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Persona and Its Uses

Persona as a term and as an analytical concept has emerged from the close study of the performance and assemblage of the individual public self. In this chapter, the exceptional value that is inherited from multiple academic domains and disciplines is unpacked. Here, we account for the work in establishing persona as a term with a broad range of historical, intellectual, and analytical precursors. More specifically, we begin to account for persona studies as a toolkit for exploring the production of the self in the era of self-presentation and presentational media. The key to this chapter is the exploration of what has altered over time, and what continues to change, in our cultures, communities, and interactions as a result of the digital technologies, networked media platforms, media services, and communication services that make specific requirements of us in the mediated assemblage of our public identities.

What propels the need for a detailed investigation of the movement from the personal to the public is clearly imbricated in the demands for an online presence in the contemporary period. Our online selves are deeply enmeshed within the economies of attention and the hierarchies of reputation that have acted to diminish the barriers between categories of the personal, the professional, the public, and the private. Involvement in any kind of public has always required a dimension of personal display, but now features a blending of interpersonal and presentational frameworks. The need for public identity management has simultaneously opened up access to complex and often intersecting online and offline publics, allowing for the creation of multiple “real” selves, each with their own roles, domains of participation, and fields of social interaction. We may be less formal with friends on Facebook than with peers on Twitter, or jovial and outgoing on Tumblr but guarded and careful on Reddit. Each instance differs from the others, or they may connect and be consistent across each platform, depending on the needs and practices of the individual.

Persona Studies and the Public Self

One of the major principles in the analytical toolkit of persona studies is the recognition of change in the complexity of individual agency in the contemporary moment. The concept of agency has historically undergone enough change to challenge a complete and categorical definition. However, the dimensions of agency as it emerged from cultural studies are core to the efforts of understanding that structural inequalities and unequal power relations are replicated by new media and communication technologies and their everyday application under capitalism (Green and Singleton 2013, p. 34). Agency has been recognized as an important function of social media platforms and services, including Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, as a means for regaining control over the information and representation of the public self, especially by celebrities, politicians, and public figures. As will be discussed in this chapter, social media has enabled the detouring of the desire for closer access expressed in tabloid consumption and paparazzi-style images into a more immediate – if equally constructed – public performance that is grounded in the “official” status of the account user and its claims to the authenticity of the performance of the individual. This is a feature of social media with significant personal and political potential, recognized by postfeminist scholars as a form of agentic empowerment and a “call to authenticity” which also recognizes the surveillance properties of the social media platforms that are used to disclose constructed performance and self-representations as an essentially “real” public identity:

The “call to authenticity” animates the idea that one participates successfully by disclosing on Twitter, so women are both lauded for being empowered through expressing themselves and criticized for the consequences of this display, enabling representations of women as enterprising individuals who willingly subject themselves to the gaze as a form of agency. (Dubrofsky and Wood 2014, p. 284)

This is not to suggest that all users are treated equally or that new degrees of emancipation and equality are present on social media. One of the contributions of cultural studies to the work of persona studies is the understanding of the value of individual agency that is deeply rooted in the inequalities of power, gender relations, race, education, and so on. The critical work of Tiziana Terranova, Dmitry Kleiner, Christian Fuchs, Mark Andrejevic, Mark Hansen, and Nick Dyer-Witheford and others in political economy studies, including the integration of key thinkers such as Marx, Foucault, and Hardt and Negri, have detailed and expanded the analysis of social media beyond classical economics, particularly in the areas of surveillance, privacy, intangible labor and immaterial capitalism. One of the key trajectories we take for working with

these concerns was recognized in John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* as the "art of making do" (Fiske 2010 [1989], p. 28).

Preceding Fiske's work, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984 [1980], p. 30) perceives "making do" as a motif for an esthetic dimension to the work of those whose individual creativity is constrained and enlivened by spaces that are generated by languages and practices that are owned, consumed, and dominated by forces out of their control. Even in the algorithmically policed spaces of YouTube copyright controls, Facebook policy takedowns, Apple iStore regulations, and government-banned file sharing websites, the digital enables an unprecedented degree of boundary crossing between home and work, labor and play, personal and public. The elements of online circumstance therefore leave no choice but to exist in a mode of innovation and with a sense of plurality. This collective self-sufficiency has influenced the work on methods in persona studies (Marshall, Moore and Barbour 2015) with the attention to the sense of agency in the practices of persona formation. We take on de Certeau's notion of the individual tactics and collective strategic negotiations as a way through the world, despite, or perhaps because of, rapid technological, social, and political change. The use of available resources and their dynamic application in the purposes of assembling an identity online is concomitantly individual and social. To understand the growing importance, impact on, and meaning of public identity in our lives, persona studies investigates the practice and ecology in which it is negotiated.

