



# a pedagogical exploration of creative identity

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This is a thesis submitted to the school of Future Environments at  
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requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Technologies.


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# abstract

This research addresses the ways in which developing creative identity can lead to a place of creative authenticity and genuine self expression. How it can enhance creative confidence, purpose, and practice as well as contributing to both self and community well being. By exploring this through a pedagogical approach, a practical sequence of modules and tasks are constructed in order to guide the individual through a journey of creative self discovery.

The research project follows a practice-led approach through the design of a hypothetical course on creative identity development which is intended to be delivered in an educational context. The course is tested by the research practitioner through the completion of the course as an artist, resulting in a body of creative work that is representative of the developed creative identity. Presentation of project artefacts along with personal pedagogy and course delivery are discussed as additional outcomes of the research project.

Reflective practice plays a significant role in this thesis and throughout the research project and culminates in a final reflection that reexamines the pedagogical exploration of creative identity development. The course and its practical elements act as a set of tools that the individual can access throughout a creative career, revisiting through the cyclical evolution of creative identity.

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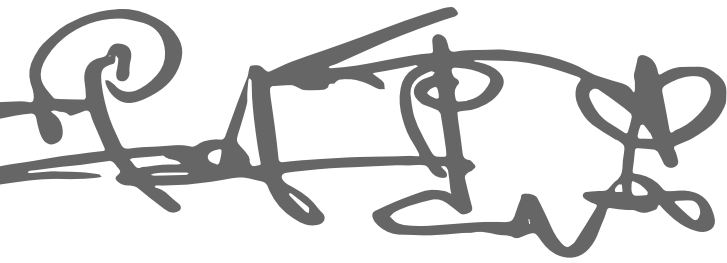
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# attestation of authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."



# acknowledgments


I am sincerely grateful for the support and encouragement of my supervisor, Dr Clinton Watkins. Thank you for your prodigious guidance not only through the adventure of this thesis but also as a mentor in my teaching experiences. The effect that this has had on my career, my pedagogy, and my art practice is profound.


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Thank you to all of the students that I have had the privilege of sharing knowledge with over the last couple of years; your willingness to learn and your never ending creativity is a constant source of inspiration.

To all the friends and loved ones that have barely seen or heard from me while I have undertaken this odyssey, I apologise! I miss you and I can't wait to be released back into the wild and reconnect with you all again.

Finally, to my family; Lee, Ophelia, Teddy, and Ludo. Thank you for your endless patience, reassurance, and the sacrifices you have all made in order for me to embark on this pilgrimage. The love and appreciation I have for you is immeasurable.





"Look, let's think about what creativity is, all right?"

He snorted. "This could take a couple of months."

"No," I said. "No, it only takes a long time because there are so many people who would like to come up with a definition of creativity that includes everything they do and nothing anyone else does. But if we're being honest, it's easy to define creativity: it's doing something that isn't obvious."

Everyone was looking at me. I stuck my chin out.

"That's it?" Jem said. "That's creativity? 'Doing something that isn't obvious?' You've had too much coffee, chum. That's the daftest thing I ever heard."

I shook my head. "Only because you haven't thought about it at all. Take the film I just made with *Rabid Dog*. All that footage of Scot Colford, from dozens of films, and all that footage of monsters, from dozens more. If I handed you any of those films, there's nothing obvious about them that says, 'You could combine this in some exact way with all those other films and make a new one.' That idea came from me. I created it. It wasn't lying around, waiting to be picked up like a bunch of pebbles on the beach. It was something that didn't exist until I made it, and probably wouldn't have existed unless I did. That's what 'to create' means: to make something new."

**cory doctorow, pirate cinema, 2012 p. 206-7**



# introduction

Each of us as humans have a unique perspective from which we view the world around us and which is formed from our experiences, thoughts, dreams, and interactions. Our reality is constructed through this perspective and our individual ways of thinking, learning, knowing, being, and creating are refracted through this *Prism of Self* (Rubin, 2023). By harnessing the symbolic vessel that contains the source material that forms our perspective, this thesis proposes that the development of creative identity can strengthen one's sense of creative self, enhance creative confidence, and uncover creative purpose. That it can enable the individual to live, work, and create as an authentic creative being through genuine self-expression. And that this can be achieved by embarking on a grand adventure of creative self discovery. A projected exploration that this thesis aims to construct in a form that can be delivered in an educational context.

The intention of this research is to explore the concept of creative identity and construct a pedagogical approach to personal creative identity development. Through a practice-led approach, a body of creative work and research artefacts will be generated that are representational of creative identity development. Research findings and project artefacts will then be presented in a form relating to creative technologies.

Initially, the research topic was creative identity on its own as I wanted to focus on the development of my own art making and artistic self. My personal creative identity was explored through art making and reflective practice and body of artwork was created during this time<sup>1</sup>. A leave of absence was taken due to pregnancy and the birth of my second child, however, I continued to work as a teaching assistant on the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme in the School of Future Environments at AUT. This informed the evolution of the research into a pedagogical approach with the realisation that I was becoming both an artist and an educator and that the purpose of this thesis needed to incorporate the intertwining of both identities.

My experiences in the creative technologies industry and as a teaching assistant are referred to throughout this exegesis as they heavily influenced the research topic and have been considered as a form of experiential and observational research. A review of literature in the opening chapter of this exegesis is separated into three sections; *creative identity*, *the pedagogical approach*, and *reflective practice*, and serve to critically contextualise a diverse spectrum of references in relation to each concept and their significance to this thesis.

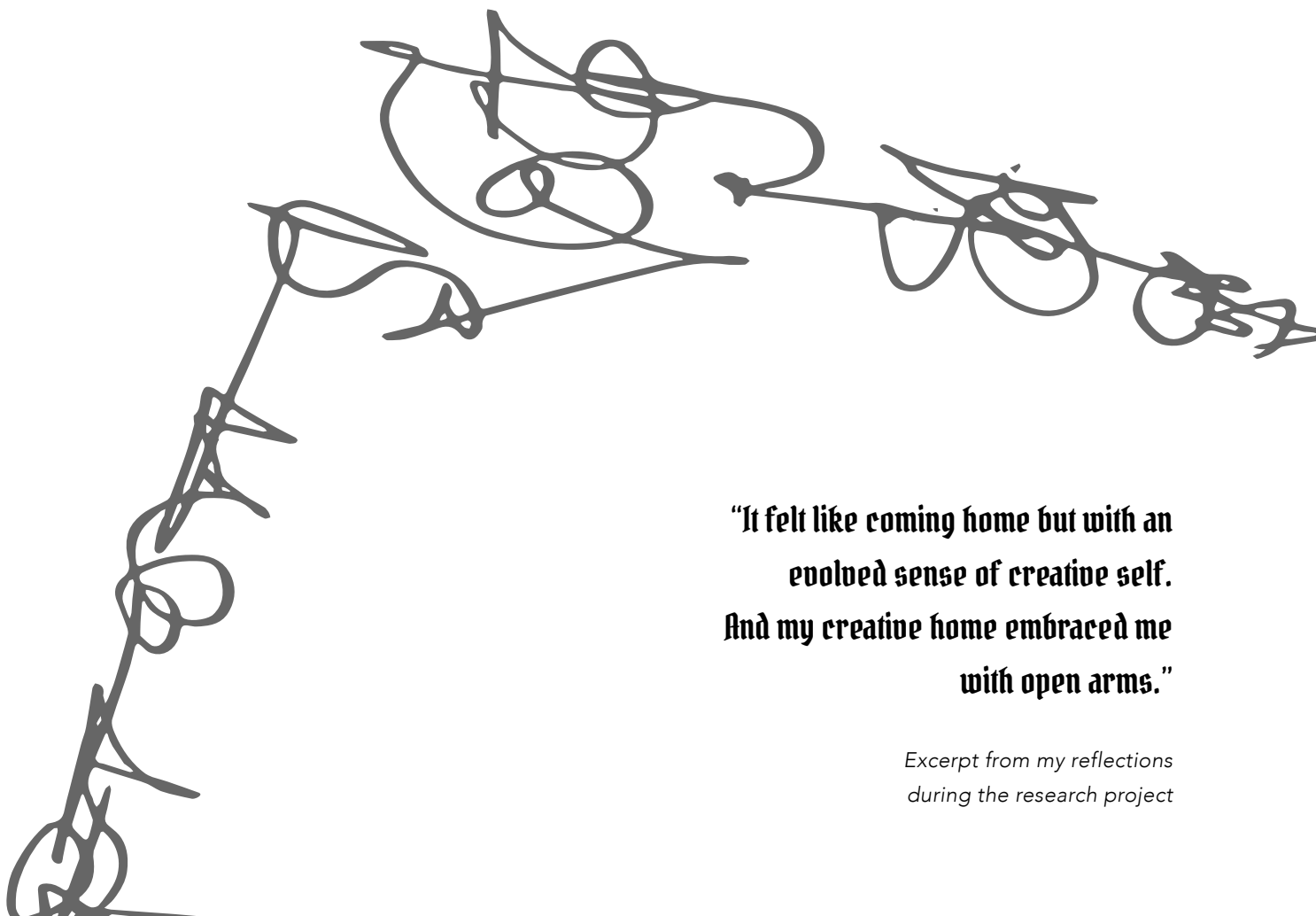
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<sup>1</sup> These outputs have been included as part of my completion of the pedagogical approach to creative identity development that was constructed within the research project.

# introduction

The main section of this exegesis, *the research project*, opens with an explanation of the methodologies and rationale behind the unconventional manner in which this practice-led research unfolded. Following on from this is the construction of the pedagogical approach to creative identity development and a description of the artefact produced. My experience in testing this prototype is written as a reflective piece and refers to the second practical artefact of this thesis. Clarification of the form in which this thesis will be presented in its entirety closes the chapter.

The concluding chapter of this exegesis is composed as a final reflection of the research project and critical contextualisation. This thesis is deeply reflective in its processes and by nature. It is an inherent quality of mine to find and make meaning in everything around me and this thesis is no different. It is honest, critical, and, at times, philosophical. It pulls from my symbolic vessel all of the source material I have accumulated through my ways of thinking, creating, teaching, and learning and culminates in a pedagogical exploration of creative identity.



**“It felt like coming home but with an evolved sense of creative self. And my creative home embraced me with open arms.”**

*Excerpt from my reflections during the research project*



**critical  
contextualisation**



# creative identity

Academic research on creative identity has been directed towards individuals identifying as creative and/or using art making to discover and define one's personal identity (see Culpepper, 2018, Kniveton, 2017, Wang, Kim, & Lau, 2021, Kaunisvirta, 2021, Jae Hwa Lee, 2022, Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014 to name a few). While this thesis is focused on the explicit development of creative identity, understanding the application of identity in creativity at a fundamental level felt an important place to start. Identity theory, social identity theory, and identity construction have all been viewed through multiple lenses from psychology, sociology, philosophy, theology, and cultural and gender studies as well as arts and creative disciplines. This would imply that the need to develop identity is a deeply rooted human trait. Generally speaking, "identity is a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure (role identities), groups they identify with and belong to (group identities), and unique ways in which they see themselves (person identities). Meanings are individuals' responses when they reflect upon themselves in a role, social, or person identity" (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Categorisation within these identities enable the individual to form a sense of self, connection, belonging, purpose, and community. This thesis aims to demonstrate ways to take these categorised identities and intentionally use them to develop a distinguishing creative identity in an educational context.

In a May 2023 blog post on *DIY Musician*, Chris Robley writes that "creative identity is how you define yourself as an artist, how well you know yourself, and why you do what you do.

Knowing your creative identity helps you stand out in a crowded field, gives you a sense of belonging, and helps you connect with your audience. This knowledge can also help you find your true voice and inspiration more consistently."<sup>2</sup> The post is an expansion of a video that UK singer-songwriter and music educator, Lady Nade, created alongside the article. The video consists of five tips from the musician to help define and develop creative identity; "be yourself... you are your creative identity, make time to be creative, write an elevator pitch, create a mission statement, and find your tribe." The concluding paragraph in the article states that "when you define yourself as a creator, you stand out in a crowded field, connect with your audience on a deeper level, and create music that is authentic and meaningful." This may be directed specifically to musicians but these tips can be applied to any artist, designer, or creative person in developing creative identity.

In *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, author Rick Rubin has included a chapter called *The Prism of Self* (p. 363) in which he speaks to the notion of the spectrum of thoughts, feelings, and sensations being refracted through our various aspects of self. Because of these

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://diymusician.cdbaby.com/musician-tips/creative-identity/>



## creative identity

refractions, he states that it is impossible for one piece of work to accurately represent our whole self or all of our selves. His suggestion is to “embrace the *prism of self*, and keep allowing reality to bend uniquely through us” (p. 364). In terms of our creative outputs, we can create from the multiple aspects or perspectives of these selves; through the lens of our shadow self, or a character for example. Understanding that, although these works will be different from each other, they are all expressions of our true selves. Creative identity is not about creating bodies of work that are all the same or that apply the same techniques or mediums every time in order to stand out clearly as ours. Rather, it is about knowing and being aware of all the parts of ourselves and using that information to develop unique perspectives that we can create from, that are inherently within us and inform our approach to our creative processes and practice.

Two other concepts from *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* that support this notion are *The Source* (p. 13) and *The Vessel and The Filter* (p. 25). *The Source* of an individual’s creativity is everything that has been experienced and internalised, made into potential material. Rubin asserts that *The Source* exists in the external, that our mind believes it comes from inside us when in actuality, *The Source* is all the events, interactions, or stimuli that we sense, remember, or tune into “not only through our experiences. It may also be

dreams, intuitions, subliminal fragments, or other ways still unknown by which the outside finds its way in” (p. 14). *The Source* is stored in the internal vessel once it has been filtered through the individual’s unique way of processing it. The filter reduces *The Source’s* potential as creative material by attempting to make sense of it rather than allowing it to be stored in the vessel as it is. The vessel now holds a variation of *The Source* that makes up an individual’s thoughts and beliefs. By accepting *The Prism of Self* concept alongside *The Source* and *The Vessel and The Filter*, Rubin states that the artist can improve the vessel’s ability to receive *The Source* and consciously select elements from it to be applied in artistic outputs.

In a 2020 prerecorded TED talk, actor and writer Ethan Hawke, speaks about creative expression and giving yourself permission to be creative<sup>3</sup>. In order to express ourselves, he says, “we have to know ourselves” (03:18). He addresses his concern for the lack of importance placed on creativity and how beneficial it actually is to the collective of humanity; “It’s vital. It’s the way we heal each other. In singing our song, in telling our story, in inviting you to say, “Hey, listen to me, and I’ll listen to you,” we’re starting a dialogue. And when you do that, this healing happens, and we come out of our corners, and we start to witness each other’s common humanity. We start to assert it. And when we do that, really good things happen” (06:53). In order to know



<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.ted.com/talks/ethan\\_hawke\\_give\\_yourself\\_permission\\_to\\_be\\_creative?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/ethan_hawke_give_yourself_permission_to_be_creative?language=en)

## creative identity

yourself, he asserts that you “just have to find your love” and “be willing to play the fool” (07:31). By embracing these notions, the discovery of unabashed creativity within can be explored and accepted, leading to healing, connection, and authenticity.

Influential musician and artist, David Bowie, gives similar advice in an interview for the 1997 documentary *Inspirations* (Apted, M. (Director), 1997); “...always remember that the reason that you initially started working was that there was something inside yourself that you felt that if you could manifest it in some way you would understand more about yourself and how you coexist with the rest of society.” Bowie continues the statement by encouraging artists to move further out of their comfort zone in order to create freely; “...if you feel safe in the area that you’re working in you’re not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water than you feel you’re capable of being in, go a little bit out of your depth and when you don’t feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you’re just about in the right place to do something exciting.”

