing and adjudication, and academic conference organization and reviewing of papers have all migrated into highly structured intranet and Internet environments. Universities themselves see the Internet as a place to not only colonize but generally as one of the best places for promotion of their wares, to organize and distribute administrative information and forms, and to facilitate current and potential students with their programs. Universities and their staff have become highly digitized and interconnected through online sources, making these institutions purveyors in the knowledge economy.

Universities have embraced how information and knowledge are communicated in this century. They have also observed the exponential growth of sources of information and communication created beyond their peer structures. For instance, for most of the last 12 years, blogs have been generating an expanding field of contemporary interpreters across a spectrum of intellectual inquiry. The development of open source resources have also matured with remarkable success. for example, Wikipedia depends on its development from thousands upon thousands of contributors of content and context. YouTube, emerging from its start in 2005, generates an incredible amount of content, with 85 million videos and counting; an additional 24 hours of content are loaded every minute (YouTube, 2010).

Personal media and communication forms have also shifted how information and communication moves through universities. New platforms for information sharing, including social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Flickr, professional networking tools such as LinkedIn and Ning and the more scholarly specific Academia.edu, and 'tagging' tools like Digg and Delicious, are being utilized by many universities. In particular, access to mobile computing, whether in the form of laptops and netbooks, Internet–capable cell phones (particularly the iPhone), digital book readers such Kindle, or tablets (especially the iPad), give both academics and their students access to information wherever and whenever they wish to view it.

Mobile computing, in particular, is considered as one of the key developments that will affect academic life in the near future (Johnson, *et al.*, 2009; Johnson, *et al.*, 2010). In the *Horizon Report: 2009 Australia–New Zealand Edition*, Johnson, *et al.* comment

> It is increasingly common for universities to provide admissions,
> registration, event and other information for students via mobile
> Internet devices ... . Teachers converse with students via text–
> messaging or Twitter, and post class notes, lectures and syllabi in
> forms that can be read by mobiles. [4]

The role that Twitter plays in this dynamic is an interesting one to consider. On the one hand, it is a sharing platform designed to function easily on mobile devices, particularly mobile phones, wherever a user happens to be. In this sense, it works to break down some of the barriers between an academic and their students. On the other hand, it can be seen as a 'safer' form of social networking; because tweets are short and able to be accessed even by non–members, there is still a sense of a public forum rather than special treatment for those who engage with staff on this platform. The ability to point to new materials or interesting online materials by

posting URLs, and to connect with students outside of class time, can be seen as a boon for instructors. Through the capacity to 'follow' other users without their explicit consent, both academics and students can engage informally with an international network of researchers and experts in related fields.

Other more gated online networking tools, such as Facebook and to a lesser extent LinkedIn, are also being utilized by academics to interact with students and each other. Facebook in particular has become close to ubiquitous within student communities, who may also expect to be able to interact with academic staff through this medium (Muñoz and Towner, 2011). Specialized social networks created on Ning or Drupal are used to build collaborative research groups in order to build collective research and writing practices, along with a common knowledge base related to a particular project in an extra–institutional space. On the other hand, Yammer allows intra–institutional networks to develop on both social and professional levels, while remaining outside of formal institutional platforms.

The number of academy–specific platforms is also on the rise, most notably through Academia.edu. This social networking site, set up specifically for academics, started in October 2008 and was originally targeted to the sciences (Academia.edu, 2012). However, usage is growing across many different disciplines, and with well over a million users at the time of writing, Academia.edu appears to be cementing its place within a wide range of social media platforms. With a clean interface, a focus on professional rather than personal information and an ability to sign up using existing Facebook accounts, the site provides a way of presenting a uniquely academic persona, within a space dominated by other academics. Whereas Facebook asks 'What's on your mind?' and Twitter asks 'What's happening?', Academia.com offers two options: update status, and ask a question. The question function encourages discourse and connections with a diverse and potentially unknown academic audience, and therefore marks a significant divergence from the more well–known 'status update'.