Much of the attention of cultural studies has concerned the collective configuration of meaning, and this is particularly evident in the examination of subcultures, fandoms, and the recent "participatory" turn to understanding the acquisition, translation, and iteration of cultural, digital, and social skills and competencies needed for full engagement in the twenty-first century (Jenkins et al. 2009). Persona studies expands on the cultural studies inquiry to examine the movement of the individual into social spaces and the requirements on the public presentation of the self that this movement involves. The critical examination then becomes an investigation of how the individual gains and articulates agency within these spaces. Persona studies seeks to better understand to what degree and under what conditions must the individual negotiate, remix, strategize, and articulate identity formations in order to provide an account of the performances that both resist and stabilize the sociotechnical systems, platforms, and services that have contributed to the contemporary emphasis on public presentation. The reconfigured privileging of the individual in online culture as a participant (Jenkins 2006a) and gatewatching beyond the old media gatekeeping (Bruns 2005) makes this focus on agency central to understanding the complexity of the structures of power in the newly constituted era of networked personalization.

The work of producing an online persona involves the labor of identity management and the curation of a living archive of mediated information and

ultimately “digital” objects. The conflation of the digital and the physical involves a series of moments and choices that we must reflect on, argues Stuart Hall (2001), and thus we need to look past the apparent randomness of personal collections to discern the crystallizing shapes and patterns of objects used for reflection and debate that require new tools for describing self-conscious and self-reflexive activity, whether it be the obfuscation of personal details in the Facebook profile or the contribution to a conversation via a Twitter hashtag. The living archive of an online persona is not “an inert museum of dead works” but an “on-going, never completed project” (Hall 2001, p. 89).

An online persona is an event in its continuous illumination of identity, and whose gaps involve information as much as the more recognizable patterns of dates, actions, locations, preferences, and other personal data that emerges from any analysis of the online self. The living archive of online persona helps us to identify what our online cultures, communities, and interactions achieve and represent. For Hall, who uses Foucault’s distinctive concept of the “archive” as an organic and mutable artifact rather than a unified or unifiable collection, the living archive assists in answering questions about these kinds of operations, processes and relations. The living archive of persona maintains discursive formations via a heterogeneity of content, from topics and texts, to subjects, tastes, and themes, which resist superficial attempts of grouping and classification that render them “the same” (Hall 2001, p. 90). Each point on the network, each user profile and service account, from Netflix and Skype, to WhatsApp and Tinder create nodal points in the larger picture of activity that informs the network of our behaviors and collectively, and most often algorithmically, determines how we appear to others. Foucault drew attention to the apparently continuous forms and fields that are indicated by gaps, differences, interplay, distances, transformations, and unpredictable departures, and the “trick,” suggests Hall, is not to allow the “oeuvre of a mythical collective subject” to dominate the description, but rather convey a sense of regularity and difference in accounting for its dispersion. It is a mistake to think then that we might tie down an account of persona, or a persona, that is immune to change.

From Personae to Persona

One of the changes that was often noted during the early subdisciplinary formation of persona studies was the shift in language, specifically the choice of the plural “personas,” over the more familiar and perhaps believed-to-be proper term “personae.” The latter is typically reserved by dictionaries, including the Oxford English Dictionary (2009), as the collective term for the members of a dramatic work. The term “dramatic personae” is historically used to denote the multiple characters of novel or serialized text, while “personas” is most often

used to refer to the multiple aspects of an individual's character that are presented and understood by others at certain times and places and in certain roles. A politician, a mother, a celebrity, a sports fan, and an individual with a disability active in a Facebook community, are all personas. By contrast, the term "*dramatis personae*" is a Latin phrase referring to the characters of a dramatic work and given to the table of names introducing a performance. It is a simple but specially formatted text linking the performers and their roles, instruments, or characters. This simple spreadsheet conveys to an audience the idea that a performance is being conducted, one that is connected to the lives of the performers in various ways, but always at a distance from the content of the production. In other words, the *dramatis personae* is a paratext of the performance. Gerard Genette's (1997) term, which draws on the ambiguity of the prefix "para" in French, highlights the role of the paratext as that which enables the reader to better understand a text, performance, or practice as a threshold, a boundary to be traversed rather than a unique and wholly complete package. Similarly, the "cast lists" of cinematic and televisual works are paratexts serving an archival role as a means for an actor to record their contributions to a collaborative production. The term "*dramatis personae*" also works as reference to contemporary public performances that are not entirely staged but are clearly performed.