Knowing yourself in order to create is something that rapper and musician Andre 3000, of the hip hop duo *Outkast*, speaks on in a video released by clothing brand Supreme in 2022<sup>4</sup>. He asserts the importance of figuring

out who you are but also who you are not, that perhaps you wish you were a certain type of artist but that your strength lies in another form. Knowing yourself leads to doing “your own thing and that’s when your skin starts to breathe, you start to get into your primal self and your primal self is the best contribution to the planet” (00:22).

In relating creativity and creative identity to personal and community wellbeing, the Blackfoot, or Siksika, First Nations tribe of the Southern Alberta region in Canada provide an intriguing perspective through their way of community life. Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow spent time with the Blackfoot people in 1938 and the experience informed the *Hierarchy of Needs* concept published in 1943. In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, he proposes a path of stages with fundamental physiological and psychological human needs as the basics required to be met in order to move through to more existential needs; cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualisation, and transcendence. Maslow perceived this journey to self-actualisation and transcendence as something to be acquired where the Blackfoot believed self-actualisation to be innate, that we are born as self-actualised beings. Through the process of ritual, prayer, and ceremonies the sacred self can be drawn out and expressed freely and wholly<sup>5</sup>. The fundamental needs of Maslow’s

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <https://supreme.com/random/andre-3000-2022/>

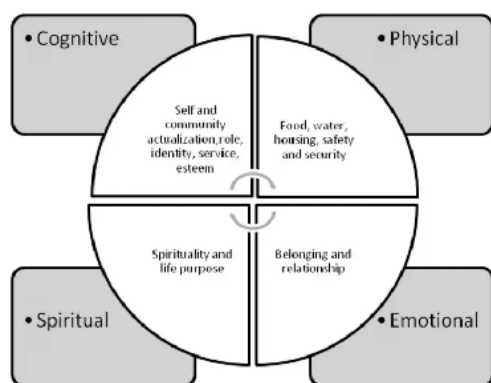
<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.esperanzaproject.com/2021/native-american-culture/the-blackfoot-wisdom-that-inspired-maslows-hierarchy/>



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hierarchy are contained in the concept of *community actualisation* (Blackstock, 2011). The physiological and psychological needs of the individual inform and enhance the community as a collective which leads to *cultural perpetuity*, the transfer of this wisdom from generation to generation. While Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been represented as a pyramid to indicate the ascending stages, the Blackfoot approach is a circular model as presented by Blackstock (2011) indicating the interconnectedness of cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

**Figure 1**  
*The Blackfoot Circular Model of Needs*



Note: This representation from Blackstock is in response to the work of Cross (2007). From *The emergence of the breath of life theory*. Blackstock, C. (2011). *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 8(1), 1-16.

Comparable to the Blackfoot perspective is the Māori health model of *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, the four sided house<sup>6</sup>. The house (whareni) with its strong foundations and four

equal walls, represents the four dimensions of wellbeing; *taha tinana* (physical health), *taha wairua* (spiritual health), *taha whānau* (family health), and *taha hinengaro* (mental health). If one of these dimensions is lacking or impaired, the whareni becomes unbalanced which reflects the state of health of the individual and the collective. While creativity is not explicitly mentioned in either model, it can be inferred from a holistic view of creativity research that personal creativity informs self-expression and identity development which in turn enhances individual and community wellbeing, leading to self and community actualisation and cultural perpetuity.

While researching world traditions of art healing in the early 1970s, art therapist Shaun McNiff worked with an indigenous healer from the U.S. Southwest. He records his learnings from this healer in a 2019 reflective article: "do the work within the context of your specific community and in your distinctive way, with an openness to how it is integrally connected to the whole human experience" (McNiff, 2019). A consensus that could be inferred from McNiff's body of academic research and writings, and indeed, art therapy as a discipline and health model, is that art can be a tool for healing, connection, resilience, empowerment, and authenticity. In art therapy, art making involves the use of artistic expression to explore and process thoughts, feelings, and emotions alongside an art

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha>

## creative identity

therapy practitioner. By using the process of making in a variety of mediums, the complexities of being human can be expressed in ways other than words which may be challenging. Through this methodology, one can gain self-awareness and further understanding of personal narratives, enhancing their connection to self, community, and the natural world.

Considering Rick Rubin's *Prism of Self* concept again, the awareness of all of one's selves is only one part of developing creative identity. Once the existence of multiple selves is revealed, how might one consciously create identities within the self in order to express those forms? Drag performance art and the concept of the alter ego can provide a powerful way to explore the inner landscape. Leadership and performance coach Todd Herman has developed a program he uses with his clients called *The Alter Ego Effect*<sup>7</sup>. Herman works with his clients to develop an alter ego that they can take into their professional lives in order to overcome obstacles that might be holding them back from success. Herman's approach to coaching through the alter ego involves working with a client to create an aspirational version of themselves and understanding how they can embody this character in situations and interactions that may be challenging, empowering them with courage and confidence.

Similarly, drag performers create a persona that they embody when performing as a way to experiment with aspirational characteristics or traits that may be different to their regular personality. Drag performance art is often used to challenge societal norms, especially in regards to gender, and push boundaries of creativity. Elaborate costumes, makeup, and performance allow the individual to explore the expression of different aspects of identity that may not be available to them in everyday life. When a performer is in drag they feel a sense of empowerment within themselves and their creativity and this feeling can be accessed even when they're not in drag. Ru Paul Charles, one of the most famous drag queens in the world, creator and host of *Ru Paul's Drag Race* reality tv show franchise, speaks to this frequently on the show. An interview with Charles in a 2018 New York Times article elaborates on what he means by this; "Charles frequently described his relationship to drag as "the Superman to my Clark Kent." The first time he stepped into his drag persona, Charles felt fully alive, electric with a power to command attention and desire. One day his therapist told him he could be Superman regardless of his attire. "She said, 'The power you feel in drag is available to you 24/7'."<sup>8</sup> By using the alter ego or drag persona as a tool to create an aspirational version of self, the embodiment of this character can access the courage and

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from: <https://alteregoeffect.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/magazine/is-rupauls-drag-race-the-most-radical-show-on-tv.html>



## creative identity

confidence required to develop a strong sense of creative self and identity.

Artists and creative collectives throughout history have used the manifesto form to explicitly state artistic intentions and serve as a tangible artefact of creative identity (Danchev, 2011). Identifying creative values and philosophies and the practice and processes that represent them, a creative manifesto can be used as a way to articulate the decisions made and actions taken by the artist. "A personal manifesto is the Swiss Army Knife of self awareness. Your manifesto can give you the confidence to take risks that are important to you and be persistent about pursuing goals that you actually care about. You can use it to synthesise new ideas and knowledge, react to change with coherence and consistency, inform your intuition, be authentic with others, and avoid situations that lead to regret" (Burgess-Auburn, 2022). Contemporary examples of the creative manifesto can be seen in the series *A Manifesto By...* on the digital arts and editorial platform *WePresent* "which invites activists and creatives with something to say to write 10 rules to live by, in order to help spread their message."<sup>9</sup>

Becoming aware of oneself, all aspects and facets, creative identity can be developed by pulling from the inherent qualities, aesthetics, and talents within, intertwining them with practice, philosophy, and purpose. Taking these elements and embedding them in

creative outputs, using this knowledge of creative self to make decisions throughout a creative career that align with the individual's creative identity. Self expressing as an authentic creative being, contributing to community and the collective of humanity to initiate new and positive ways of living and being.



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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from: <https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/series/a-manifesto-by>

## the pedagogical approach

Rather than reviewing general pedagogy and educational research, I felt it necessary to consider my perspective and experience as an industry professional, artist, and teaching assistant as this is the foundation of the practical elements of this thesis. Therefore, this review is relative to pedagogical approaches that inform and influence these aspects of both the research project and myself as an educator.

In an article included in the *Tate Papers* Spring 2009 issue, contributing researcher, Emily Pringle, examines the relationship between art practice and artist-led pedagogy. By working with artists who provide learning experiences within a gallery context, Pringle aims to explore how the artists define themselves as artists and educators and contribute to the wider understanding of artist-led pedagogic practice. From this study, Pringle states that the artists interviewed “saw their practice as a process of conceptual enquiry and of making meaning” and spoke of “the importance of learning through doing and how their knowledge is gained through practice” (Pringle, 2009). From this, the artists draw on the knowledge gained through experience and create processes for learning that reflect their creative practice. Rather than teaching technical skills and techniques, the artist-as-educators see themselves as “facilitators, engaging students in the processes of learning. As such, they locate learners as active makers of meaning, rather than passive


recipients of ‘objective’ knowledge. They encourage learners to actively question and embark on a process of enquiry. The artists also promote experiential learning, with an emphasis on giving participants the opportunity to engage directly with the art, experiment, take risks and play, within a supportive environment” (Pringle, 2009).

Further research of artist-led pedagogy in higher education is limited in relation to artists as educators. For the purpose of this thesis, the literature review is focused on artists as educators rather than arts educators with an art practice. This is to coincide with my experience as an artist and creative industry professional moving into higher education and developing a pedagogy from these experiences. The understanding gained from a combination of research reviewed and personal experience observes that the focus of an artist-led pedagogy is artistic expression and experiential learning. Experimentation through practical and process-driven curriculums enhance personal exploration and aids in the development of artistic sensibilities. Interestingly, Oxford Brookes University in the U.K. offers postgraduate courses in Education - Artist Teacher Practice<sup>10</sup>, targeted to artists who may be involved in education but are not qualified as educators specifically, which determines that arts education is starting to embrace an artist-led pedagogy.

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/artist-teacher-practice>

## the pedagogical approach



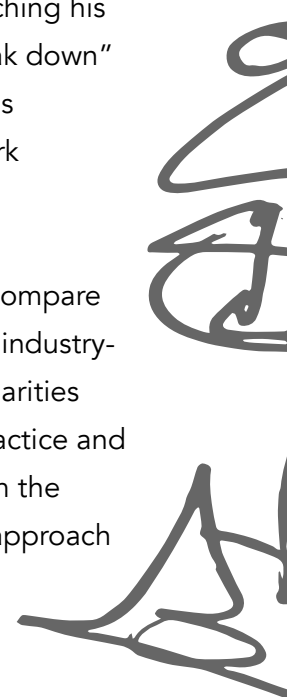
There is equally limited research on industry-led pedagogy, again relating this to creative industry professionals moving into higher education rather than educators gaining industry experience alongside teaching. There is some research involving industry professionals volunteering time or partnering on projects within a course or programme (Fleischmann, 2012, for example), however, this is not relevant to this thesis either. My experience in the creative technologies industry and as a member of the Industry Advisory Board within the School of Future Environments at AUT (2018-2021) provided the insight that the disconnect between industry and academia was concerning and that graduates did not have the necessary skills to navigate the workplace successfully. Skills such as written and oral communication, collaboration, self-directed learning, and problem solving. Further experience as a teaching assistant for the past two years has served to solidify this view. Universities are required to produce employable graduates and are under increased pressure to do so (Bridgstock, 2007). By focusing on academic outcomes of theory development and the publishing of research, professional practitioners remain frustrated with universities' lack of awareness when it comes to industry needs (Gasper & Lipinski, 2016).

Creative Technologies as an academic discipline encourages studio-based and student-led learning environments and implements an integrative practice of

transdisciplinary methodologies. This approach sets a solid foundation for a career in the creative industries, however, the lack of understanding of industry needs in relation to the skills listed above and of the reality of current industry standards and expectations, undermines that foundation and creates a barrier to graduate employment.

One example of industry experience informing pedagogy can be found in the introduction to a 2021 research article by Hora and Lee; a community college educator is speaking about his approach to teaching, telling the researchers that he uses his training and experience as an oil rig operator to teach problem solving in an anecdotal way. His "teaching philosophy and classroom practice was based on a commitment to guiding someone towards an answer they discover on their own instead of "regurgitating information," because he felt that would not serve them well on the job where problems are common and rarely neatly packaged with a single solution. Consequently, teaching his students how to diagnose and "break down" the situation was a key element of his pedagogy, grounded in his prior work experience" (Hora & Lee, 2021).

To take from the above review and compare what is known of both artist-led and industry-led pedagogies, there are clear similarities between the two; both take from practice and process-driven experiences to inform the learning environment. An artist-led approach



## the pedagogical approach

encourages creative expression and the development of artistic sensibilities. An industry-led approach teaches practical skills informed by the needs of industry and employers such as communication and collaboration. An educator that can embrace a balance of both approaches is highly beneficial to the students in creative disciplines.

Tim Gunn, fashion design academic, educator, mentor, and host of competition reality tv shows *Project Runway*, *Under The Gunn*, and *Making the Cut*, speaks to his teaching philosophy in his book, *Tim Gunn: The Natty Professor: A Master Class on Mentoring, Motivating, and Making it work!* (co-written with Ada Calhoun, 2015). He lays out his personal pedagogy in a simple acronym; T.E.A.C.H. *Truth Telling* refers to being honest about what the teacher is seeing in student work, being realistic in feedback and critique. *Empathy* is about understanding each particular student and meeting them where they are at that moment. "It's only by paying close attention to whom the students are and putting yourself in their shoes that you can truly help them." (Gunn & Calhoun, 2015). *A* stands for *Asking*, turning questions from students back onto them so they can ask themselves as well as being curious in life as an educator. "Make it Work!" is Gunn's catchphrase in the *Project Runway* workroom and relates to the C in the acronym; *Cheerleading*. Celebrating student victories, encouragement, and pointing out strengths to

instil creative confidence and self belief.

*Hoping for the Best* rounds out the acronym and is knowing when to let go, to allow the student the space to fail, learn, and grow on their own.

A review of Gunn's approach to student critique and comparison to that of Simon Cowell, judge on singing competition reality tv show *American Idol*, by Higdon (2007) brings the T.E.A.C.H. philosophy into observable action. The article is in relation to legal writing in a school of law, however, the observations are not discipline specific. In laying out four basic principles of student critique, Higdon uses examples from both Gunn and Cowell to compare contrasting styles and how they can be helpful or a hindrance to an effective critique. The first principle relates to the viewer's reaction to the work and Higdon's chosen example of Gunn's critique shows *truth telling* and *asking*. Principle two is about showing the student how to consider the audience and multiple perspectives, *truth telling*, *empathy*, and *asking* are all reflected in Gunn's critique. Getting the student to explain the choices made in the work is the third principle and this is a considerable part of Gunn's pedagogy. Through *truth telling*, *empathy*, and *asking* Gunn regularly opens his critique with questions to gain understanding of the student or designers intentions before providing feedback. Higdon states that praise offered in critique is vital, but only if deserved. *Cheerleading* is also important to Gunn and

## the pedagogical approach

Higdon draws attention to his “make it work!” catchphrase. Ultimately, Higdon concludes that “Gunn uses his critiques as an opportunity to help improve the student’s ability to make more effective choices in the future.”

Continuing with the study of pedagogy through competition reality tv shows, *Rupedagogies of Realness*, a collection of essays edited by Lindsay Bryde and Tommy Mayberry (2022), explores teaching and learning with *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (RPDR). An essay by Phillip Joy and Jill Marie McSweeney-Flaherty entitled *Pedagogy of the Mother: Exploring Freire’s Philosophy of Co-Productive Learning* (p.93) is a fascinating look at how creator and host Ru Paul Charles utilises critical pedagogy and transformative experiential learning throughout the show, albeit unknowingly. Essentially, Freire’s pedagogical approach states that educators and learners are interchangeable, that they are learning from and teaching each other in a dialogue-driven co-production of knowledge<sup>11</sup>. This approach can also be seen in the Māori concept of *ako*<sup>12</sup>. The word itself means both teach and learn in Te Reo Māori and refers to new knowledge that can emerge from learning experiences for both teacher and learner.