What is most innovative about all of these forms of information sharing tools is that they are user driven. Commercial or open access online software has permitted a proliferation of user–generated content and has acted as an impetus to academics to sidestep gatekeepers of academic knowledge within an institution or between institutions or in the structure of university presses and other commercial publishing operations (Burbules, 1997). One of the major developments in academic publishing is the increasing concentration of ownership of journal titles amongst a very small group of commercial publishers (Edlin and Rubinfeld, 2004). Although the number of academic journals has increased, it nonetheless remains a restricted passage for the production of new knowledge. In contrast, self or collaborative online publishing by academics is growing at an exceptional pace and moves new ideas to key and interested academic groups more quickly and without geographical constriction. If there ever was a tyranny of distance in facilitating academic collaborators, this has been drastically alleviated through this self/collaborative production of information and knowledge. This form of sidestepping also produces a murkier field of checking and editing, of peer review and the other features of controlled and validated academic work. From an institutional standpoint, this new found freedom could potentially lead to reputational damage for a university, if a representative or employee posts controversial, misleading or incorrect information.

One example of the influence of digital writing and online persona on an academic life can be seen in the story of Juan Cole. Cole, a history professor, was found unacceptable for an appointment in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at Yale University due to, according to some, his anti–Iraq war position outlined on his blog (Goldberg, 2006). Although Cole stated that the media coverage over this decision was a "tempest in a teapot" (Democracy Now!, 2006), the discussion surrounding this controversy illustrates the impact of blogs on the career of academics. In some case, the content in this sort of self–publishing is taken seriously by recruitment and appointment committees in universities.

Although some academics appear to be attached to older publishing traditions, they are more accurately at the vanguard of a reconstruction of the ways in which scholarly information is distributed and how this information affects ntions of reputation, value and esteem. With their students, academics are learning and adapting different ways to deliver and share information. From the perspective of their own relationship to research, they see the presentation of a research or professional 'self' online in order to individualize the experience, but also feed the development of very powerful research networks and collaboration. Moreover, the increasing digitization of academic writing provides a much more seamless connection between the peer–reviewed structures of journals and other forms of presenting research (Davies and Merchant, 2007). Indeed, what is increasingly becoming evident is that self–publication, often in the forms of blogs, is becoming the precursor to more formal peer–assessed work (Kjellberg, 2010). From all these developments around research, there is an increasing acceleration or time compression in the process from submission of research for publication and its appearance, specifically because of the online environment. Universities are aiding in the process of making research available, searchable, and aligned to their scholars through digital repositories.

While academia needs to lead these transformations, it continues to develop heuristically as opposed to some clearly coherent strategy within any institution. Thus, although universities usually provide formal Web spaces on their servers to profile their academics, these processes of presentation have remained roughly the same for more than a decade. What universities need to move towards in collaboration with their academics are ways in which they should foster effective professional and public identities which present an accessible version of how teaching and research constitute their individual academics. Moreover, academics and universities have to harness new online and mobile spectrum of public and private selves in order to build personal and institutional prestige and value. This task is not easy. Like other forms of reputation management, universities and individual academics have to work out where to put their energies, what kinds of professional micro-publics should they develop, and what kind of wider or generalizable public academic persona is useful for the university and the individual in the context of the reputation of their institution.

As indicated above, policy structures and guidelines are just not developed enough to handle the presentational media era of online communication for and by academics. Nonetheless, because academics have always operated semi–autonomously in their constitution of their professional identities, there are examples that are worthy of

study. What follows is a categorization of these various styles of presentation of the public academic self or, as we would like to call it, the academic persona. The examples and categories at this stage of our research have been drawn much more from the humanities partly because of our own comfort in exploring those online identities and our capacity to make sense of their relative prestige. In future research, we would like to expand the sources of academic online persona that we explore in collaboration with researchers in the sciences, business and management, medical sciences, law and engineering.