Persona is a more contemporary spelling of "personae" in the everyday lexicon, with the plural "personas." The meaning has shifted with this move but is still attached to the concept of a mask, a layer, or adornment used to obscure the underlying features of the performer, providing a new surface upon which to inscribe a public identity. Remaining in the term is a conceptual link to an identity that is somehow distinct from an "origin" or "real" source. This link is used to distinguish between the virtual, the digital, and the real, and it often leads to failure to see where they are indistinct and overlap. Persona continues to take on the dimension of the mask in the digital age, and as such is performed as a social role, one that is constructed through negotiation with a whole series of actors, networks, and institutions. Personas are frequently guided by informal rules in face-to-face interactions, but also through highly structured digital environments, like Skype, Tumblr, Reddit, or WordPress. The function of a persona is to convey the performance and, as such, it serves as a position from which to speak to an audience. A persona, however, cannot be located in a unique or a discrete object; a persona is formed by the relations of a series of performances and assembled objects, and is never a single act, object, profile, or account. Persona is accrued and curated. It is accumulated in carefully constructed assemblages as well as erratic, haphazard "living" collections. A persona is therefore an archive of processes, a description of network interfaces and interactions with other objects, systems, and personas, as will be explored further in later chapters. Personas are communicative acts of self-production, but the majority of freedoms in these processes only exist within

the options provided by the builders and owners of the platform through which it is enacted.

Our intention is to deal with the different constitutions of agency that persona as a concept embodies and it is important that this agency be contextualized within the history of identity theory and within the economic and technological affordances of the various applications, platforms, and services employed for the expression of the public self. We will build on the approach that is mapped out in this chapter and identify, for example, how advertising, self-branding, and personal monetization of the public self are part of the developing exposure culture of presentational media embedded in the capitalized economic structure of online culture. The risks in creating public personas range from the mundane to the profound, but investment and trust in services and networks that are regularly monitored, break down, change their terms and conditions, monetize our data, and alter their interfaces, is undeniably part of the experience.

Personas are in the processes of interactions with other personas, systems, and objects, across all forms of media and communication. They are communicative acts of self-production, but freedoms in these processes only exist within the options provided by the designers, operators, and advertisers of the platform. A game world may appear free and open but is still limited to the constraints and affordances of the software and the hardware that the system operates on as much as the terms and service conditions of entry. All media are potentially social and any technologies that aid us in performing or fulfilling the social role of persona formation and management is a social media, but there have been more formal approaches to the terminology. The definition of social media by boyd and Ellison (2007) includes three key characteristics: (i) the ability to construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (ii) the capacity to articulate a list of connected users, and (iii) a system for traversing personal connections and others made within the system. The term “social media” is used in marketing to refer to Web-based and Internet-enabled technologies. As Christian Fuchs’s work identifies, social media advanced as a term derived from “social networks” which has had a much longer history of use and meaning and contextualization in terms of the idea of the social (Fuchs 2017, pp. 36–51). Nonetheless, the majority of these relatively new, identifiable online social media all include in their processes functions that derive value from the user’s construction and maintenance of persona, and their involvement in the act of communication. Social media users are not customers in a traditional sense, more often they are seen as the product for advertisers as their activity produces revenue streams via algorithmic analysis. There is a significant risk involved in the trust of these media forms, all usually owned by companies whose primary concern is an economic one, which understands privacy as a commodity and a currency that users trade for access.

Web-based platforms monetize the immaterial labor of our everyday interactions with imperceptible ease. Google takes our searches and sells our words, and we pay this cost and sell ourselves at this price every time we use the Google search, email, or document service. Facebook takes our preferences and activities and packages us up as eyeballs and attention to advertisers looking to hone their targeted messaging to an unprecedented degree. We take unknown risks with our identities providing our information in everyday interactions, risks that perhaps in some places would draw attention to the vulnerability of our lives, homes, and histories. We often assume online anonymity, but find it impossible to avoid leaving digital traces and electronic trails wherever we go online. In the past such public traces were less ubiquitous and tied to physical access to electoral rolls or the *White Pages* “phone book,” which functioned like a classical *dramatis personae* for a populous connected by geographical space and limited analog communications technologies (mail and telephony). The phone book was a serious resource for the pre-Internet age. Like the Web it extended the information available to us, and like the Web it connected our public-facing identity and property to the wider world. The degree of information is, of course, greater now, and the Web and its uses are broader, but the literacies learned with the analog technology are often reflected in the digital ones required for a public facing online self.