The authors describe RPDR as a pedagogical space and Charles as a *transformative intellectual*, a teacher consistent with Giroux’s characterisation of educator (1985); “RPDR is a pedagogical space, a learning environment comprised of the workroom and the main stage in which Mother Ru, the contestants, and viewers co-create the knowledge and learning in order to dismantle the broader structures that disenfranchise the LGBTQ+ communities” and throughout the show, contestants “reveal their authentic selves to the audiences and provide a window into the personal transformation they go through every episode. We believe that through the seemingly unintentional use of critical pedagogy, RPDR has enabled itself to become a global learning space that continuously transforms itself, Mother Ru, contestants, and viewers and encourages us all to reflect on broader systems of oppression through key conversations and challenges that represent the political and social barriers experienced by the LGBTQ+ communities” (p.104).

Taking from a critical review of the show and conceptualising Charles as a teacher, the authors identify three types of pedagogical strategies that align with transformative learning; learning through dialogue, learning through vulnerability, and learning through reflection. “Learning for Mother Ru is a praxis of dialogue, reflection, and action and is

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.pedagogy4change.org/paulo-freire-pedagogy-of-hope/>

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from: <https://tereomaori.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-guidelines/Teaching-and-learning-te-reo-Maori/Aspects-of-planning/The-concept-of-ako>



## the pedagogical approach

reflected through her interactions with the other queens/learners on her show” (p.113). The workroom setting is where much of the show takes place, where the competing queens prepare and participate in the various challenges before presenting outcomes on the main stage. Ru Paul makes regular visits to the workroom to check in on their progress and uses this time to initiate discussions with each queen, not just about the current challenge, but their lives and artform as well, how “their drag, relationships, and lives have been shaped by political, social, and cultural systems, ultimately mentoring them to push outside any constructed boundaries and find their own unique identity. Together, they create knowledge and possibilities for new ways of performing their art and sharing their lives with an audience” (p. 113). There is also a dynamic of learner-learner dialogue between the group of queens in the workroom as they share the myriad ways personal experiences have shaped their identities and art.

Vulnerability is highly encouraged by Charles as a significant tool for transformation on RPDR which he reinforces by being vulnerable himself, “in creating an environment where Ru and contestants are free to share, co-learn, and be vulnerable, the workroom becomes a space that facilitates deep learning and self-growth” (p.119). Charles often refers to the *inner saboteur*<sup>13</sup> or the internal negative voices and openly reveals his own struggles

with self-doubt and imposter syndrome. By sharing his own experiences through vulnerability, Charles transforms the workroom into a space for learning and reflection. This enhances the workroom itself as a safe space for further vulnerability in a peer-learning environment. “At the heart of teaching is a sense of vulnerability and authenticity, which are critical components to support intentional transformative learning for students. When we can create a space where our learners are able to explore, take risks, and open themselves up to critique and challenge, we increase the impact of their learning” (P.121).

“Mother Ru incorporates many opportunities for learning through critical and personal reflections for contestants, which is pivotal in the process of transforming their drag and personal self” (p.122). A lot of the success of the contestants on RPDR comes from the ability to learn, grow, and transform through the competition. Charles and the other judges continuously invite transformation by asking and encouraging the queens to talk about what they have learned about themselves, others, and drag. The final four contestants are usually shown a provided photo of themselves as children and asked to share advice to their younger selves and “through this act of sharing and providing a life lesson, contestants actively become teachers to viewers and demonstrate the lessons they’ve learned during Mother Ru’s reflective process” (p.123).

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<sup>13</sup> Ru Paul has a personal lexicon that is referred to throughout the RPDR series, *inner saboteur* is one of these phrases

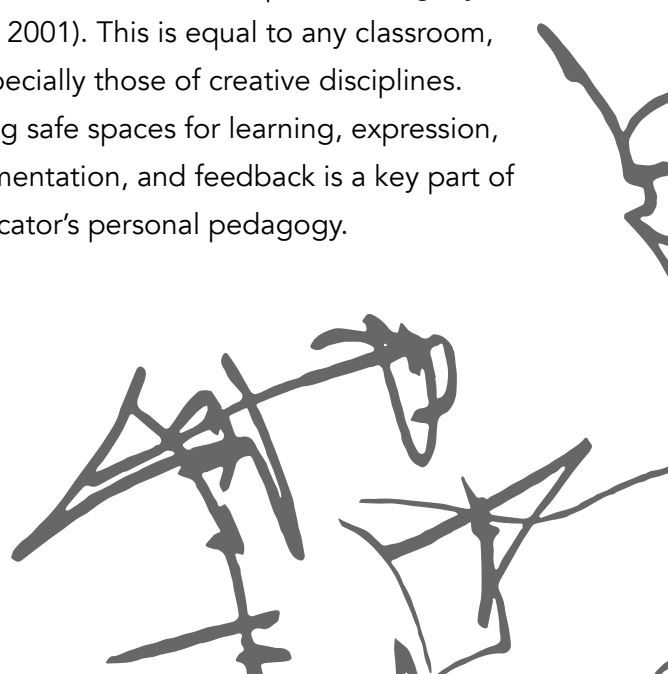


## the pedagogical approach

Art therapist Jessica Drass incorporates a punk rock approach to her group art therapy sessions and practice. She determines that an “art therapy practice informed by punk culture can be a way to create a culture of connection among patients” (Drass, 2016). By drawing from her experiences in the punk rock subculture, she maintains that this provides the ability to form her therapy studio as a judgement-free space where patients are encouraged to discover authentic self-expression and individuality through art making exercises and reflective practice. She identifies with the statement of punk culture as being “based on an ideology that emphasises questioning conformity and creating a space for individuality within community” (Snyder & Engelsgerd, 2014, p.14). By using the punk rock notion of *collapsing hierarchies*, Drass shares her own art making with patients in order to highlight the “art making process itself and illustrate the innate ability we all have to be artists” (Drass, 2016). Another concept she takes from punk culture, *deconstruction and reconstruction*, is used to enable patients to create personal narratives through art making. This breaking down of materials along with social norms and conditioning and reconstructing them in ways that represent the individual's true form of expression and ways of being is inherently punk by nature (Graffin, 2002). By using the punk rock attitude and incorporating it into her practice, Drass sets up powerful spaces for group art therapy in which patients feel safe

and secure in their self-expression and art making, while developing a sense of community and connection within the group environment.


Another prominent art therapist, Catherine Moon, in her 2001 book *Studio Art Therapy: Cultivating the Artist Identity in the Art Therapist*, refers to the art therapy studio space as being more than just the room or area where the art therapy session is held. Moon has worked as a mobile art therapist, using kitchens, living rooms, and back porches as a studio, however, despite these less than ideal settings, she states that the spirit of the studio is what makes it a success (p. 71). The goal of the art therapist is to “establish an atmosphere where each person is viewed as uniquely capable of artistic expression, where the process of creating is as important as what is created, where spontaneous expression and disciplined practice are understood to be interdependent aspects of creativity, and where both the person creating and the thing created are treated with respect and dignity.” (Moon, 2001). This is equal to any classroom, but especially those of creative disciplines. Creating safe spaces for learning, expression, experimentation, and feedback is a key part of an educator's personal pedagogy.





## reflective practice

Reflection-in-action as a concept was developed by M.I.T. professor Donald Schön and first published in his book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* in 1983. Schön referred to professional practitioners in a variety of disciplines and the ways in which they thought about problem solving in real time, that is, in action. Making decisions about the creative process while in the process, while reflection-on-action refers to the reflection that takes place after the design is complete, thinking in retrospect about the decisions that were made during the creative process. Reflective practice has become a key component of arts education and experiential learning, stemming from classic educational research such as Dewey (1933) and Kolb (1984).



In 2013, Parsons School of Design implemented a trial of online learning portfolios (LPs) as part of the first year curriculum redesign (Millington and Doren, 2019). The purpose of the LP is to encourage students to write about creative processes in real time in order to become reflective practitioners and to aid in the understanding of the design studio work. The LPs were set up as a blog platform where the student can make blog-post style entries about the work as it is completed. The tutors included post prompts as regular assignments and asked students to “use the blog like an actual studio space: to test ideas, to play, to assemble things and leave them behind, and to take unused ideas and bring them into new

projects. Most importantly, [they] asked them to develop the habit of using reflection to understand their own practice” (Millington and Doren, 2019). An outcome of the LP was that the value shifted from the final product to the creative process itself which in turn enhanced the quality of students' outputs; “In the reflective posts, we observed improvement in students' understanding of what creative process includes, witnessed a new focus on methodology, and a stronger sense of community in our classrooms as we talked more about making. Students began to prototype more extensively, sought feedback, faced challenges without emotional judgement, posed thoughtful questions, and developed more unique work” (Millington and Doren, 2019).

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) also redeveloped the curriculum in 2013 and embedded reflection in practice-based learning in the arts (Guillaumier, 2016). The RCS graduate profile, as stated by Guillaumier, is that the graduate “should be an excellent and reflective arts practitioner who leads, creates, achieves and innovates,” thereby confirming RCS's belief of reflective practice as an essential part of practice-based disciplines. “Furthermore, our belief is that the processes of reflection underpin the practice of conceptual and embodied critical thinking, a skill essential to students at all times, but particularly in the last 2 years of their course when they have had the benefit of 2 years of foundational training, are beginning to find

## reflective practice

their own creative voices and to think in a more focussed way about the industry they plan to enter" (Guillaumier, 2016).

Documented reflection is a requirement for students across individual, collaborative, and work-based learning which offers "students the opportunity to participate in the teaching, engage in debate, develop decision-making and leadership skills, engage with practice-based research and participate in peer learning. Through this process of developing ownership of embodied reflection students are gradually enabled to recognise, articulate and question any intriguing problems or opportunities they may come across. It is through such reflection that creativity regenerates" (Guillaumier, 2016).

Another component of reflective practice is the critical reflection taken when engaging with art and artistic outputs. Art critic and theorist John Berger's 1972 seminal book and subsequent BBC television series, *Ways of Seeing*, invites the reader to recognise the multifaceted nature of visual perception and the human constructs of reality in the visual arts. The deconstruction of meaning and intention within artworks are emphasised in Berger's writing and he continuously touches on the cultural and social contexts in which art is made. This is mirrored in the artist-led pedagogical approach, reviewed earlier in this exegesis, whereby the artist as educator takes the meaning-making process they've developed in their own practice and uses it as a learning example for students when

critiquing artwork. Critical reflection when engaging with other artworks can inform and enhance personal art-making and creative identity by considering those same notions captured by Berger when engaging in reflection-in-action through the creative act.





# the research project





## methodologies

As a neurodivergent professional practitioner who has pivoted into academic research and higher education only recently, I embrace unconventional methods and creative approaches to research. Being diagnosed with ADHD at age 35 was a complete paradigm shift and helped me to understand and accept the unique way that my brain perceives the world and processes information. Because of this, I do not tend to follow methodical and empirical modes of conducting research. I am incredibly intuitive and am able to allow the appropriate methods to reveal themselves to me throughout the process, a rhizomatic way of thinking and being.

Rhizomatic thinking is inspired by the root systems of plants, a rhizome, and as such is non-linear, non-hierarchical, interconnected, and encourages a nomadic approach to knowledge and learning (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This way of thinking accurately describes my brain and the way that I make connections and associations that diverge from linear and conventional thought processes. When I latch on to an idea I must first acquire as much information about it as I can, gathering and consuming a wide variety of material from whatever source I can find, traversing disciplinary boundaries so that I am able to form a picture in my mind of all the elements connected to the topic. I have hyperphantasia<sup>14</sup>, a form of extreme visual mental imagery, which means that the

visualisations in my mind's eye are intensely vivid and I have a photorealistic imagination. By building a picture of an idea or topic through this initial research, I can see all of the patterns, connections, and gaps or holes so vividly that sometimes it feels like I'm actually reaching into the image and moving things around to create new connections and associations, walking all the way around it and looking at it from every angle. This also applies to my art making when I'm coming up with concepts and even in my day-to-day life when attempting to manage domestic activities and responsibilities. This image ends up functioning as a map of the methodology or approach required to execute the idea, a principle of rhizomatic thinking and learning according to Deleuze and Guattari; "the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectible, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

Experiential and observational research was the starting point stemming from my awareness of the disconnect between the creative technologies industry and academia, as stated in *The Pedagogical Approach* section in chapter one of this exegesis. Not only had I witnessed the lack of necessary skills graduates required to meet employers expectations, but my experiences also showed

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24232330-300-how-people-with-extreme-imagination-are-helping-explain-consciousness/>

## methodologies

me how a notable portion of the creative industry itself has lost any sense of innovation or imagination, especially in New Zealand. A culture of risk-adversity, status climbing, and gatekeeping, plus communication breakdowns between client and creative agency has led to a homogenisation of design and a decrease in the value of creativity. From this I believed that a strong sense of creative self within the art, design, and creative technologies communities could push through the barriers from the industry and the priority of profit in business. By considering these observations along with the experience gained in the classroom while working as a teaching assistant, a vision or a map was emerging in my mind of how to construct a pedagogical approach to creative identity development.

Within this practice-led research, *design thinking* as a methodology has been applied, taken from my training and experience with it in a professional setting. Design thinking as a framework for innovation design was first introduced at Stanford d.School by David Kelley and is now offered as a course through the Kelley-founded online learning platform, IdeoU<sup>15</sup>. From *Design Thinking 101* by Nielsen Norman Group; “the design thinking ideology asserts that a hands-on, user-centric approach to problem solving can lead to innovation, and innovation can lead to differentiation and

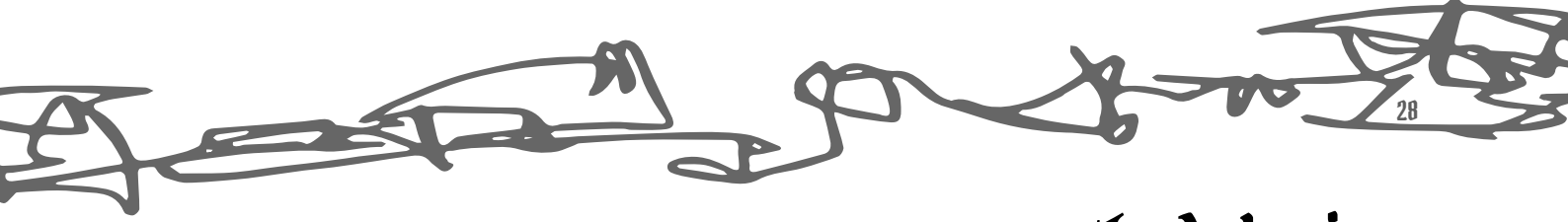
a competitive advantage. This hands-on, user-centric approach is defined by the design thinking process and comprises six distinct phases.”<sup>16</sup> The phases of design thinking consist of empathise, define, ideate, prototype, test, and implement. My observational and experiential research fulfilled the empathise phase and my rhizomatic approach to thinking and learning enabled me to define the research as a pedagogical exploration of creative identity.

The ideation phase explored creative identity in a learning context and the concept of the course emerged from this. Rapid prototyping has been adapted for learning design by University College London, entitled *ABC Learning Design*; “ABC enables programme and module teams to rapidly develop a storyboard visualising the learner journey based on their activities through the course of study. The method is non-prescriptive and builds from the participants’ existing practice but can be used to identify opportunities for blended learning, to review assessment and feedback and align the programme to wider institutional priorities.”<sup>17</sup> This approach was used to design the course and is elaborated on in the following section of this exegesis. To test the design of the course, I completed it myself as a test participant.