Presenting the academic self

The range and style of online academic persona is currently neither fully patterned nor consistent. What we have mapped below is emerging clusters of types of activity that we are identifying as particular 'selfs'. Researching academic persona online allows one to see quite different styles, but perhaps the clearest evidence is that the most new media usage by academics is haphazard. What we were able to discern from our research is that the level of identity planning and management varies among individuals, and quite dramatically over the course of an academic year. It is worthwhile to underline these tropes before we identify the kinds of academic 'selfs' that we are identifying as coherent. Some people seem to spend a short amount of time developing an online presence only to fail to maintain it. Others switch between different tools, abandoning each as new technologies and platforms become more popular. The swathe of extinct academic blogs, networks and Web sites stand as testament to the speed of development within new media, and as a record of the time required to keep these presentations current. The level of engagement with new media from different academic specialties (arts/humanities, sciences, health, education, commerce, etc.) is indicative that it is significantly easier to maintain an online presence if a given academic is teaching or researching within the media itself. However, by being selective as to which tools and platforms used, and by being clear from the outset on what is to be achieved, it is possible to create a presence that is tailored to the style of a given online persona. Table 1 below identifies the key features of each of the five main styles of academic persona that we have identified in our research. The boundaries between these styles are fluid, but the distinctions we've identified are useful to frame a discussion of trends.

Table 1: Features of the five main types of academic persona.				
Formal self	**Networked self**	**Comprehensive self**	**Teaching self**	**Uncontainable self**
Broadcast style Fixed presentation Focus on achievements and expertise Framed through the institution	Narrowcast Interactive Professional Extra–institutional Multi–platform	Narrowcast Interactive Professional and private blurred Extra–institutional Multi–platform	Targeted Interactive and collaborative Professional Inter/Intra/Extra–institutional	Uncontrolled Unmonitored Multi–platform

The formal self — The static self

In the registers of communication, there is always a need for a formal identity. In our analysis, this formal online self we are also calling the 'static' self for both its simplicity and its lack of general interactivity that resembles earlier generations of online culture and Web sites. Established academics who present a formal self through online media channels use these platforms in the same way that curriculum vitae or staff profiles are used. Strengths and achievements are laid out, carefully structured to present a persona that demonstrates extensive knowledge and experience in a given area of specialty. Although the formal self persona is evident in some way through most academics' online presence (most commonly seen on the universities' own Web pages or through professional networking sites such as LinkedIn), for some this is the full extent of information available online.

The formal self is often most evident in the most senior dimensions of university management. Deakin University's Vice–Chancellor, Professor Jane den Hollander, is one example of this formal persona. With only a short biography detailing her professional qualifications and work history, along with a professional photo, the presentation of den Hollander is typical of many in senior administrative roles in academia (Deakin University, 2010). Although den Hollander also has an up–to–date profile on LinkedIn, this is relatively undeveloped, and at the time of writing not cross–linked with her Deakin University Web profile (den Hollander, 2011). There is an obvious pressure to maintain both a coherent and static identity for the most senior levels of a university as it serves as a connected

brand and associated direction and vision for a university. The other dimensions of identity that a senior official might have — such as a detailed scholarly history or hobbies — are often recessed or hidden.

Sometimes an online presence is built over time when a senior university executive has maintained their post and thus their professional identity over a number of years. For example, it is not surprising that Drew Gilpin Faust, President of Harvard University since 2007, has a greater presence on the University's Web site than someone newer to a position like den Hollander at Deakin. Interestingly the actual persona created, though with greater content, is remarkably similar to den Hollander's profile (Harvard University, 2010). With a more extensive biography, along with speech transcripts and audio–visual material, Faust still controls the information presented about her, and uses the Web pages as a one–way broadcast medium. The one insight into her personal life available is a 'day in the life' photographic presentation, which utilizes images taken across a work day, including meetings, speeches, walks and meals. However, it appears that the impression one is intended to take from this presentation is that Faust works from dawn to dusk (and into the evening) rather than giving us a glimpse into herself as a private individual (*Harvard Gazette*, 2009). It should be noted that variations of formal persona may work for senior executives through internal networks of a university via mass e–mail messages and other techniques that ensure that messages are reaching staff and apparently no further. These forms of informal networks that may surround an online persona are unseen and are not part of an open, and universally accessible public persona, but potentially very valuable to the university executive's campus identity.