Online persona demands a range of digital media literacies in its production, but there is a structural element to this kind of literacy – the distribution of cognition across multiple technologies: followers and contact lists; cloud-based spreadsheets; or even Wikipedia. These forms of social media extend our knowledge and capacities in what Henry Jenkins (2006b) describes as “distributed cognition” that expands exponentially as users of networked media platforms and digital services increase in number. The shift to subscription-based access to cloud storage, streaming media, and direct-from-provider models, like the crowdfunding systems of Kickstarter and Patreon, has magnified this trend. **Digital literacies** involve the distribution of cognition and interactions that follow everchanging rules and demands, with technologies for recording, searching, sorting, and representing information, making it easier for users to identify, create, and produce digitally. Distributed cognition and the distribution of persona is formed in the use of hardware and software of technologies, especially mobile ones: laptops, tablet devices, and mobile phones. Distribution occurs as we increase our reliance on the machines and technologies that expand the capacities of our brain and senses. The transformed distribution of the social via distributed cognition as well as the use of media and communication tools enable us to build complex personas; but it is important to realize that these kinds of distributions of the social can even be found in the most basic of media when used to perform roles or duties: from the social simplicity of the handwritten letter, to its articulation in SMS or even the private message exchanges via the communication channels of an online role-playing game.

Unlike Facebook or Google services, which requires users to verify their “real” identities through various means, such as linking the user account to a particularly mobile phone number, Twitter is a social media Web-based platform with a user model that does not strictly require users to present themselves as offline selves, leading to novelty, humor, satirical, political, and other types of user accounts. Where Facebook and Google’s terms of service agreements demand adherence to a singular account policy, Twitter is a less restrictive opt-in system, resulting in multiple satirical “parody” accounts and automated “bots.” This openness forces powerful figures like the US president Donald Trump or actor Hugh Jackman to go through Twitter’s verification service and prefix their profiles with “real,” such as @realDonaldTrump and @RealHughJackman (see Hearn 2017). Twitter does not change its interface at the same pace as Facebook or Google, and its development has not outgrown its core practice that remains the simple enough “tweet”; at 280 characters, a tweet can be a powerful means for communication and conversation across a range of events and purposes. Arguably, tweets played a significant role in Trump’s success as a presidential candidate in the 2016 election. Fan conventions and academic conferences come alive in reaction to a vibrant group of Twitter users equipped with a convenient hashtag that can be a source of discussion and debate, and, of course, heated exchange.

The Premodern to the Contemporary Self

The question of how we arrived at this point is examined in the following part of the chapter as we explore these claims about the contemporary self as they hearken back to premodern notions of the self that is much more about public comportment and visibility than the inner self. Identity theory is considered in this and later chapters. However, our emphasis is on the degree to which these approaches help to inform the analysis of producing a public self that includes being a citizen, a consumer, an audience member, and other categories of being public that are both qualitatively and quantitatively different to the understanding of interior selfhood. Central to this approach is to begin to understand how the techno-cultural shift described above has contributed to the production of new relationships and organizational practices of the self in terms of the public that often incorporate what would once have been deemed personal, private, and even intimate.

The etymology, or root, of the word *persona*, is the Etruscan and Latin word, derived from the Greek “*prosopon*.” *Persona* meant the mask worn by actors in classical Greek theater (see Figure 1.1). Sound was an important component of the masked performance, as the term suggests, *persona* is literally the sound (*sona*) passing through the wooden mask (*pers*) or the sound of the actor’s voice through the wood of the mask. *Persona* is thus connected to the ideas of

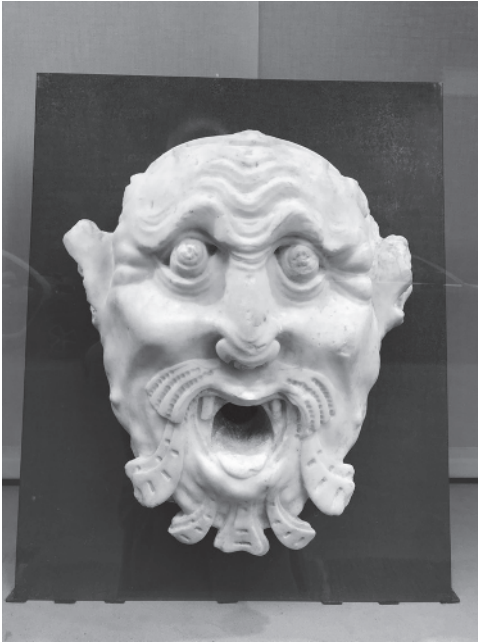


Figure 1.1 A “prosopon” – Greek persona mask. *Source:* Photo: P. David Marshall.