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking>

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/design-thinking/>

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from: <https://abc-ld.org/>



# methodologies

Experimentation and making across a wide variety of mediums along with reflection in and on action was applied in order to achieve each of the course modules. Implementation is not feasible in this instance as the course is hypothetical but the presentation of research findings and artefacts is to be considered as a form of implementation for the purpose of this thesis.

A reflective practice was kept throughout the entire project, not just reflection as a requirement of the course module tasks, but reflection as a researcher. Viewing the project from above and reflecting from this vantage point enabled the methodologies and decision making about the necessary processes to be revealed as I went along. This was the place that my imaginary map was continuously referred to so I could see what new connections were being formed and what the appropriate course of action was to follow next.



# creative identity course design

Observing the structure, delivery, and assessment of the Creative Technologies programme at AUT aided in an understanding of learning design and provided a framework for this particular course to be built from.

Considerations were also made regarding my personal pedagogical approach, developed from these teaching experiences as well as my professional background in the creative technologies industry and as an artist. The focus of the curriculum development was centred around two questions: What is the most effective process for developing creative identity in an educational context? And how might this course be delivered in a way that reflects my pedagogy and personality?

The intention is that this course can apply to any creative discipline at a tertiary level. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the course as a project artefact was purposely designed for the contextual setting of the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme within the School of Future Environments at AUT. The curriculum is to be hypothetically delivered as a 12-week, 15-point elective paper and targeted to second or third year students. Observations have shown me that first year students spend that initial year becoming familiar with the university environment and expectations. They are usually straight out of high school and are not fully equipped with the knowledge of self required for this process. There appears to be a significant amount of personal growth that happens between the first and second years,

freedom of expression and a willingness to experiment creatively is more prevalent from the second year onwards, both of which are essential for developing a creative identity.

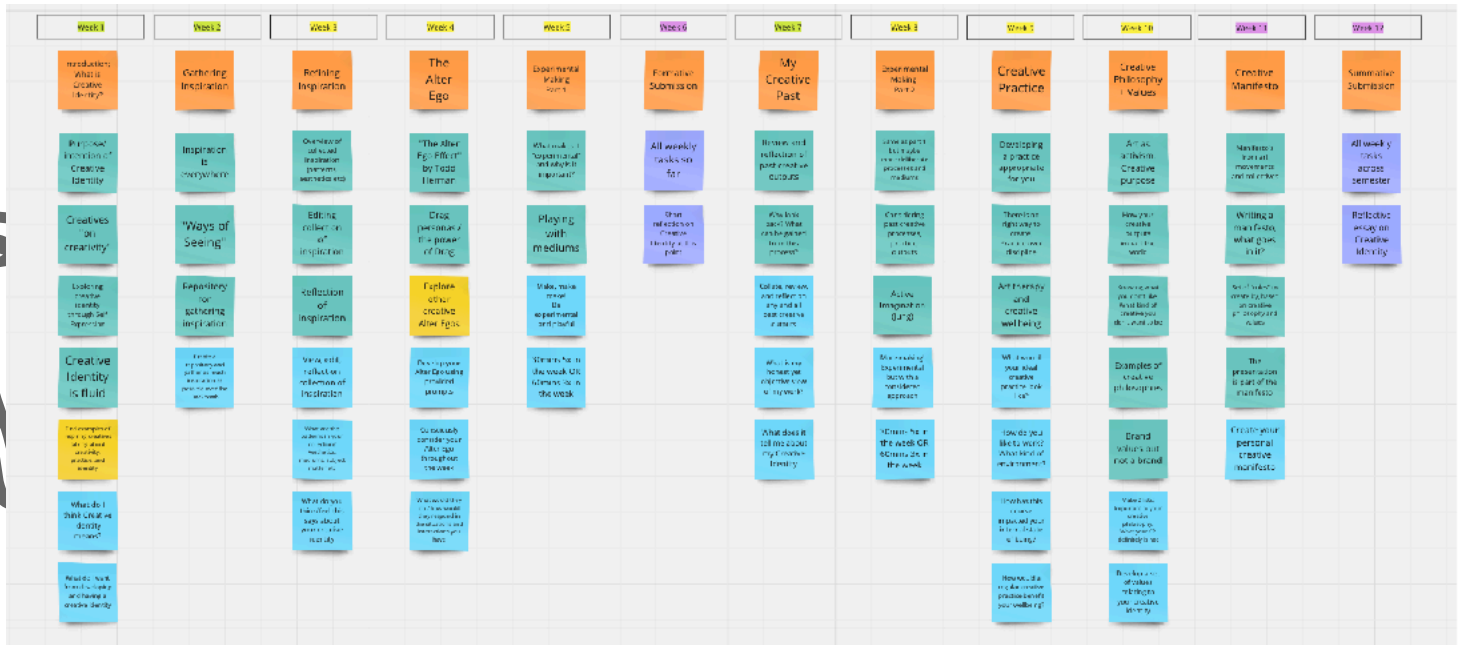
Figure 2: The creative identity course developed through the *ABC Learning Design* method



Using Post-It notes and a sheet of cardboard, the curriculum was developed visually, using the *ABC Learning Design* method, to get a high-level overview and see how the content flows from module to module throughout the course (see fig. 2). Using different colours of Post-It notes to represent module headings, lecture content, practical tasks, and assessment requirements, made it possible to evaluate the module content and arrange the delivery of them accordingly. The topic for each module was revealed to me through this process; being able to visualise the course design and get a sense for the flow provided the clarity I needed to pull from my imaginary map and understand what would be the most beneficial for creative identity development.

# creative identity course design

Figure 3: The creative identity course in digital form on the Miro platform



Note: This can be viewed at: [https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMK89Nrg=?share\\_link\\_id=420405280876](https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVMK89Nrg=?share_link_id=420405280876)

This analogue version was then moved into a Miro Board digital format for clarity and editing (see fig. 3).


The course flows from becoming consciously aware of the individual's creative identity in the present to an understanding of the decisions they can make about the kind of creative being they want to be going forward. In order to build a strong sense of creative self, I felt it important to journey through the depths of one's creative self, to pull from this Source and consciously build a creative identity through genuine self-expression. Reflection is an essential part of the course and will be part of each module. This is to

nurture an ongoing reflective practice that can become part of their creative toolkit beyond this course, similar to the examples shown in the literature review of Parsons School of Design and RCS.


In considering possible learning outcomes for this course<sup>18</sup>, the intention was not only for the development of creative identity reflected through the body of artistic work resulting from the module tasks but also a set of tools and strategies that the student can carry with them through their creative career and life as their creative identity evolves. The primary outcome is a reflective practice and the knowledge of how and why to apply this

<sup>18</sup> Because the writing of learning outcomes goes through a rigorous process involving multiple teaching staff, including programme directors and course leads, with multiple approval points, LOs have simply been considered in a hypothetical sense for the purpose of this thesis.

# creative identity course design



practice in relation to their creative identity. The research has shown that communication skills are highly sought after by employers, therefore, an outcome stating an enhancement to the communication of personal creativity and self-expression can provide the student with the creative confidence required to navigate the professional world successfully. The willingness to engage in the course is measured by the effort shown in task completion and reflection. As stated above, the student can choose the depth of their creative identity that is appropriate for their personal creativity as this will be different for everyone, but, in my experience of grading assessments, it is quite obvious in their outputs if they are participating at a superficial level.



## the creative identity course

The modules open with an introduction to creative identity as a concept and asking what it means to the individual and what they hope to gain from the course. The process of gathering and analysing inspiration that follows the introduction cultivates an appreciation for aesthetics and refines the creative eye. It presents them with a picture of their unique creative perspective. Creating an alter ego allows the students to break free of social conditioning and harmful beliefs they may hold about the kind of person they are and design a version of themselves without these self-imposed limitations. Embodying this character can open them up to creative potential and possibility. The two most practical modules are experimental making, delivered in two parts. The first part, at this point in the course, encourages the freedom of making without expectations. There is no end goal other than the experimentation of techniques and mediums to foster playfulness and curiosity within a creative practice.

Module six is a formative submission and is purposely set at the halfway point of the course, generally before a two week mid-semester break. The requirement for submission is a visual document combining the module outputs so far and a brief reflection of creative identity development. The purpose of this submission is for them to identify patterns and themes that are beginning to emerge through the process and to reflect on becoming aware of who they are creatively. From an assessment point of view,

this gives me as an educator a chance to check in with their progress and ascertain where I can assist them individually to get the most out of the next phase of the course. It will be clear from their submissions whether they are engaged and comprehending the course content.

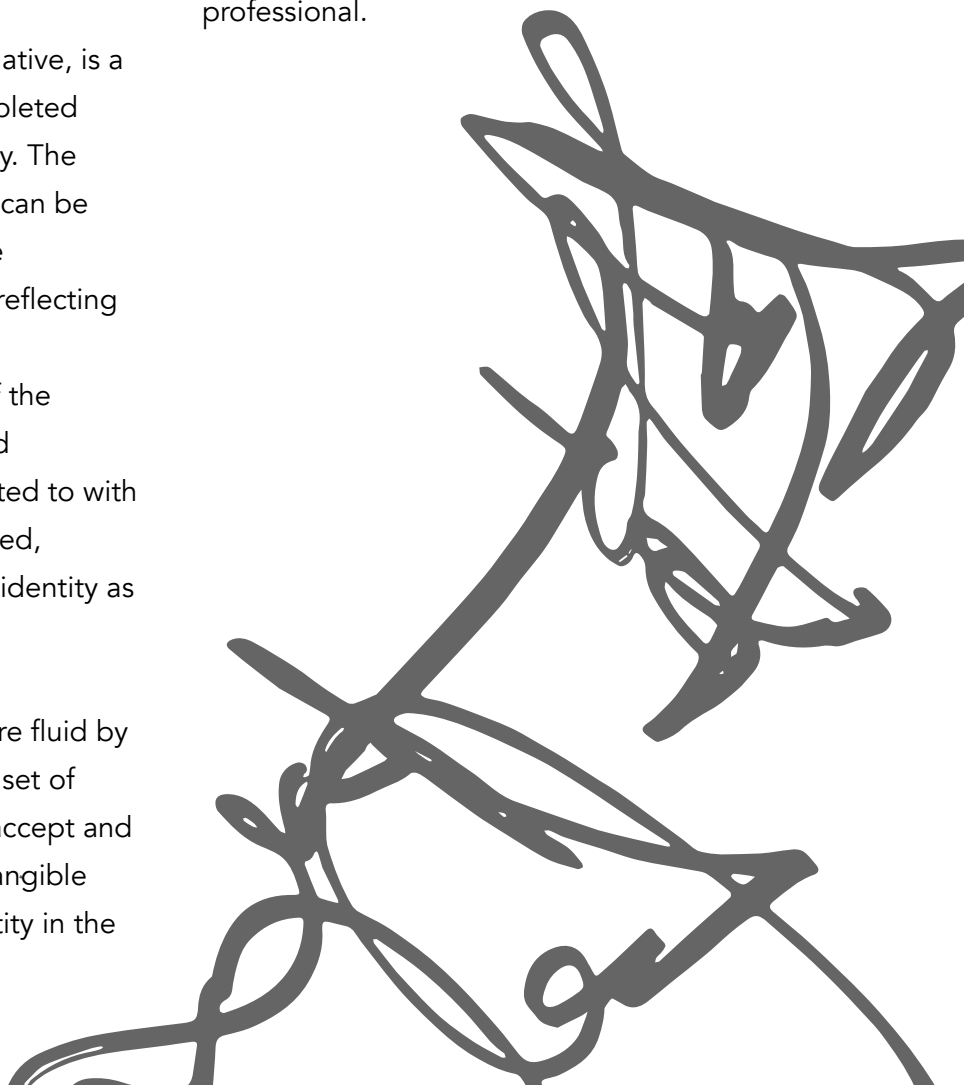
Upon return to the course the students will be tasked with collating their entire collection of creative outputs starting from whenever they started purposefully making in their life. This could include any work made in an educational setting such as high school and university assignments, personal projects, journal entries, poetry, or images they have created and saved on their camera phones. There is no rule around what kind of work to include, the point is to observe and reflect on where they have come from in terms of their creativity and creative practice. To then use this information to determine where they want to go next. The second part of experimental making will follow this and is the same method as part one but with a more intentional approach. The objective is that by now in the course there is clarity on who they are as creatives and can start to refine an aesthetic or explore certain subject matter to align with the creative identity being developed. From this, choices can be made about what a regular creative practice might look like for the individual and how this can be implemented into daily life.

## the creative identity course

Moving into the tail end of the course, personal creative philosophies and values can be explored and established according to creative identity. Defining a creative purpose and making decisions about the ways it shows up in creative and artistic endeavours. This applies to art making and outputs, the kinds of projects taken on, and working with or for collaborators, employers, and organisations. Pulling together everything that has been developed, reviewed, defined, and reflected upon across the course culminates in the creation of a creative manifesto. A set of creative guidelines that represent the unique creative identity and serve as a tangible reminder of the creative being that each student has chosen to become. The summative submission, like the formative, is a visual presentation of all of the completed modules along with a reflective essay. The document from the first assignment can be added to, to give an overview of the completed body of work and aid in reflecting on the process of creative identity development in its entirety. Some of the reflective writing that was completed throughout the process can be pointed to with observations made on how it informed, enhanced, or impacted the creative identity as it eventually became.

Creative identities will evolve, and are fluid by nature, but the student now holds a set of tools to allow this evolution and to accept and embrace it as it comes. They have tangible representations of this creative identity in the

form of a creative manifesto and in the artefacts made through experimental making. Creative philosophies and values were discovered and will become guiding principles throughout creative careers. Awareness of natural creative rhythms can be used in regular creative practice. An alter ego can be called upon when they are feeling lost or unsure in any creative interactions. They have opened themselves up to the beauty and inspiration all around, refined an artistic eye and sensibility, and can freely self-express. The ongoing effect of undertaking this adventure is a strong sense of creative self that reinforces creative confidence and builds resilience for future creative endeavours, personal and professional.



## completing the creative identity course

Moving through this process as an artist was immensely rewarding. One of the hopes I had recorded for the first module was:

**“to become the embodiment of my creative self; a fully integrated creative being.”**

While I was confident in the course I had designed, I was concerned that I might not be able to gain the full experience completing as an artist while still thinking about it from the perspective of this thesis. Fortunately, this was not an issue at all. By allowing myself to separate *artist* from *teacher and researcher* I was able to give myself over to the process and embrace the development of my creative identity as I would hope any student or artist completing it would. Completing this course myself as an artist and student allowed me to experience the curriculum design and gauge the success of the structure and outcomes. Iterating on the modules as I went was anticipated but very little was actually adjusted or amended in the end. The course made sense chronologically, each module informing the next and building off of the one before.

I have always held quite a clear aesthetic in terms of my presentation and the things that I find inspiring. Gathering and collating a collection of artefacts that inspire me was enjoyable and it was satisfying to organise it into categories and analyse it as a collection. I am highly visual and my neurodivergence means that I feel things very intensely, I am

sensitive to aesthetics and the way things look or are put together. These visual elements, when paired with a complex and philosophical subject matter, are the ultimate inspiration for me. Overall, the main thing that features heavily in my collection is the subject of humanity itself; the raw honesty of being human, the potential for humanity as a collective, individual self-expression and creative authenticity, and a celebration and exploration of human creativity in all forms.