In contrast to these somewhat limited formal personae, the Vice–Chancellor of Macquarie University, Professor Steven Schwartz, provides a much more extensive online presence, thereby augmenting his formal and static self, and verging on a different kind of online persona for an executive. The standard formal professional biography is augmented by a more informal description of himself and his experience. Personal information is included — he describes his wife as a "devastatingly attractive woman" — and a much clearer idea of the personality and philosophy of Schwartz is visible through his Web site (Schwartz, 2010a). What is particularly significant in its different constitution of his public self is that the informal biography is the first one a visitor would visit and see. His formal career description is linked only from the bottom of the page. Augmenting these somewhat personalized and professional biographies, Schwartz also maintains text and video blogs. Updated once or twice a week, posts on the text–based blog relate primarily to university and higher education issues, but are not limited to issues that affect only his own university (Schwartz, 2010b). Sometimes humorous in tone, these posts attract comments from readers, but it is rare that Schwartz responds to these comments. Thus we see a more extensive version of the formal self, embellished with new technologies and social network applications. The video blog primarily contains clips of interviews or presentations made by Schwartz himself, but also includes clips from a range of university events including poetry slams, public lectures and so on (Schwartz, 2010c). Schwartz also links the Macquarie University Web site to his Twitter page and it is very evident that Schwartz tweets prolifically. Through those micro–posts provides links to articles and other blog posts on higher education issues, using hashtags proficiently, and retweeting posts from those he follows (Schwartz, 2010d).

All of this obvious online work by the Macquarie University Vice–Chancellor has created a well–maintained online persona, presenting Schwartz as a 'professional', but still appearing to be approachable and human. What we can identify here is a good example of a formal persona that is coherent and, unlike den Hollander's or Faust's presence online, allows for nominal interaction with others.

Senior executives are not alone among academics in maintaining a controlled formal self. Some emerging academics have also taken this approach to present persona online. Young academics, concerned with building their professional reputations, may find it more difficult than those who are more experienced to negotiate the line they perceive between public and private information. Rather than risk crossing the public/private divide, they simply keep all publicly accessible information professional. To maintain this division, some younger academics set their social network controls and access to the highest level of security possible and, as a result, keep their private Facebook worlds only accessible to their private friends and their private lives. Certain researchers who have built both professional and personal networks with emerging academics through their online connections have noted evidence of this informally. What these researchers have noted is the compartmentalization between the formal, professional presented self, and the informal, private, hidden self by younger academics may reflect a more sophisticated use and understanding of privacy settings in online environments (boyd, 2010; Holson, 2010).

Overall, we can read that the presentation of the formal self by academics, and particularly by senior administrators, has certain limitations in its use of online and new media culture in favor of control and coherence: missing is two–way communication. One of the defining features of Web 2.0 technology and current developments in new media is the ability to generate dialogue and discussion, a useful tool for many academics who may be geographically separated from peers working in similar research areas at different institutions. The formal self presented online is fixed; it does not allow for input from others, nor feedback on ideas. In extreme, (and extremely rare) cases, some blog writing academics have disabled the comments feature on their sites and thereby reducing an interactive communication tool to little more than a broadsheet. This may suit those working in contentious areas of research but this choice removes one of the key advantages of blogging: the ability to engage with a wide variety of interested parties.
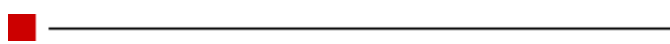
The public self — The networked self

The next evolution of the formal self in online presentation is what we've called the public self. Although still located within a traditional academic frame, public self–presentation encourages discourse, and focuses on sharing ideas and networking. Potentially the most useful persona for many, academics see feedback on research ideas, discuss a range of academic concerns, and foster a group of researchers who are working in the same area of

study into a cohesive network. Academics who operate these persona link to and discuss blog articles by others, give and receive comments on posts, and generally engage with other academics online. Personal blogs, along with sites designed to facilitate two–way communication and network formation such as Academia.edu, Yammer, Facebook and Twitter (and, to a smaller extent, LinkedIn), may be utilised to connect across geographic and/or institutional boundaries, enabling the spread of ideas and research outside of a traditional framework of conference presentations and formal publications. With the needed exchange of ideas and commentaries, it is not surprising to find the public self appears to be more common in the humanities. The public self is even more privileged where new media is a particular focus, such as in communication studies and cultural studies. Here we find established academics that exemplify the public self online, such as Mark Deuze and Henry Jenkins.