the role, character, avatar, *personnage* (French), front (from Goffman), and facade. Persona indicates the projection of a character, or role, by an actor, through a mask out into an audience, an intentional projection outward to a public via the device of the mask. Persona identifies the work of the actor through their voice, but also an entirely embodied performance that includes sound, posture, movement, and other shaping effects of stance, projection, and circumstance. The value of persona as an analytical concept is to understand a self not as fixed, but as a constantly updated projection of identity presented and enacted for the benefit of communicating to, and maintaining relations with, others. Personas are a production/process of a visible performance, publicly accessible but still a masked presentation used to negotiate through the world.

Persona was also a term used in Ancient Rome to identify the mask of performance and it is clearly related to historically important ideas about acting and being in public. In addition, it is also a term used by Cicero as he tried to describe the four roles or personas that are essential to being human. Reiss’s study of early European conceptions of the self found that in the ancient world there was no dominant concept of the private self, suggesting the inner psychological dimensions that we associate with the modern self provides little insight into how individuals thought of themselves in Ancient Rome or Greece (Reiss 2003). The “prosopon” or mask was primarily purposed toward symbolism and

effective communication of character. Notably in use by 700 BCE, and perhaps most well known in the celebration of the festival of Dionysia, the trajectory of the mask's movement from fertility ritual to the theatrical comedies and tragedies is unclear and its exact use varied. Typically covering the head and face in helmet fashion, with eyes and mouth holes, the mask was often made from organic materials not meant for permanent or long-term use and were produced by the "skeupoioios" and the "maker of properties" (Brooke 1962). Brooke suggested that the role of a particular mask was not restricted to any single task or duty but represented multiple roles and purposes. The obfuscation and alteration of the visual features of the performer was a means to produce a new persona connected outwardly and physically to the body underneath; this is very much like a pre-cybernetic version of the connection between our physical bodies and the mediated ones that we present via social media. The mask served to distinguish and make an individual recognizable as a persona connected to a publicly performed role, much as the *dramatis personae* of an eighteenth century playbill. The mask also served to distinguish between characters for an audience, to help note the differences among and within a group of performers: the chorus, for example, has similar masks and is considered to be a singular figure. The contemporary notion of a costume is an embellishment of the *prosopon*, developing from the use of jewelry, adornments, and other pageantry to help separate different roles in a play or performance.

Applying Persona

Derived from performance and acting, Hannah Arendt's reading of the *prosopon* considered the construction of a public – and potentially political – persona as naturally removed from the private and domestic performances of home life and domesticity. The stage performance and the political persona are both deemed to have originated from a source that was separate to the domain of an everyday public life, and became part of it through the staged orchestration of an alternative identity, one in the service of a different script to the rhythms of the mundane. The classical division in ancient Greek culture between the public and private was anticipated and articulated, argues Arendt, through strategic public identity practices, which identified clearly separate but touching spheres of home – "oikos" or interior – and public – the "polis" or exterior – life. The popular portrayal of character or political identity by an individual was not considered to carry into the personal and private, as the constitution of the public identity occurred in the *polis*, the political realm, while private affairs occur under the umbrella of the *oikos* (Arendt 1958, p. 185). Arendt recognized the continuity in the historical need to construct clear and separate public and private identities, which continues today as an impulse but less clearly as a practice. The separation of the private and the public that

was essential for the development of the political persona of a citizen has become a blending, merging, or overlapping of these spheres of identity in the contemporary era.