Creating an alter ego was the module that took the longest to complete in terms of tasks but it was an incredibly enjoyable process. I had already created an alter ego character several years ago named Electric Stardust for burlesque performances but this was an opportunity to go deeper into the character development. Electric Stardust represents the *electric stardust* that is within us all; the firing neuron's, the passion/desire, the feeling of being in creative flow, and the energetic point of connection in our interactions with ourselves and others. They are the version of me that comes from an alternate dimension, they travel through the multiverse to promote self-expression, compassion for all living things across space-time, sexual liberation, community actualisation, and creativity as the requirement for conscious evolution. This awareness is shared through performance, artistic outputs, and connecting with people and communities, with the use of humour helping to engage people with this message. They are unapologetically themselves,

# completing the creative identity course

accepting of all parts of self and humanity, and have a passion for life and the complexities of being human, with attributes such as rebelliousness, exuberance, frankness, and intuitiveness. In creating Electric Stardust I discovered that I can use my creativity and creative outputs to share messages, themes, and values that are important to me and that I feel strongly about. The character emerged as the way that I see myself without 39 years of conditioning, the authentic version of myself that represents my creative identity.

Figure 4: Artefacts created during Module 5: Experimental Making Part 1



Getting into making ended up being quite challenging. I had some techniques that I had wanted to experiment with during this process but struggled to get into a flow with them.

Figure 5: Artefacts created during Module 5: Experimental Making Part 1



Making a selection of digital imagery in my usual process of using the Adobe Capture app to create vector shapes of photos, text, and illustrations from an assortment of books and magazines and then recontextualising them into new imagery in Adobe Photoshop (see fig. 4). I work quickly in this way, I made

## completing the creative identity course




sixteen different images in about an hour and then printed them onto gesso-painted calico fabric. Experimenting with the sewing machine and embroidery techniques was fine but the results were mediocre, it wasn't adding anything to the imagery and it felt like I was forcing ideas to fit together (see fig. 5). In the reflection part of the task I mentioned that I would like to keep working with this technique to create a tapestry of some kind but, in hindsight, I now believe that this phase of my art making is complete. There was some follow-on from my previous collections of work but it was not until modules seven and eight did this realisation come to pass.

The opportunity to pause at the halfway point and put together all of the work so far into one cohesive slide deck and then reflect on it all was beneficial to this process. An excerpt from the reflection from this task demonstrates this accurately: "I have enjoyed this process immensely, I knew that I would but I wasn't expecting the flow of each week to reveal so much about my creative identity already. This has shown me who I have been, creatively, my whole life. While most of my conscious creativity has been established throughout my adult life, this process has opened me up to the innate creative personality that I have always been. It has given me a kind of self-confidence that I wasn't expecting, a sense of shame lifting perhaps. It's hard to articulate but I can feel a stirring within myself. I have often felt a deep shame in who I am, and the kind of person I am, and have questioned my

creative talents and abilities. Being able to put together an overview of my creative self allows me to consider objectively the kind of creative being I want to be. It has begun to show me how to make creative choices that align with my true creative self...

... I can already see how the themes of human complexity, celebrations of human forms and community, a *Hope Punk* attitude, and self-expression are showing up in my creative identity. These are still feeling like intangible or abstract concepts, it's still a little bit too philosophical. I would like to see how I can turn these concepts into artistic outputs and incorporate them into a way of being."

Similar to the formative submission task of collating the body of work completed so far, reviewing and reflecting on my entire collection of artwork and creative outputs for the past sixteen years was also beneficial to this process. Most were photography based as this is my foundational medium and ranged from undergraduate work, commercially contracted and professional work, and personal projects or experimentations. In the reflection, I wrote more about how I was feeling at the time the artefacts were made rather than the technical aspects of the work. It showed me how I had evolved from amateur to professional to artist and that I was incredibly proud of the collection and the creative growth that it represented. In the transition from photography to image manipulation I noted that I "was able to separate myself from the self-imposed



## completing the creative identity course

standards of image making and make art that was weird and absurd and spoke to me on a different creative level. It felt more true to my creative self and while the results still don't feel fully resolved, it has opened me up to experimental image-making and a discovery of who I am as an artist."

The second round of experimental making was such a different experience from the first one in module five. I started working with the Midjourney text-to-image AI<sup>19</sup> and creating an assortment of AI-generated imagery. My initial mindset was that it was another tool, I was going to use it in the same way I would use Adobe Photoshop for example. However, as I tested ways of communicating with the AI I came to realise that it was far more like a creative collaboration. I could work to get an understanding of how the AI is programmed and what associations it makes. Taking the time to adjust language within the prompt accordingly aided in effective communication which meant that I was getting imagery that I was happy with, not dissimilar to directing a full-scale editorial photoshoot with an entire team of multiple people. I then manipulated the images further by using my favoured technique of blending assets collected with the Adobe Capture app. I went through some old *New Scientist* magazines and captured different headings about space, time, reality, technology, and humanity which I blended into the AI-generated imagery (see figs. 6-8). The concept of creating an artistic

conversation with the Midjourney AI revealed itself through this process. This recontextualisation provided an additional layer of meaning within the artwork that felt like a new era in my *Book of Revelations* series; "It felt like coming home but with an evolved sense of creative self. And my creative home embraced me with open arms. The imagery I was making felt so right to me, I was working so fluidly and intuitively. I was able to work in a creative flow that had eluded me for so long."

Figure 6: Artefact created during Module 8: Experimental Making Part 2



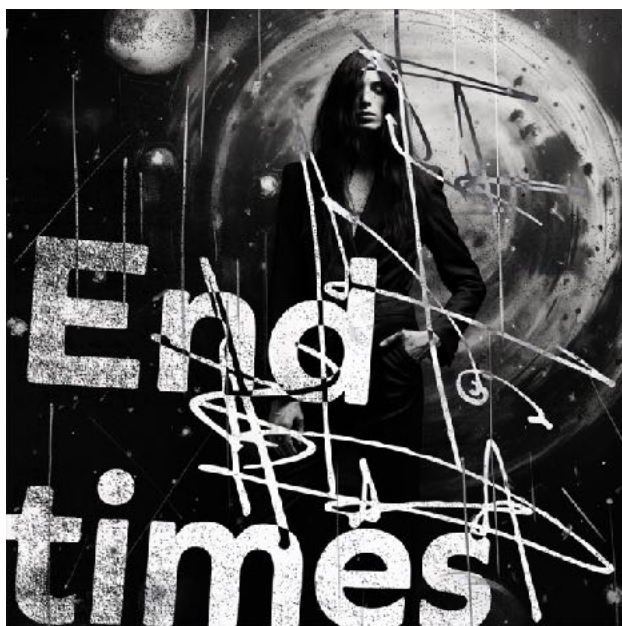
<sup>19</sup> This can be viewed at: <https://www.midjourney.com/>

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Figure 7: Artefact created during Module 8:  
Experimental Making Part 2



Figure 8: Artefact created during Module 8:  
Experimental Making Part 2



It was at this point in the process that I deviated somewhat from the course, a turn down a side street perhaps before coming back onto the main path. I was in such a deep state of creative flow and was experiencing an otherworldly connection to my creative *Source* that I felt it necessary to continue the experimental making module for slightly longer than planned. It was the collection of text captures that I was gathering that inspired me to generate imagery with the Midjourney AI around the concept of alien cult leaders or tent preachers. Imagery that included a lot of ritualistic motifs and a voodoo-inspired aesthetic. I was subconsciously and intuitively creating a body of work that represented what I entitled *The House of Stardust*; the place where our *electric stardust* resides within us, around us, and through us. The metaphysical realm that we inhabit when we meditate, worship, create from, or pray to. I sensed an urge to share this work publicly and include the viewer in the dialogue I was establishing with the Midjourney AI. As I set up the Instagram post I was compelled to write a caption to accompany it:

**“Welcome to The House of Stardust. A realm of creative possibility and imagination. A place to discover your darkest dreams and befriend your deepest discomforts. Move beyond your humanity and embrace the electric stardust within.”**

This text was not planned, I had no intention of articulating what *The House of Stardust* was, I was not even aware of it as a concept

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until that moment. *The House of Stardust*, as a conceptual body of artistic work, revealed itself to me from, through, and within *The House of Stardust* itself, or at least, what I perceived it to be. Each time I posted a new artwork I included a caption that complemented the image and challenged the viewer's perceptions of creative reality and their place within the collective of humanity through philosophical and provocative questioning (see figs. 9-10).

Figure 9: An artwork from *The House of Stardust* as it was shared on Instagram

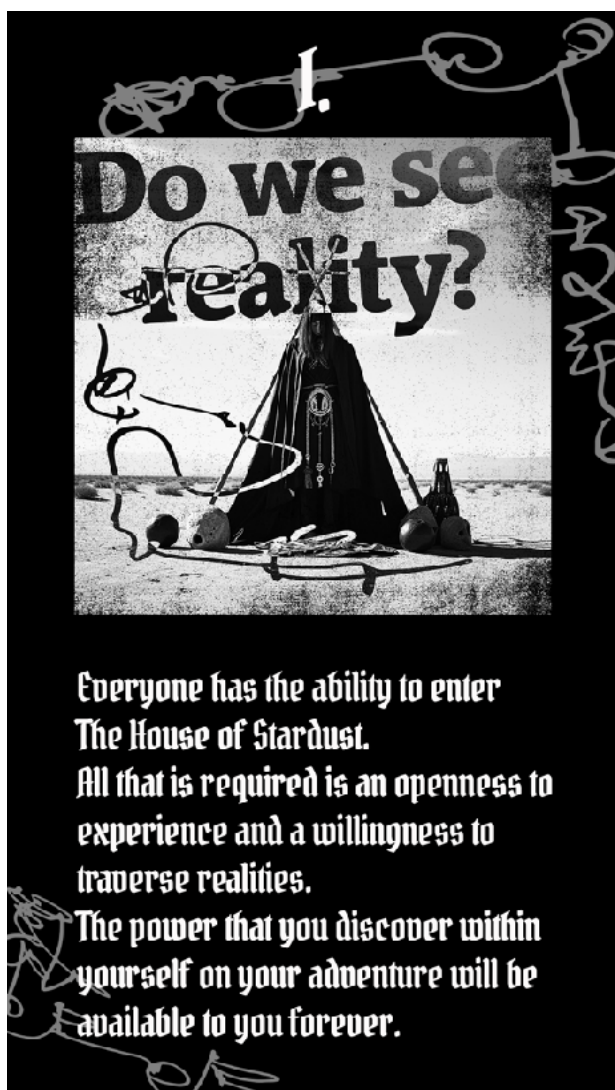
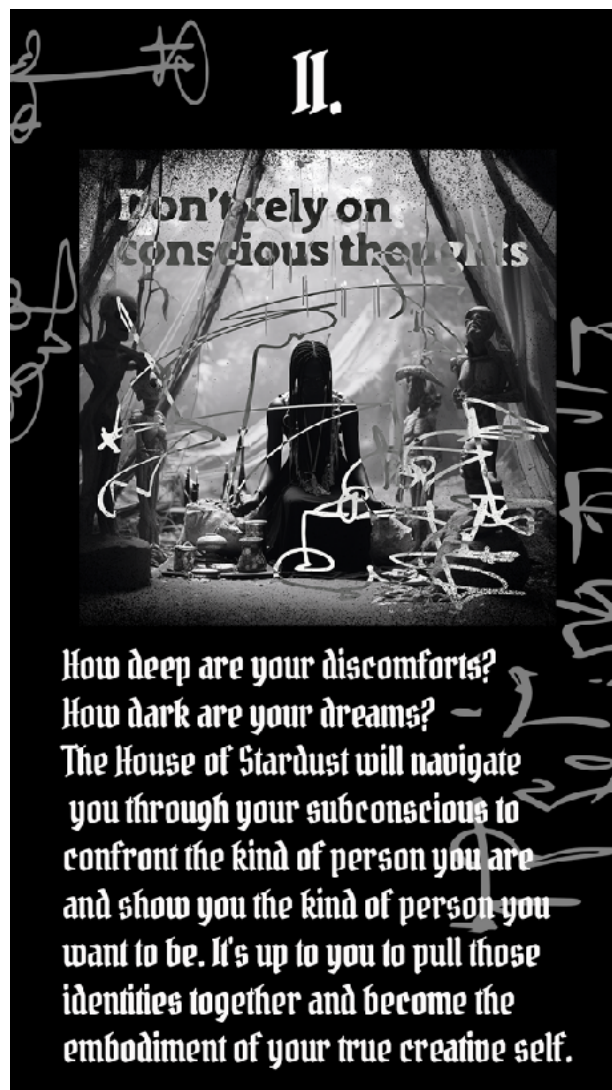


Figure 10: An artwork from *The House of Stardust* as it was shared on Instagram



Interestingly, I had very little engagement with the images on Instagram, not even from my friends and family. At first I was really discouraged by this, my *inner saboteur* was telling me that it was not good enough and no one liked it, that it was too weird and too philosophical and made people uncomfortable. I was second guessing my creative identity and fooling myself into believing that my art is *bad art*. But I realised

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that, actually, that is the point of my art and my creative identity, it is weird and philosophical and uncomfortable. I want it to be confronting and provocative, that is what *The House of Stardust* symbolises. People are engaging with it just by viewing it, that is where the dialogue happens. It doesn't need to be through *likes* and *comments* and *shares* on social media. I stand by it and it represents my creative identity.

It was hard to bring my focus back to the course after the elation of creating *The House of Stardust*. I had made a significant amount of individual artefacts in a short amount of time so I was able to share one at a time, once a day on Instagram to keep me creatively satiated while I returned to the process. Contemplating creative practice in relation to what I have learned about my creative self, I am now able to see my practice as a cyclical series of actions; gathering inspiration, generating ideas, experimental making, refining concepts, and sharing artefacts. My natural creative rhythm consists of periods of intense making, productivity, and inspiration, and periods of percolation, contemplation, and rumination. Appreciating this as my unique way of being creative helped me to set an intentional creative practice that not only enhances my art making but gives me a way of forming creative routines that coincide with day-to-day life and responsibilities; "I can

focus on them and be present with my family because I have balanced my time effectively. This also includes making time for others in my family to have their own creative practices. Because I am in a situation where I have to compromise and work alongside others in my life, the time I make for my creative practice can't just be whenever I feel like it or want it to be. It will be a negotiation of sorts, planning that will be done together in order for everyone to get what they need."

As an established creative with a reasonable amount of life experience, creative philosophy and values were already a part of my creative way of being, albeit vaguely or subconsciously. What I gained from this process, however, was clarity and refinement in the application of a defined creative philosophy through my art making, practice, and creative identity. "I am now putting a lot of the thoughts and ideas I have had percolating for some time into the new body of work. It is certainly a lot more explicit in the work than anything else I have made before. I am working with an intention for the first time in my creative life and it is clear to me that this is my form of protest, of political action, of art as activism." By this, I am referring to the uncovering of philosophical concepts and values that I am now intentionally putting into my art making; *Protopia Futures*<sup>20</sup>, *Optimistic Nihilism*<sup>21</sup>, and *Hope Punk*<sup>22</sup>. The complexities

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from: <https://medium.com/protopia-futures/protopia-futures-framework-f3c2a5d09a1e>

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBRqu0YOH14>

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20220113-the-sci-fi-genre-offering-radical-hope-for-living-better>

# completing the creative identity course

of being human, the interconnectedness of living things, and challenging perspectives about the world we live in and how we choose to live in it. My specific creative values became an extension of my alter ego, Electric Stardust; subversive, absurd, rebellious, inquisitive, collaborative, and frank.