Mark Deuze is a communications scholar, holding dual appointments as Associate Professor in the Department of Telecommunications, Indiana University, Bloomington, and Professor in Journalism and New Media (personal chair) at Leiden University in the Netherlands (Deuze, 2010). Deuze's research expertise studying media work and shifts in cultural production, especially in relation to new media technologies, makes his extensive use of new media unsurprising. With university profiles, a blog, Twitter feed, Facebook page, Academia.edu and LinkedIn profiles among others, Deuze uses multiple platforms to engage with different *micro–publics*, while simultaneously presenting similar persona in each. Deuzeblog (deuze.blogspot.com) is updated at least fortnightly, and includes short posts on work currently underway, along with posts on position openings, paper and presentation details, and embedded pieces of music and video related to his work. Links to other Web sites on which he has a presence are also available, as is a Twitter widget and Facebook badge. Each of the sites has had some level of development and point back to the center points of Deuze's online persona — his blog and Twitter feed.

Deuze's approach to the presentation of the self allows for the construction of several small networks — what we are calling *micro–publics* — that overlap in many ways, but allow for distinct foci. These could be teaching and research via his university profiles, research and writing via his blog and Twitter feed, or his reputation as a writer via his Amazon author's profile. By having a large number of different sites of presentation, Deuze runs the risk of spreading himself too thin, falling into the trap of having outdated information online. However, Deuze deals with this by always providing links to the most commonly updated sites, namely Twitter and the blog. The key benefit of having such a comprehensive online presence can been seen through a simple Google search of Deuze's name, which results in at least the first 40 results linking to information Deuze has uploaded or edited himself. There is therefore little chance of a searcher not being able to find Deuze online.

Professor Henry Jenkins is another excellent example of the public self category. Currently the Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and the Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, Jenkins has previously worked as the Director of MIT's Comparative Media Program, and specializes in the study of convergence cultures, media literacy, and online fandom. A prolific writer, he is the author or editor of 12 books on various aspects of media and popular culture, and, by his own online admission, is working currently on his thirteenth major publication (Jenkins, 2010). It is likely that, similar to our profile of Deuze above, his personal engagement with digital media and online cultures has influenced the development of his online persona, which is primarily developed through his blog.

The use of a personal URL as a homepage or blog is a feature of those academics who develop a strong public self persona online. The henryjenkins.org Web site is where Jenkins hosts his blog titled*Confessions of an Aca–Fan*, and includes a substantial 'About Me' page, along with links to his publications and research projects. This page is strategically and expertly linked to both his current home university at USC and its staff profile, and his MIT profile where, because most of his career was located there, would perhaps be the natural place individuals might search for Jenkins. This consistency makes finding the hub of Jenkins' profile easy. Moreover, the site is optimized so that a Google search of Jenkins' name will come up with his blog as the first search result. When Jenkins shifted from MIT to USC, the blog had to change servers or be abandoned (it was located on a MIT server when it was originally created). Rather than leave the trail of abandoned sites so often seen from academics online, blog updates stopped for the best part of October 2009 while content was transferred between the two universities. This included all of the archived posts from the original MIT site's inception.

The content of Jenkins' blog varies, but is generally academic in focus (as opposed to overtly political or personal, although these elements come in to play at times). The majority of posts are lengthy, representing original discussions of research and theory or transcripts of interviews with journalists and other researchers. The blog is updated frequently, generally more than once a week unless Jenkins is travelling, and includes embedded YouTube video, images, and links to other online information where appropriate. One of the more unique uses of Jenkins' blog is the publication of transcripts of panel discussions and interviews from some time ago. As he has been studying online fandom almost since its inception, this 'historical' information is often not available via other means, and provides interesting background for those writing and studying in this area.

