4C "Finding the Edge: Online persona creation by fringe artists" (30 min)
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Self-presentation through the creation of profiles and pages on digitally networked spaces is becoming ever more ubiquitous. In order to develop greater depth of understanding of the place of social media in our self-identification practice, my dissertation investigates the experiences of online persona creation by eight artists. Drawing on sociological and cultural studies approaches to understanding identity as performance, I tie current artists' presentational and representational practices to historically grounded, socio-culturally constructed discourses of 'artistness'. Through this connection, I argue that the creation of online persona has not radically changed notions of what it means to be an artist, or how artistness is represented and understood by audiences of fans or followers,

but rather that digital technology has allowed for renegotiation of the boundaries of artistness that still draws from historical understandings of the role and persona of the artist. This shifting of boundaries, allowing for more inclusivity within the art world, is demonstrated by my focus on 'fringe' artists: those whose creative practice places them outside of the traditional art world and its existing structures of representation, distribution and consumption. The eight fringe artists who participated in this study are drawn from street art, performance poetry, craftivism and tattoo.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis drives the methodological focus on the experiences of the artists. Rather than a consideration of behaviour and habit, or what the artists

do, this phenomenological approach allowed me to instead focus on what it is like for the artists to create persona, what drives particular types of representational practices. Using unstructured interviews, and online listening as an extension of participant observation, the artists' narratives of experience are expressed through transcript extracts and screenshots: both are necessary to fully explore the nature of online persona creation.

My analysis of the artists experiences has demonstrated that there are three somewhat distinct registers of performance with which an artist's persona can engage: the professional register, where one demonstrates ones proficiency, experience, popularity, and professionalism; the personal register, where one connects with wider social and political interests and activities; and the intimate register, where one allows the audience in to one's private world. These three registers occupy the same performance space, but are implicitly or explicitly for different segments of the digitally networked audience of fans, followers, friends and family. The complexity of the performance and reception of these registers is influenced by the shared nature of the performance space – where previously different roles would be performed for different audiences without reference to one another, the networked nature of online social media influences decisions of how much, and when, to share with whom. Interpreted here using themes of strategy|happenstance, specialisation|diversification, visibility|self-protection, self|others and work|play, the professional, personal and intimate registers of performance enable us to see the consideration and care with which each participant creates their artists persona.

The experiences of performing the self in these three registers, as presented here, provides an insight into the complexities involved in creating online persona, while also demonstrating that this type of presentation of self is, in itself, no different from the types of role play and performance of self that has arguably always occurred in our physical world. Despite focusing on the role and performance of artistness, this dissertation speaks to the creation and performance of online persona more broadly.