Figure 11: Artefact created in Module 11: Creative Manifesto



By bringing all of these creative and artistic concepts together to form my creative identity, building a creative manifesto was the perfect task to complete the practical part of

the course before the summative submission. I was able to use everything I had developed and refined through this course and turn it into a tangible representation of my creative identity. My creative philosophy and values were the framework for the *rules* or convictions that made up the manifesto and my creative practice, processes, and perspective informed the statements that elaborated on them. The visual format was designed in the style of my artistic outputs, the aesthetic complementary to where I have ended up in my art making (see fig. 11).

At the end of this course, in the final module, I could revisit the entire process and review the body of work in its entirety, a holistic artefact depicting the adventure of an artist and the exploration and discovery of their creative identity. And it felt like an adventure, a grand undertaking of sorts, an expedition that changes you so deeply and viscerally that you can never go back to being who you were before. *The Fool's Journey*, the archetypal storyline represented in the major arcana of the Tarot, "tells of the spiritual travels taken from the innocent wonder of *The Fool* to the oneness and fulfilment of *The World*. In other words, these cards tell the story of humanity's spiritual evolution into enlightenment and individuation."<sup>23</sup> The idea is that the themes encountered along the way reflect the lessons and karmic influences we experience through life. The journey is never-ending, even when we reach *The World*, the final card in the

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from: <https://labyrinthos.co/blogs/tarot-card-meanings-list/tagged/major-arcana>

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narrative, the journey starts again with each phase or cycle that being human entails. It is not a linear journey either, the adventure requires us to get lost or stuck, to go around and around in circles, to take the paths unknown and unseen, and to embrace and accept the challenges and joys that it brings.

While this course has been designed to complete in a linear fashion due to the intention of being delivered in a tertiary education environment, my experience has provided me, as an artist, with tools to use throughout my creative career whenever I feel that my creative identity is moving into a new cycle. I can embark on a new adventure with

the knowledge that, whatever challenges arise and however many times I get lost or stuck along the way, every iteration will show me something new and every version of my creative self will be refracted through the *Prism of Self*. They will all be represented in my creative work in whatever way, shape, or form they choose at the time, each embodiment residing at *The House of Stardust*, waiting patiently for me to knock at the door.

Figure 12: A selection of artworks from *The House of Stardust*



## course delivery and personal pedagogy

By setting tasks for each module, the aim is to allow the student to focus on reflection and learning each week rather than using the time clustered around submission dates to rush through assignments. The plan for delivery is to spend the first hour of a class in lecture form, discussing the previous module and presenting the present module's topic and tasks. The students can then use the rest of the class time to work on the set tasks. This gives me, as the educator, the opportunity to move around the classroom and spend time one-on-one or in small groups discussing their progress. This has been the format in classes that I have assisted in and my observation is that this is an effective way to build relationships, provide support and guidance, and alleviate any anxiety the students may have about course expectations and time management. They will likely have to use additional time outside the classroom to complete the modules and will still need to put together their submission documents and write the reflective essay, but my experience shows me that using class time in this way is beneficial to the quality of the outputs. It also encourages peer and self-directed learning, collaboration, and the *collapse of hierarchy* through the sharing of knowledge and experiences in a non-direct way.

The Ru Paul approach in relation to transformative learning is something that I have begun to apply in my teaching while working as a teaching assistant alongside the completion of this thesis. I have witnessed


dialogue, vulnerability, and reflection-led learning lead to a metamorphosis of sorts in students, especially when they are able to direct this learning into their creative practice and outputs. This curriculum is designed so that the student can receive as much out of it as they choose to put in, in terms of effort.

Learning outcomes are considered but as this course is more about personal creativity rather than technical skills, each student will likely have a different experience while completing it. Supporting the students through it and walking alongside them on the adventure is important to me as an educator. Cultivating safe spaces for self-expression, experimentation, creative problem-solving, and experiential and interest-driven learning through a blend of practical and discussion-led classes. Tim Gunn's T.E.A.C.H. framework is also influential, I am able to connect with students in a way that challenges their creative thinking and decision making while enhancing their skills and creative confidence.




## presentation of project artefacts

This course is one artefact of this practice-led research, alongside my own completion of the course as an artist and student. From a creative technologies perspective, the presentation of artefacts will be in a digital format, as a website. I have built many websites for myself and for clients and this felt like the most appropriate way to house the content. This format allows me to develop one cohesive home for everything relating to this thesis and design it in a way that represents my own creative identity. Initially, the plan was to create masterclass-style videos for the delivery of each module, however, as I moved through the course design and development I felt that this format would not achieve what I would like in terms of my personal pedagogy and delivery expectations as stated above.



The intention for this digital space is that the course will be separated by the modules and there will be an opening text that explains the module topic and tasks. The idea for this is so that, once a student has completed the course as delivered in the classroom, they can access the curriculum content through the website whenever they feel like revisiting the process and redeveloping their creative identity. This exegesis will also be accessible from the website. Each module on the website will hold my completion of the tasks to view including the submissions. My body of artistic work that was created from this process, *The House of Stardust*, will have its own space on the website.

The website will be developed upon completion of this exegesis. This is an explicit choice I have made in response to my rhizomatic approach to this research project. This exegesis has acted as an additional artefact and writing it has enabled further reflection and realisations about the research outcomes and the presentation of the project in a digital space. New connections formed through the writing in my imaginary map have emerged and ideas have synthesised which will enhance the final website design and presentation of the project artefacts.





# final reflection



## final reflection

The intention of this practice-based research was to explore the development of creative identity through a transdisciplinary methodology and to construct a pedagogical approach to creative identity development. Through this process, a body of work or artefacts that are representative of creative identity development would be generated and the research findings and project artefacts would be presented in a form relating to creative technologies.

Casting a wide net in terms of literature and references enabled me to explore the concept of creative identity as an applied practice. *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* (Rubin, 2023) was highly influential and inspired much of the thinking around creative identity development. This research project has confirmed for me the idea of creative identity as a way of representing and expressing one's creative self and using that knowledge to contribute to community and the collective of humanity. Knowing what you stand for and believe in and applying that to your creative practice and outputs. Taking on projects and working with collaborators that align with your creative values. Being confident in who you are and what you have to offer the world. Developing artistic sensibilities and refining an eye for aesthetics. Exploring these themes across a variety of disciplinary perspectives from artist's experiences to art therapy to drag performance art to indigenous models of wellbeing, and so on, provided a wealth of

resources to pull from when constructing a framework for creative identity development.

Designing a course on developing creative identity to be delivered in an educational context allowed me to reflect on my experiences as a teaching assistant and take from those learnings to ensure that the course itself would be effective in terms of delivery. I was able to utilise the design thinking methods that I had acquired in my professional career and apply them to the process of constructing the course. The application of this methodology from the *ABC Learning Design* process was useful and I can see how this could be incorporated into further course and programme design within the School of Future Environments at AUT. It would be interesting to observe its use in a collaborative way with multiple staff participating in a learning design session.

It took me a while to accept the rhizomatic way my brain thinks and I tripped myself up many times by focusing on what I thought I *should* do and how it *should* be done. Because I received my ADHD diagnosis later on in life, I had internalised the messages I was continuously told about how my way of thinking, being, and doing is *wrong* even though the *right* or neurotypical approach didn't make sense to me. I had to keep pulling myself back to my initial beliefs about creative identity, as this excerpt from my reflection early on in the process shows; "There is a whisper of resolution, quietly tugging at the

## final reflection

back of my mind. It is foggy but morphing into something visible and clear. I'm focusing too much on this vagueness, trying to will it into being instead of just starting and being within the process. What is the point of creative identity development? The development of a practice, of a discipline, of flow. The artefacts aren't necessarily what make up the creative identity, it is the exploration, the adventure, and the joy of discovery." This was before I had fully defined the research and was walking around my imaginary map trying to form the appropriate connections that I required to close the gaps in my thinking.

Sometimes my maps are too convoluted for me to be able to make sense of at first, I get into hyperfocus during the gathering of research and material and end up with too much data and information which clouds the image. I struggle to make decisions about which items need to be discarded, I am a knowledge hoarder and my ADHD impairs my ability to prioritise and understand what is helpful and what is superfluous. The frustrating flip side to this is that my brain won't let me make my imaginary map until I have absolutely everything there could possibly be, which is ultimately limitless, again due to the rhizomatic nature of my thinking. Reflective practice has been the most useful and successful way of tackling this internal conflict, as I externalise my thoughts and create a dialogue with myself the map comes into focus and I can start to see it with

photorealistic clarity. This process enabled me to move into the next phase of this research project and start developing the creative identity course.

After the course had been designed, I discovered the Are.na digital platform<sup>24</sup> which was perfectly suited to be the repository for this adventure. The visual simplicity and workable functionality is so good for my brain. It allowed me to recreate my imaginary map and sort through all the nodes, ordering them in a way that made sense to me so I could view and review them as needed. I created a channel for the course with each module as a channel within it along with a channel specific to the reflective practice for the project. The intention was to complete each module as both educator and student, creating lecture content and completing the tasks together, however, I found that it was difficult to get deep into the process of developing creative identity when I was trying to think about both perspectives at the same time. It was impossible to write the lectures when I hadn't been through the course myself and I needed to test the course design as realistically as possible to validate its success. For this reason, I focused on completing the course as an artist and came back to the lecture content afterwards.

My testing of the creative identity course as a prototype was successful for me as an artist but, through reflection, I was able to observe

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<sup>24</sup> This can be viewed at: <http://www.are.na>



## final reflection

how the design of the course was achieving what I intended. The following excerpts from my reflections captured throughout the project articulate this;

"I am feeling so excited and positive about the flow of this course and what I have gotten out of it personally as an artist. The creative identity that I am developing feels so viscerally true to my creative self, it's actually hard to articulate. I am confident that there is so much potential in this course for creative students and artists"

"...this bodes well for the structure of the course and how others may respond to it. I'm hopeful that they will be able to follow it and complete each week to a sufficient level so that they can get what they need out of it."

"Something that I am cognizant of, however, is how might this course be effective for someone, especially an undergraduate student, that may not be as creatively open as I am. I am older, more experienced, and have an established body of creative work as well as being personally motivated to complete each task to the depth required...

... I have tried to keep the tasks of each week relatively simple to allow space for the student to discover their creative selves at a pace and depth that is somewhat comfortable. I definitely want them to push past their comfort zone and approach this almost as a form of edge work. But I know that there has to be a limit to this as it would not be

appropriate to get so deep that it becomes harmful to their wellbeing and mental health."

"A transcendence has occurred, or perhaps, is occurring. The development of my creative identity has been so much more successful than I had imagined. The discovery of my creative self and the confidence I have gained with it feels like it has changed my creative life completely. As an artist, I am so excited about the work I am creating. Enough to have started sharing it publicly again. I have been experimenting with techniques and themes for the last couple of years and this process has pushed me to the place I needed to get to, I have entered *The House of Stardust*. As a teacher, I am carefully considering the structure of this course and how my experience of completing it will translate for students and other artists. I am also starting to think about my personal pedagogy and my teaching style."

After the completion of the practical elements of this project I have acquired an enhanced approach to my role as teaching assistant in the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme at AUT. Noticeably, I have an increased confidence in my abilities as an educator and am able to effectively collaborate with teaching staff on delivery as well as contributing to a positive learning environment. The students are responsive to feedback and are open to challenging themselves creatively, resulting in a much higher level of engagement and creative

## final reflection

processes and outputs. The development of my personal creative identity through the completion of the course has culminated in a body of artistic work that I am incredibly proud of, that explores themes that are aligned with and represent my creative identity. I have a strong sense of creative self which empowers me to take responsibility for my contribution to the collective of humanity through my roles as artist and educator.

A significant limitation of this research project is that I am the only person to test the validity of the prototype course. As I noted in my reflection above, I was “personally motivated to complete each task to the depth required” which would indicate that the course was likely to be successful in my completion regardless of how well it was designed or not as I was determined to get something out of it. Although, the fact that my experience was so much more rewarding than anticipated and each module could be moved through with ease and flow could imply that there is a legitimate effectiveness to it. Further research would include the course being delivered as part of the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme, or any other programme in a creative discipline, in order to gauge its efficacy in the intended context. There is also potential for the course to be delivered to established artists and creative professionals so they can redevelop, enhance, or confirm their own creative identity.

This research is exploratory, rhizomatic, and reflective. By this nature, the outcomes are somewhat esoteric and ephemeral. But so is creative identity. It is fluid, personal, and is expressed through the *Prism of Self*. It enhances individual and community wellbeing and cultural perpetuity. It encourages creative confidence and knowledge of creative self, solidifies creative purpose, and prioritises self expression and authenticity. By providing a set of tools through which to discover and develop creative identity and a pedagogical form in which to deliver them, this research project has contributed not just to the library of academic writing, but more importantly to the collective of humanity, to the interconnectedness of living things, and to future ways of living, being, and creating together.



*“When you contribute your point of view to the world, others can see it. It’s refracted through their filter and distributed again. This process is continuous and ongoing. Taken all together, it creates what we experience as reality.*

*Every work, no matter how trivial it may seem, plays a role in this greater cycle. The world continually unfolds. Nature renews itself. Art evolves.*

*Each of us has our own way of seeing this world. And this can lead to feelings of isolation. Art has an ability to connect us beyond the limitations of language. Through this, we get to face our inner world outward, remove the boundaries of separation, and participate in the great remembering of what we came into this life knowing: There is no separation. We are one.”*

**rick rubin, the creative act: a way of being, 2023, p. 392-3**



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# appendices



# appendix i: thesis presentation website

**[www.creativeidentity.quest](http://www.creativeidentity.quest)**

As stated in the Presentation of Project Artefacts section of Chapter Two; The Research Project, the thesis presentation website has been designed and built after the completion and submission of the exegesis.

The sole intention of the website in this form is to serve as a digital presentation of the thesis in its entirety, including all artefacts made within the practice-led research format.

The URL ([creativeidentity.quest](http://creativeidentity.quest)) was chosen with the long term view of iterating the course, along with its branding and visual/web design components, so it can be offered as a product and service beyond this academic context.