Although comments are operational on Jenkins' blog, it is rare that long conversations take place in this forum. However, the option is available to leave comments, and potentially have questions answered. Jenkins has a Twitter account (@henryjenkins) where he links to interesting articles, posts information about upcoming events, and engages in brief open discussion with followers. His Twitter account also links to his blog. Interestingly, despite having close to 2,000 friends, his Facebook account settings are very private, meaning that unless he accepts a user as his 'friends', the only information visible are two images, a link to a television show and a link to a movie. Many of the 'friends' appear to be students or other academics (as they are members of university networks); however, without requesting to join the group, it is not possible to research the use of this platform further.

It can be assumed that in the humanities, at the very least, the construction of a public persona online will become increasingly common for emerging academics. This type of persona allows an early career researcher to connect online with others either at the same stage in their careers, or with more established researchers, raising their research profile and potentially improving career prospects. The ability to engage in dialogue with leaders in a

field of study, gaining insights, or even providing critique, not only allows researchers to improve their own work, but also locate their thinking more clearly within a wider academic community.

One of the key ways that academics can engage in debate is by providing links to their own writing in the comments sections on blogs or social networking Web sites, or by linking out from their work to the writing of others, either in text or via 'blogrolls' which are lists of blogs that the author reads and admires. These explicit forms of interconnection and intercommunication help contextualize their work, as well as tapping into the *micro–publics* that exist around more prominent or prestigious academic personae. Writing thoughtful responses to ideas raised online, or providing research–based examples for theoretical propositions allows an academic to draw new readers and raise their online profiles.

The comprehensive self

In contrast to 'formal' and 'public' personas online, the presentation of a comprehensive self online does not focus solely on an academic's work life. In addition to research or teaching issues, new media is used by these academics in the same way as it is used by most social networkers: to keep in touch with friends and family members and to organize a social life. It can be assumed that a purely private persona exists behind strict security settings in many instances, as academics strive to keep the details of their personal lives away from their students and colleagues. However, in some cases, academics allow public access to their private lives, mirroring on a much smaller scale a tendency in popular celebrity towards the exposure of everything from the banal to the intensely personal (Marshall, 2010). This tendency started with some of the earliest academic blogs about the lives of academics, and many were published under pseudonyms due to sensitive subject matter — particularly discussion of university policy and institutional complaints (Walker, 2006). However, pseudonymous blogs remain separate from 'comprehensive self' persona that we are discussing here, as by their very nature they do not work to increase the prestige of the academic writing them, hidden as they are behind the pseudonym. What is more interesting are the online personas which incorporate not only academic thought but personal issues — family, relationships, political or religious views — seamlessly and systematically into the presentation of the self to their audiences. There are elements of this in many of the public and even formal personas, but the extent to which this occurs is the defining aspect of the comprehensive self.

An example of an academic who allows this type of access, although couched in her own research and professional writing, is Dr. Melissa Gregg. An affect theorist working in the University of Sydney's Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, Gregg has one of the longest running academic blogs in Australia,homecookedtheory.com. Along with research and theoretically based blog posts, conference announcements, and book reviews, Gregg also writes on the process of choosing a wedding ring or marriage celebrant from a personal perspective, linking in to the research she conducts on gender and sexuality (Gregg, 2010). This mix of public and private is smoothly managed, aided by the fact that Gregg has only one fully developed publicly available platform (the blog) to aid the development of her persona, along with a well–developed university profile (http://sydney.edu.au/arts/gender_cultural_studies/staff/profiles/mgregg.shtml) which points back to the blog. Gregg keeps her Twitter feed private, has not developed her LinkedIn profile, and her Facebook security settings are completely private. Gregg provides an excellent example of how a persona may be created from a single focus online, and shows how the selective disclosure of personal information can be appropriate, even within an academic context.

The teaching self

The final constructed academic persona to be discussed here is the teaching self, often overlooked but also potentially extremely influential in wider *micro–publics*. Distinct from the public self because of the focus on students as opposed to colleagues, academics who use new media to present a teaching persona use these technologies to connect with generation Y and digital native students, who use new media as a matter of course. Therefore, the teaching self online becomes an extension of the use of institutional intranets — a tool to connect with the student body and extend the tertiary learning environment. In some cases, this persona is perfunctory, answering common questions and giving advice on assessment. However, the standout new media users take full advantage of the social aspects of new media by providing an interactive forum for students to connect, engage with the teaching staff and each other, and organize out–of–class activities that extend learning environments.