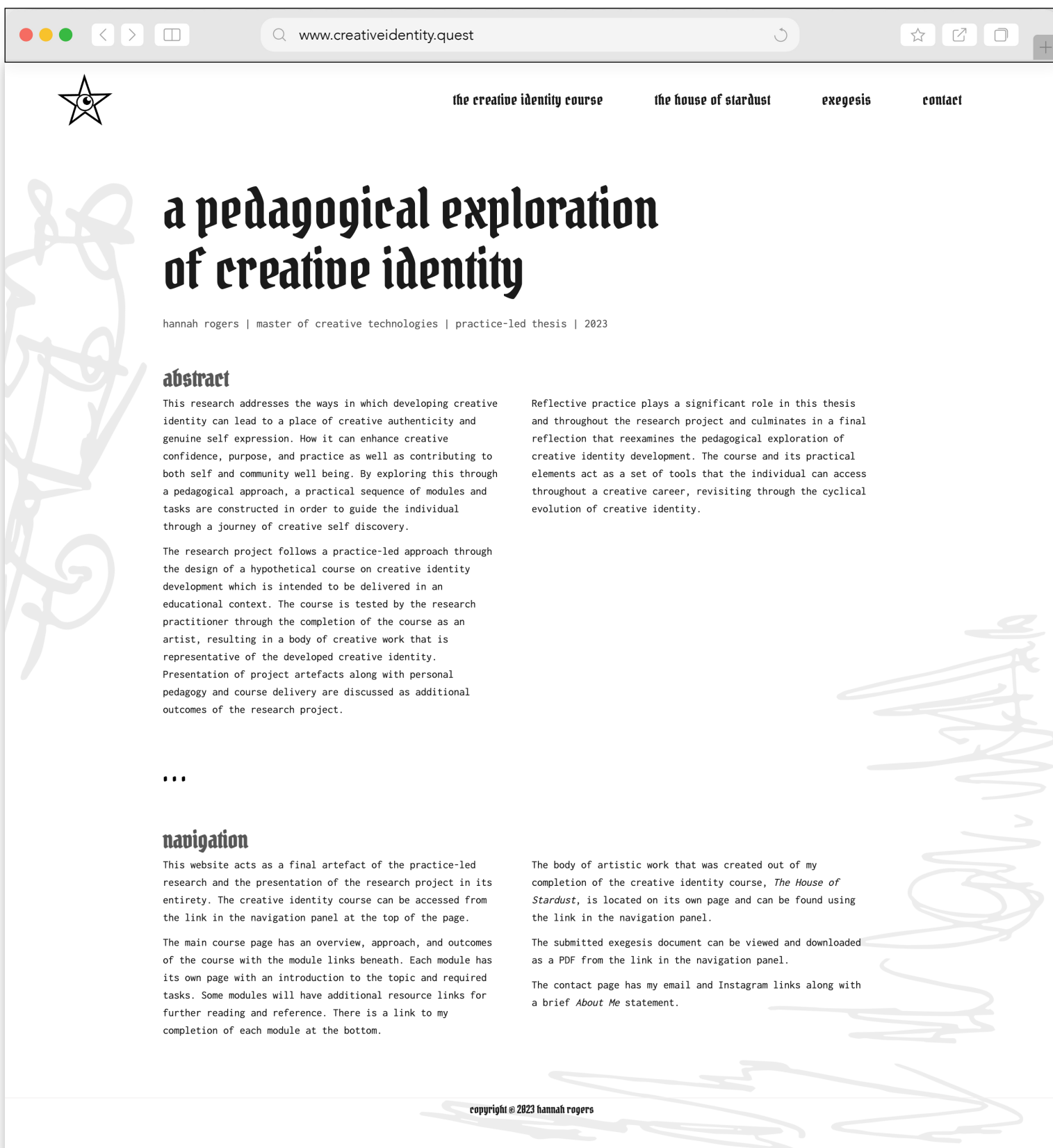
Aesthetically, the website has been designed in the same style as this exegesis, the style that emerged as my creative identity through my completion of the course. The decision for this is to create a visually cohesive submission for the thesis and promote the development of creative identity and how it can be applied to one's work in multiple formats. The intention is that it is specific to this thesis submission and, once examination and lodgement has been completed, the course website can be redesigned through an iterative process to develop a brand for the course itself outside of my personal creative

identity. It can then be marketed and offered as a product; a course I can take other artists and creatives through via an online learning scenario or as in-person workshops.

I have chosen to write the copy for the course modules as if it were directed to someone completing the course through the website. As mentioned in the exegesis, I had considered recording masterclass-style videos, however, the time and effort required for this was not available to me. Therefore, the course is constructed so that the examiners can imagine themselves as students of the course and get a full understanding of the course as an artefact of the research project.

Each module has a tile block at the bottom that links to my completion of that particular module via the Are.na platform. I considered building a space within the website to house this content but it felt appropriate to show, not only how I completed the module, but how I used the Are.na platform as my digital workbook.

Each page of the website as been laid out in the following pages as part of this appendix with a brief explanation underneath regarding the functionality. The opaque squiggles are locked in place so when the page is scrolled down they sit behind the content, similar to the layout of this exegesis. Because of this digital feature they appear broken up or repeating in the following screen shots.



The main landing page of the website has the Abstract of this thesis along with a brief explanation on how to navigate through the website.

The links for each page are located in the navigation bar at the top which is presented throughout the website.

www.creativeidentity.quest/creative-identity

the creative identity course    the house of stardust    exegesis    contact

## the creative identity course

The creative identity course is designed to take you on a journey, or quest, of creative self discovery. There will be peaks and valleys which will need to be traversed in order to move forward. Each module will challenge you to explore different aspects of your creative identity and show you the ways in which you can apply your creative identity to your personal and professional creative practice.

...

### approach

The purpose of this course is to enable you to discover and develop your personal creative identity through a variety of topics and tasks. As you move through the modules you will reflect on the process at each stage in order to gain clarity and awareness of who you are and who you would like to be as a creative being. The recommended approach is to complete each module over the course of one week, however, this is not prescriptive and you can take as much or as little time you need on each module and the required tasks. You are encouraged to go a little bit further out of your comfort zone though, as long as you feel like your feet can ever so slightly touch the bottom. Allow yourself the space to explore and experiment with your creativity without judgement and restriction. Be honest with yourself about who you are creatively, who you would like to be creatively, and where you would like to go creatively.

Ideally, you have completed this course directly with me first, either in a classroom setting or through one-on-one guided sessions. If this is the case then the module content will be familiar to you already. Move through them at your own pace, reflecting back on your initial undertaking and what you gained from it while looking ahead to the next evolution of your creative identity. If you are new to the course and this is your first time completing it, no worries and welcome! Take your time, review the resources, and reflect as much as possible throughout the process. Feel free to reach out to me via email if you have any questions, concerns, or you feel lost or stuck at any point.

...

### outcomes

Creative identities will evolve, and are fluid by nature, but by the end of your quest, you will hold a set of tools to allow this evolution and to accept and embrace it as it comes. You'll have tangible representations of your creative identity in the form of a creative manifesto and in artefacts made through experimental making. Creative philosophies and values will be discovered and will become guiding principles throughout your creative career. Awareness of your natural creative rhythms can be used in regular creative practice.

...

On each module page you will find a brief overview of the topic and the set tasks as well as a link to view my completion of the module from the development of my own creative identity. Some modules will also have links to resources for further reading and reference. I highly recommend giving [The Creative Act: A Way of Being](#) by Rick Rubin (2023) a read as you work through the course. This book was influential during the construction of this course and in my Master's research (you can read more about this in the Exegesis) and is a beautifully written reflection on what it is to create and be creative.

I will refer to your workbook throughout the course. This can be digital or analogue, however you prefer to work. My personal preference is the [Are.na](#) platform which I find fits the process of this course well but you can use whatever platform feels right for you.

The Creative Identity Course page opens with a summary of the course with the

recommended approach and intended outcomes. The page continues below.



The modules are presented as tiled blocks, each linking to the specific module page.

www.creativeidentity.quest/what-is-creative-identity

the creative identity course the house of stardust exegesis contact

**module 1:**  
**what is creative identity?**

The development of creative identity can strengthen our sense of creative self, enhance creative confidence, and uncover creative purpose. It can enable us to live, work, and create as an authentic creative being through genuine self-expression.

Creative identity is not about creating bodies of work that are all the same or that apply the same techniques or mediums every time in order to stand out clearly as ours. Rather, it is about knowing and being aware of all the parts of ourselves and using that information to develop unique perspectives that we can create from, that are inherently within us and inform our approach to our creative processes and practice.

Becoming aware of oneself, all aspects and facets, creative identity can be developed by pulling from the inherent qualities, aesthetics, and talents within, intertwining them with practice, philosophy, and purpose. Taking these elements and embedding them in creative outputs, using this knowledge of creative self to make decisions throughout a creative career that align with the individual's creative identity. Self expressing as an authentic creative being, contributing to community and the collective of humanity to initiate new and positive ways of living and being.

**task**

Review the resources provided and seek out some of your own. Think about the creative individuals that you are particularly drawn to and see if you can find any content of them speaking on creativity and creative identity. Open your workbook and reflect on what creative identity means to you. What are you hoping to gain from this course? What do you currently believe about your creative identity? How open and honest with yourself are you willing to be as you embark on this adventure through the wilderness that is creative identity development?

**resources**

- i. Give yourself permission to be creative: Ethan Hawke, TED, 2020
- ii. David Bowie's advice to young artists: *Inspirations* documentary, 1997
- iii. Rick Rubin & Malcolm Gladwell on *The Creative Act*: Broken Record podcast, 2023
- iv. When Billie Eilish met Stormzy: i-D, 2021
- v. NITCH
- vi. Nowness
- vii. WePresent

**hannah's completion of this module**

**next module**

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Each module page is designed in the same format starting with the module heading and a brief description of the module topic. The set task for the module follows, with both the practical and reflective elements specified for the student to complete.

Some of the modules have a list of resources linked that the student can click through to.

Resources are not necessary for all modules, for example, the experimental making modules, therefore these are only listed on the applicable module pages.

The link to my completion of the particular module on the Are.na platform is at the bottom in a tiled block.

www.creativeidentity.quest/gathering-inspiration

the creative identity course the house of stardust exegesis contact

## module 2: gathering inspiration

Inspiration can be found in and from, any and all sources. It is intuitive and subjective, specific to the eye of the beholder. To be inspired is to be aware, to look and to listen to the world around you. As creatives, we are naturally drawn to things that inspire us. Anything from artistic outputs to the natural world, and even the ways in which others choose to self-express. The purpose of this module is to bring the awareness of inspiration into focus and create a collection of personally inspiring artefacts. Before we start moulding the forms of our creative identity, we will first generate a picture of our subconscious creative perspectives. This starts with going out into the world and being consciously inspired.

### task

For the next week, become aware of those things that inspire you. Create a repository and document as much as you can. Set up categories (imagery, music etc.) within your repository so you can easily organise as you go. You can photograph things that catch your eye in the street, catalogue the artists and creatives you admire, or make a playlist of your favourite songs. Don't think about what it is about it that inspires you, just gather, gather, gather. Be an inspiration hoarder. Don't limit yourself to mediums or techniques. The expected outcome is that we will become attuned to the beauty and creativity around us, without even realising it. We will awaken and refine our creative eye which will continue to benefit us in our creative lives.

A consideration here is how much inspiration to gather. The reality of being inspired beings is that we could, and likely will, not stop gathering inspiration. You probably already have a collection of inspiration in some form. The priority is to gather and organise enough artefacts for the process of analysing our collections in the next module. As long as your collection has several categories with enough artefacts in each to gain a sense of patterns, aesthetics, subject matter, and themes. More than ten or fifteen will definitely be required but upwards of fifty is probably not going to provide any more information and would therefore be quite useless for the purposes of this exercise.

### resources

- i. Why Inspiration Matters: Scott Barry Kaufman, HBR, 2011
- ii. A Guide to Gathering Inspiration: EttaVee blogpost

hannah's completion of this module

next module

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Upon completion of each module, the student can click through to the next module using the button link in the bottom right of the page or by returning to the Creative Identity Course page via the link in the top nav bar.

A selection of the module pages are presented below.



## module 4: the alter ego

The alter ego is a powerful tool for enhancing self-confidence and self-expression. High-performing creatives, sports players, and business people often use an alter ego to push themselves further in their chosen profession. For example; Kobe Bryant as The Black Mamba, Beyonce as Sasha Fierce, and David Bowie as multiple characters such as Ziggy Stardust and The Thin White Duke.

Another interesting use of the alter ego is the art of Drag. Drag queens and kings create personas that they embody when they dress up and perform. You'll often find that their persona is an extension of their personality, an expression of their true creative self in the extreme. Ru Paul Charles, one of the most famous drag queens in the world, creator and host of Ru Paul's Drag Race reality TV show franchise, maintains that the power you have in drag is available to you at all times. This means that when a performer is in drag they feel a sense of empowerment within themselves and their creativity and this feeling can be accessed even when they're not in drag. The embodiment of an alter ego can empower you to tap into the parts of yourself that perhaps you don't have the confidence to access in your everyday life.

In the previous modules, we have begun to open ourselves up to who we are creatively at a subconscious level. Creating an alter ego is the next phase of this and allows us to observe the beliefs we hold about our creative selves and consciously design the kind of person/superhero/performer/artist that we would like to be. There are many ways in which we can create our alter ego but here we will cover a few basics that you can elaborate on further if you wish to.

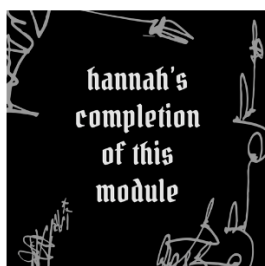
The process of creating an Alter Ego can be confronting but it can also be extremely rewarding. It's important to have fun while creating your character, don't take it too seriously but put as much of yourself into it as you can. What you discover about yourself might shock and surprise you, in a very positive way.

### task

- i. Create a list identifying your weaknesses or challenges. Don't be too hard on yourself, we all have things about ourselves we wish we didn't but these are the things that make us beautiful humans. They don't have to be deep and emotional, a skill that we would like to develop or something we would like to be better at is enough.
- ii. Create a list of your strengths. Be honest with yourself about the things that you're good at and what you like about yourself. Forget about being humble, this is a free space to brag about how awesome you are! You can use the personality type quiz at [16personalities.com](https://16personalities.com) to help. Remember that the Myers-Briggs personality theories have long been debunked by experts but this one can be a bit of fun and the results are sometimes helpful for this kind of exercise.
- iii. Create a list of the characters you're drawn to or see yourself in, 4-6 if you can. Fictional characters tend to work well for this exercise as they have more extreme personality types and usually a resolved story arc. Write a brief character analysis for each one; quirks, appearance, how they carry themselves, how they interact with others, the way they speak, etc.
- iv. Now it's time to develop your alter ego. Starting with personality and voice, create a list of keywords that describe your persona. Consider things like: traits, expressions, characteristics, quirks, flaws, and behaviours. What do they do that you don't? What kind of person do you want to be?
- v. Think about the backstory of your character. Where do they come from? What does their universe look like? What kind of life have they had? What experiences have they been shaped by?
- vi. Describe the visual elements of your character: aesthetics, clothing style/costume/hair/makeup. How do they carry themselves? What props or totems do they use?
- vii. Come up with a name. This is the key part of creating your alter ego and the way that your brain learns how to embody them. You may have come up with a name during the previous tasks, something that came to you in a fit of inspiration as you were developing them. Or you may not have thought about it at all. Revisit your previous lists and throw some different name ideas around to see what feels right. Write them down and see what you're visually drawn to. Or use a good old internet name generator. Any way is totally fine as long as it feels right to you.
- viii. Introduce us to your Alter Ego! Write a brief reflection on this process and what you have learnt about yourself. How does your Alter Ego reflect your creative self? How might they help with your creative confidence and self-expression? Consider your Alter Ego in your interactions and situations that you find yourself in this week: What would they do or say? How would they respond?

### resources

- i. The Alter Ego Effect™: Todd Herman
- ii. The Power of Drag: Cheddar Gorgeous, TEDx Royal Tunbridge Wells, 2020
- iii. How to Create an Alter Ego: WikiHow
- iv. Carl Jung and the Shadow: The Hidden Power of Our Dark Side: Academy of Ideas



next module

www.creativeidentity.quest/experimental-making-part-1

the creative identity course the house of stardust exegesis contact

## module 5: experimental making part 1

Time to get making! Experimentation is the crucial component of this task. Work with whatever medium feels right to you, it can be your go-to medium for making or your professional/academic discipline, although you are encouraged to step away from this and try something new. It's also recommended to work with your hands for at least some of these experiments. Getting off a screen and working analogue activates a different part of your brain and can open up a realm of new possibilities for creating and making that perhaps we have previously been closed off to, maybe because we didn't believe we were capable or we had defined our creative identity to be one specific kind of making.

Experimental making works best when you're not focused on the outcomes. This is not a task to create final artistic outputs, there should be no intention other than to just make. Follow the flow of your making and let your creative intuition guide you. You might end up hating what you make and that's okay, the output is not the point. Experimenting with techniques and pushing yourself outside of your standard creative processes will show you new ways of playful making.

### task

Set some perimeters as this can be a good way to alleviate the overwhelm of starting this kind of process. For example; an hour of dedicated making three times a week, or thirty minutes five times a week. Don't overthink it and don't overcomplicate it. Be free, be playful, and have fun!

At the end of the week, write a brief reflection on what it felt like to experiment freely in your making. What mediums and techniques did you play with? What did you learn about your creative process? What techniques would you like to experiment with next?

hannah's completion of this module

next module

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www.creativeidentity.quest/formative-submission

the creative identity course the house of stardust exegesis contact

## module 6: formative submission

Now that we are at the halfway point of the course, it's time to review and reflect on the process of creative identity development so far. In an educational context, the formative submission can be used as a way of breaking up the course and getting the opportunity for feedback. For the purposes of this course, you can use this as a sort of rest stop on your adventure, a chance to pause, breathe, and reflect as you prepare for the second half of the journey.

### task

Put together a slide deck of all of your completed modules so far. You can use a template but it might be good to start thinking about your creative identity and how you want to start visually representing this through your deck design.

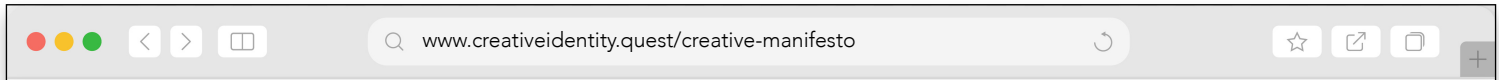
You might find yourself subconsciously evaluating the work as you lay out the slides. This will give you a way to analyse the body of work as a whole so you can write a short reflection on the first half of the course. Add your reflection to the end of your slide deck. Contemplate the ways in which this process has been challenging and/or satisfying. What have you enjoyed and/or despised? What have you learned about your creative self? In what direction do you see your creative identity heading? What are you looking forward to in the second half of the course?

If you were completing this course in an educational setting, this slide deck and reflection would be submitted as an assignment to be evaluated according to predetermined learning outcomes and an assessment rubric. As this is not the case here, you can contain them in your workbook for your own reference. Or, if you feel comfortable to, you can share them with me! I would love to see how you're getting on and what you're discovering about your creative identity. I'm also happy to discuss your progress and experience of the course at this point and guide your preparation for the upcoming modules.

hannah's completion of this module

next module

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[the creative identity course](#)
[the house of stardust](#)
[exegesis](#)
[contact](#)

## module II: creative manifesto

The last module before the final submission is the culmination of learnings, reflections, outputs, and developments from the entire course; our creative manifesto. Manifestos, as a literary genre, can be political, artistic, or avant-garde. Generally speaking, a manifesto is a sort of declaration from the writer, who could be an individual, a collective, or a political party. It can be used as a way to share ideas or inform the world of their intentions or opinions. Many artists and art collectives have used the manifesto as a form of communication, a way of announcing or confirming their specific point of view. Throughout various counter-culture movements of the 20th century, the manifesto was often employed as a tool for revolution, activism, and protest, to challenge the status quo and provide another perspective or option for collective living.

The medium of the manifesto, or how the manifesto is designed and distributed, is as much a part of the manifesto as the content is. There is a sense of theatrics involved, a performative nature to the construction and creative choices made in developing the manifesto. In this module, we will compose and produce our personal creative manifesto as a tangible representation of the creative identity we have developed through the completion of this course.

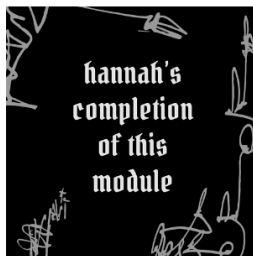
Through this process, we have discovered our creative ways of working, refined our aesthetic and creative eye, created an Alter Ego that represents the creative superhero inside of us, and established our creative philosophy and values. We will use this to build a framework for our creative manifesto that we can flesh out in a way that feels appropriate to each individual. Once we know what our manifesto will include in terms of written words, we will experiment with layout, design, and style to determine what our manifesto will look like.

### task

Create your manifesto! Have a look at some of the examples in the resource list if you need some guidance on how to put your manifesto together. Pull from everything you have developed through this process and think about how you can declare and share your creative identity through the manifesto medium. Once you have the written components, experiment with the presentation of your manifesto. What medium is the appropriate format for your creative identity to be represented in the manifesto form? It might be a poster or static imagery, a short film or animation, or maybe even a song or poem.

### resources

- i. The Manifesto Handbook: 95 Theses on an Incendiary Form: Julian Hanna, 2020
- ii. 100 Artists' Manifestos: From The Futurists To The Stuckists: Alex Danchev, 2011
- iii. A Manifesto By: WePresent Series
- iv. You Need a Manifesto: How to Craft Your Convictions and Put Them to Work: Charlotte Burgess-Auburn, 2023


[next module](#)

www.creativeidentity.quest/house-of-stardust

the creative identity course   the house of stardust   exegesis   contact

## the house of stardust

The place where our electric stardust resides within us, around us, and through us. The firing neurons, the passion and desire, the feeling of being in creative flow, the energetic point of connection in our interactions with ourselves and others. The metaphysical realm that we inhabit when we meditate, worship, create from, or pray to.

AI can somehow tell  
if you'll die soon

Welcome to The House of Stardust. A realm of creative possibility and imagination.  
A place to discover your darkest dreams and befriend your deepest discomforts.  
Move beyond your humanity and embrace the electric stardust within.

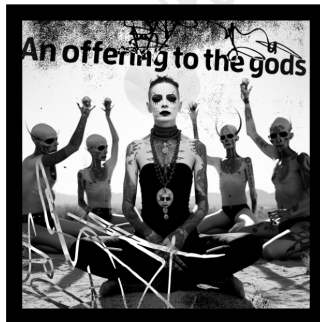
The House of Stardust is presented in its own section on the website. As this is the body of creative work that was produced as an outcome of completing the course it felt necessary to show the artefacts in a digital gallery.

The thirteen artworks that became the *acquirements* gained as one visited and spent time at The House of Stardust sit in a click through slider. This is so they can be viewed individually with the accompanying caption underneath.

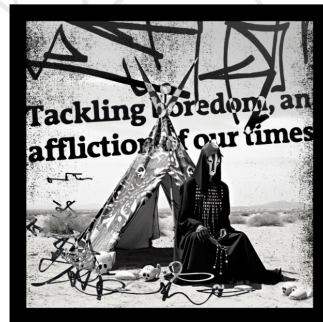
A selection of twelve artworks are underneath the slider and are arranged in a grid format to replicate the House of Stardust Instagram page (@houseofstardust.art). The philosophical/existential questions that were posted as captions are beneath each image.



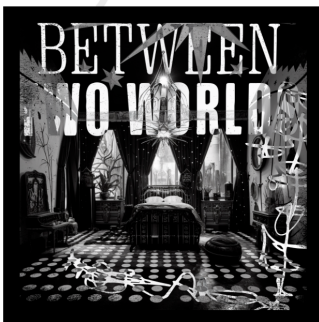
What does The House of Stardust look like in your dimension?



What are the outcomes of your ritualistic sacrifices?



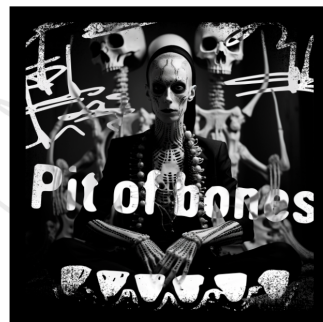
How do you fill your days, nights, and all the milliseconds in between?



"When we all fall asleep where do we go?"



In what ways does the surveillance of communities affect how you monitor yourself and those around you?



How do you take care of your body?



How do you return from the aether?



What have we done?



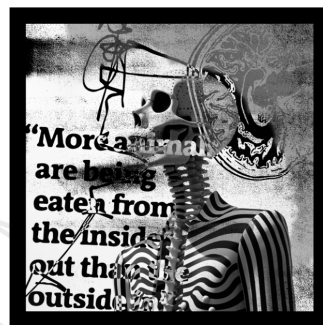
In what ways do you allow beautiful new friends to come into your life?



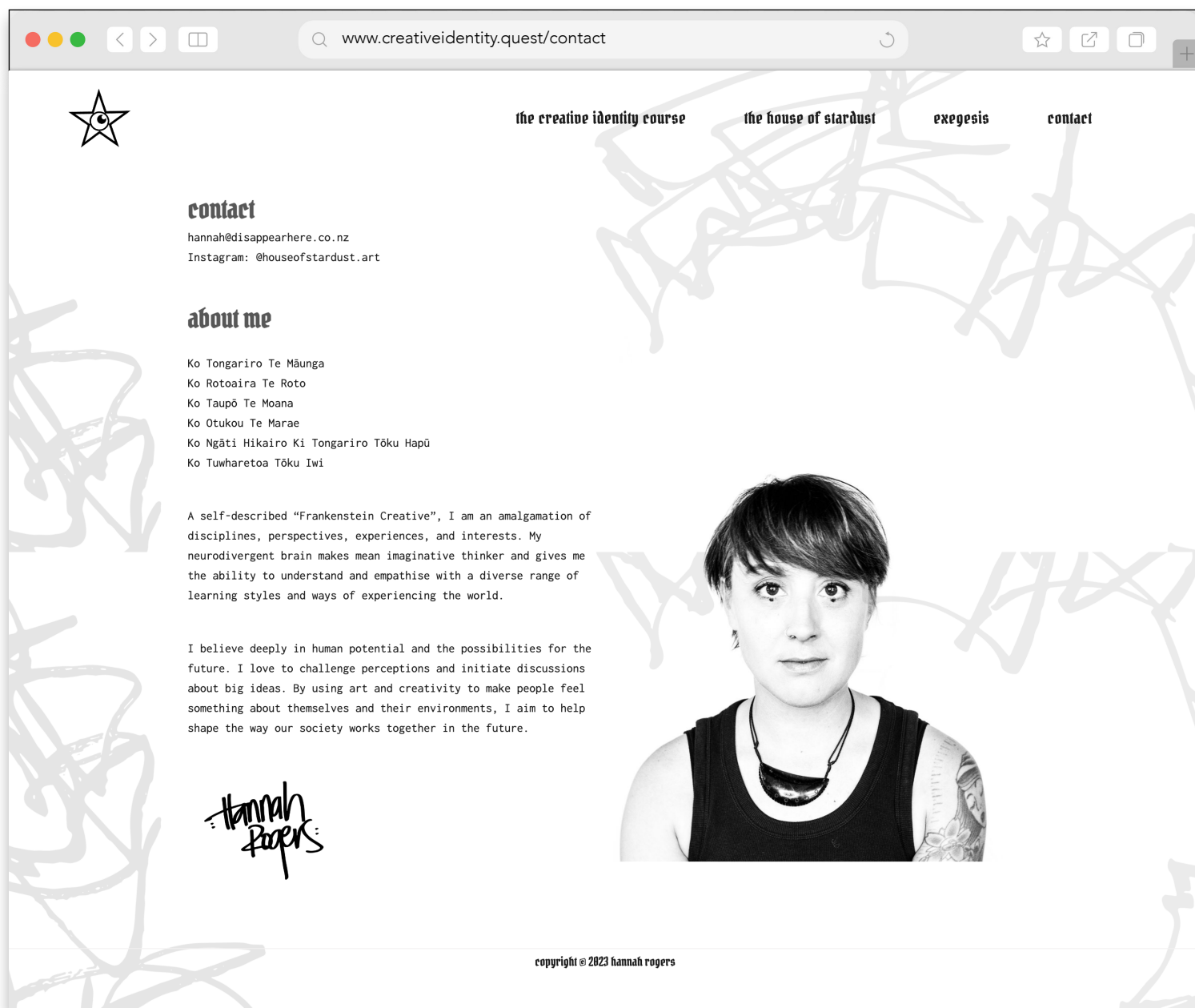
So what are we going to do then?



The House of Stardust is always watching over you



What eats away at your soul?



The contact page has active links to send me an email and to the House of Stardust Instagram page.

A brief introduction to who I am, including my pepeha, sits alongside a headshot.



## appendix ii: post examination reflection

Due to the reflective nature of this thesis and the way that it unfolded, both through planned execution and rhizomatic practice, I felt it necessary to include a post examination reflection at the end. With time and revisits to the research, the course, and the thesis itself alongside conversations with examiners as well as my supervisor, family, and peers, the need for a bookend of sorts revealed itself. It felt as if the thesis was calling out for a sense of closure.

A key aspect that has emerged from these discussions is the aesthetic choices made for the website design. My original intention was to create a cohesive submission for the thesis and use the elements from the visual creative identity that was developed through my completion of the course. Because the research topic was about creative identity exploration, I wanted to promote the ways in which I benefited from the course and present that exploration of creative identity as a visually consistent package.


I do believe that I have successfully achieved this, if the website and exegesis are to be considered as a presentation of artefacts and written document of findings produced through practice-led research. This was the intention of the website; as a digital exhibition of the thesis outputs. In my mind, it was never intended to be received as the professional presentation of the course as a product, that would be marketed and viewed by potential students or people wanting to complete the

course. My plan was always to approach the branding and marketing of the course upon completion of the thesis.

However, upon reflection of the exegesis and website presentation I can see how there was a lack of clarity on this point, especially given the way that the content for the course modules was written. There is an obvious lack of discussion within the exegesis about those decisions. This is, perhaps, the downside to my rhizomatic way of thinking; by not planning the website more before writing the exegesis, by designing it after the exegesis had been submitted, I didn't provide the space to explain my intentions for the website explicitly.

I had not considered user testing of the website at this time since this was not intended for user interaction. When I redesign the website for a general audience I will definitely allow for user testing and feedback to determine the accessibility and appeal to the target demographic of artists and creatives wanting to develop their creative identity.

Since the completion of the exegesis and website I have been thinking about the next steps for the course and how it might be prepared for distribution. I would like to take several people through the course as students initially to gain some feedback on how others are experiencing it and what could be better or changed within the course from a learning design and delivery perspective.




By considering the course as a product I am moving from a research and academic mindset to a business orientated view of what comes next. In terms of branding and marketing I plan to take the course through the course! A meta approach but I am interested to see how the course could also serve as a way to develop a professional creative identity. While the outcome of this research shows that the course can assist in developing ones creative identity in a deeply personal and artistic manner, I wonder if it might assist in developing ones creative identity in a more professional, marketable way. Something I, myself as an artist struggle with is promoting and marketing myself as the artist outside of my work. I'm curious as to what kind of outputs and outcomes might be produced in this approach.

Another aspect I have been revisiting is the body of creative work that was produced from my completion of the course, The House of Stardust. I have continued to develop this work and experiment with AI image generation and various image manipulation techniques, both digital and analogue. What has become a point of contention within myself are the captions and questions I had written to accompany each image. As I continued to make artworks, I felt restricted by having to come up with these texts and began to feel that I had limited myself by doing this in the first place. I loved, and still love, the concept of The House of Stardust, but I was starting to overthink and intellectualise

everything I was making. It had taken the joy out of making the images as valid artworks on their own.

Reviewing the images on the website, I can see how the captions are distracting and are a detriment to the artwork. They limit the viewers ability to engage with the work and add to the dialogue between myself as the artist and the AI, which was the original intention for sharing them. Some feedback received is that they could be read as a lack of confidence that the work could speak for itself and I have to agree. Upon reflection I believe that I was worried that people would not understand the artwork so I was compensating by over explaining concepts through the addition of the text. By removing the need for these captions going forward, my confidence and sense of joy in my art making has returned which has been liberating.

Revisiting and reflecting on the research project and thesis has been fascinating, it has renewed my enthusiasm for the course and my belief in it. I am looking forward to taking it through the next iteration and having the opportunity to present it to a wider audience. I am excited about the possibilities and to witness the ways in which others will experience it, how they will develop their own creative identities, and the creative confidence they will gain upon completion.





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