Some research conducted on the use of Facebook in particular looks at interactions between staff and students (Bosch, 2009; Madge, *et al.*, 2009; Mazer, *et al.*, 2009). Although evidence from these studies suggests that 'friending' students would be considered unwelcome by both teaching staff and their students, using aspects of the platform such as groups and pages associated with particular courses could be useful in terms of enhancing teaching and learning achievements. One important reason for this is that the platform is outside of a university's formal system, allowing more informal relationships to be developed. Also, students have indicated that they check their Facebook pages considerably more frequently than their institutions' own online platforms or their institutional e–mail accounts, important messages are more likely to be received in a timely manner. Another important consideration is the open nature of the networks created on Facebook, an aspect often missing from course specific intranets developed within or specifically for each university. Bosch (2009) comments that "students interviewed talked about how Facebook allowed them to learn from the older students whom they did not usually meet with in person, allowing them to network with groups who had similar academic interests, even if they were in different classes" [5]. For staff, Bosch (2009) found distinct benefits also, especially in relation to

dealing with student queries. The informality of the platform (when compared with class time and university–based systems) encouraged more active inquiries outside of class, allowing students who might be too shy to raise their hand in front of their fellow students to ask specific questions. Bosch also comments that "some lecturers indicated that class time is spent more effectively, because student queries had already been dealt with via Facebook" [6].

An example of this type of online persona — the teaching self personified online — comes from Ross Monaghan from Deakin University. A former public relations professional, Monaghan's teaching persona online creates excitement and engagement from students, providing opportunities for them to network with those working in the public relations industry, drawing attention to interesting work (both academic and professional), and offering opportunities for internships and summer positions which give students field experience. Monaghan also posts podcasts of events, and interviews with interesting people, stimulating debate that support in–class learning objectives. As with Deuze, Jenkins and Gregg, the primary location for this information is a blog, *TheMediaPod*(http://themediapod.net/). Unlike academics who focus primarily on their own research interests, Monaghan encourages his students to post to the blog as well, and uses the site as a teaching aid. This has resulted in a cycle of use and disuse for the blog, with use peaking around assessment time for students.

Monaghan also engages with his students via other platforms, particularly Facebook. By utilizing the Facebook's event creation capabilities, he is able to organize networking evenings with students and alumni, keep in touch with his students during teaching breaks and after they leave campus, and provide information about job and internship opportunities without having to send lengthy e–mail messages and keep an updated contact list. With its flattened structure, Facebook allows Monaghan's students from all levels of study (along with those who have moved to the workforce) to speak to each other, and allows Monaghan himself to become something of a pivot point for this*micro–public*.

The academics described in the public and comprehensive self sections earlier also work within the teaching persona at times by listing information about courses on their blogs and other sites and loading slides from presentations and lectures on sites such as YouTube and SlideShare. However, the level of engagement with students is much lower than Monaghan's, and their presentation of a teaching persona is an adjunct to their central online persona. Similarly, a great many teachers engage and build community online with their students solely through their institution specific platforms. However, what we are interested in is the development of a teaching persona through *micro–publics* that extend the boundaries of an institution, and are accessible by those outside the immediate reach of some academics. Extending these boundaries allows for the reputation and prestige of an instructor to transcend a given scholarly institution.

The sharing of lectures and slides online is neither new nor particularly rare, but there are instances where teaching material has 'gone viral', leaving academics and entering public consciousness in a larger way. One example of this can be seen in the work of Associate Professor Michael Wesch from Kansas State University. A cultural anthropologist, Wesch teaches and researches on the social and cultural effects of new media (Kansas State University, 2010). As a part of this research, he created a short YouTube clip exploring the impact of digital text, *Web 2.0 ... The Machine is Us/ing Us*, and uploaded in January 2007. Despite its age, this original five–minute upload still attracts comments, and has well over 11 million views (and counting) (YouTube, 2011). Although none of his other uploads have reached this level of views, Wesch continues to attract large numbers of viewers for his work. At the time of writing, 19,634 people subscribed to his YouTube channel — a number most video bloggers can only dream of (YouTube, 2011). Wesch's skill as a teacher has been recognized by more than just the YouTube audience however, as in 2008 he was awarded 'Outstanding Doctoral and Research Universities Professor' by CASE and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Kansas State University, 2010).

We believe that creating a teaching self persona online would be beneficial to both an academic and their institution by providing both current and potential students insight into the quality and skill of specific instructors.

The uncontainable self

Although many academics do contribute to their online persona creation, there are just as many who do not engage with new media in any meaningful way. However, this does not mean that they are not present online. The risk of not taking control of one's own online academic persona is that others will create one for you. This is what we are terming the 'uncontainable self'. In best case scenarios, an acolyte — student, fellow researcher, or fan — will construct a positively framed persona of an scholar's research or teaching, loading videos, discussing writing and archiving online publications. In the worst case, the traces of the academic's progress online could be limited to commentary by those who may wish to criticize or even defame: this may be through personal blogs or profile pages, or by students using sites such as ratemyprofessor.com.

Conclusion

There is little question that the landscape for the contemporary academic has shifted in a virtual way. As we have outlined here, the nature of academic life has become in many ways surrounded by online and mobile media culture as much as there continues to be patterns of engagement and activity that resemble previous eras of scholarship. These transformations in the way that academics conduct themselves could be seen invasively as a threat to the structures of institutions surrounding a given individual. There is an invasion from below with

students increasingly structuring their study and personal lives through digital technologies. In other words, the classroom has altered, the lecture theatre has a different disturbing electronic cacophony, and the 'conversation' between academic and student has mutated into various online and off–line forms. Implied in this invasion are new communication technologies that have become more prevalent. Web sites, social networks, online videos, and the invigorated capacity in student life to make links and connections between various sources of information accelerate changes in communication ecology. This movement of information to knowledge is critical to both the student and academic experience.

As we have indicated in this paper, the academic is negotiating a new intercommunicative environment and must navigate these spaces. It is precisely this communication terrain that now occupies center stage in the movement of ideas and information. This process is not solely student driven. The academy itself has moved online as well with online journals, virtual conferences, YouTube submissions, and collective peer assessment techniques analyzing academic work. Moreover, university Web sites are advancing in their sophistication and links to other forms of interactivity and structures of social networks. These changes are redefining institutional identities and the manner in which individuals construct their identities within higher education. In effect, higher education communication is increasingly being reorganized through patterns of online personal identity construction, publicity and dissemination.

We see these changes in the movement of ideas as less invasive and more as an opportunity to present and build academic personae individually and institutionally. Although there are other forms of power operating within and between universities, at the core of higher education is a very elaborate prestige economy. Academic personas are the linchpin in this system of prestige that often have clear multiplier effects for departments, colleges and universities. We have mapped in this paper an array of possible academic personas that are already in play in the online world and demonstrate ways in which reputation and ideas are conveyed. We have linked this development of persona to other systems of presentation of the self that are now ubiquitous in contemporary culture. The presentational media forms of social network sites, such as Facebook, have become the models for micro–social networks such as Academia.edu that are involved in shaping the presentation of the academic. Our characterization of five types of online academic personas provides a path for understanding how these new constructions of professional academic identity can be both charted and conceived as exemplary for other academics to imagine their online selves. Critical to this imagination of an online professional self is to realize that there is not one technique or pathway. The academic persona, like other online persona, also has to connect authentically to an individual's professional work. It is not hype or spin, but more an elaboration of what one is conceptualizing or thinking about, developing, and achieved. In the *micro–publics* of academia, the online persona will resemble other peer reviewed systems of knowledge production and be primarily judged on its merits. 🟥

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Notes

1. Stearn, 2002, p. 106.

2. Manning, 1992, p. 47.

3. Donath, 1998, p. 36.

4. Johnson, *et al.*, 2009, p. 8.

5. Bosch, 2009, p. 195.

6. *Ibid.*

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