Persona in Psychology

Recent usage of the term persona gradually emerged in psychology and increases in frequency from the 1940s onwards, as seen in Figure 1.2. One particularly influential figure is Carl Jung, an important psychoanalyst and theorist whose work rivals Sigmund Freud for its impact on the way the public has come to understand psychology as a field that attempts to reveal the internal mechanisms of selfhood and subjective formation. For Jung, persona is “acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks” (Jung 1966, p. 157) and “adaptation to the social environment” (pp. 469–470) which is articulated through the desires, strategies, methods, and efforts to impress and conceal. Jung argued that an unregulated persona can lead to many problems for an individual, as if the self becomes unbalanced with the inner self of archetypes, or becomes too outer-world directed, a potential psychosis may arise. The key point here in terms of the history of the term persona and its relationship to the field of psychology, is that the persona is not simply the subject, the self or an identity, but instead is the interface, the connection, the medium between the individual and the social. Persona is the collective notion of identity by the individual.

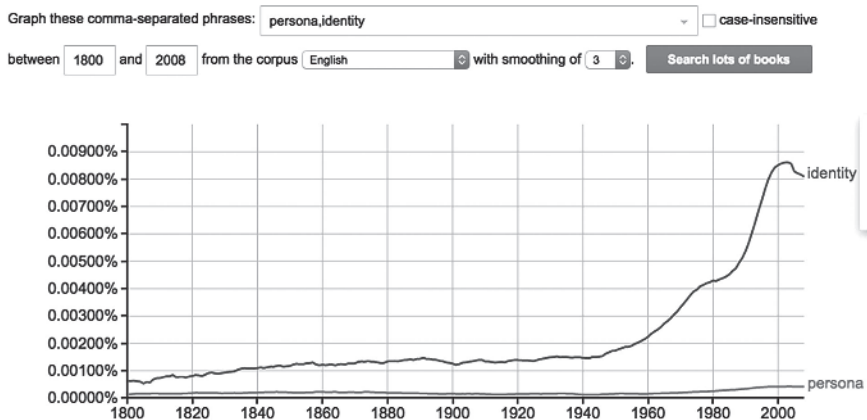


Figure 1.2 The Google ngram illustrates the comparative use of the term identity with the term persona in the Google books archive (<https://trends.google.com.au/trends/explore?q=persona,identity>).

Psychology is a key site for the evolution of the term persona because, as noted by Marshall and Barbour (2015), Jung and Freud offer two different configurations of thinking about the relationship of the self to the social. Freud's account of the unconscious is underpinned by the expanded notion of self-consciousness, following the modernist obsession with the self in the twentieth-century literature of Joyce, Faulkner, and others. Jung's alternative path provided a different framework of archetypes and anima, and he used the word persona sparingly, but significantly in his work. Jung's concept of persona is "the arbitrary segment of the collective psyche" that the individual inhabits as "a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual" (Jung 1966, p. 157) rather than a person playing a particular collectively defined role. Thus Freud and Jung maintained entirely different ways of understanding the unconscious; while Freud's approach was individualized Jung appealed to a universalized humanized unconsciousness which dismantles the presentation of the "outer personality" or persona, but not the "inner-personality" or anima (Jung 1991, pp. 466–467). Persona in Jung's model is influenced by "adaptation to the [social] environment" (Jung 1991, pp. 469–470) and a concerted effort to make oneself understood and recognized, which Jung explains as the persona's function "to impress and conceal" (cited in Fawkes 2010, p. 4). Jung's brief account of persona captures central components explaining why persona is an important and significant means for analyzing and describing the contemporary condition. The mask of the individual in Jung's model is the persona derived from the social environment. This version of persona is performed as a means of interaction between the individual and society, standing in for the individual in a socially acceptable format. Marshall and Barbour (2015) take from Jung an understanding of persona as representing a potential threat, a potential to reveal an unbalanced self that needs to be overcome. Important in this recognition is that the externally mediated identity can be mistaken for the whole of a being. Jung's approach enables us to understand persona as a strategic public identity, one that is not always in tension with the "inner" or "real" self (Jung 1966, p. 303), and a means to imagine and account for the past, present, and emerging dimensions of a life and its public formation of the self.

Persona in Literature

The history of the term persona in literature similarly provokes a number of competing accounts and ideas about the author, characters, narrators, and works as a whole. One key example is *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound (1996), which is an incomplete poem composed between 1915 and 1962 that includes themes of culture, history, government, and economics, and features cross-cultural characters, moral tales, and a speculative, if fragmentary, reflection of human existence. The poem begins with Odysseus's voyage into Hades, but later the poem

presents a series of different identities from poets to warriors and explorers. Right from the outset, argues Richard Whitaker (1990), and right through to the conclusion, though intermittently, Pound assumes the persona of Odysseus:

No doubt it was precisely the hero's versatility and many-sidedness that recommended him to Pound. For, as the compositions of the *Cantos* progressed and as his circumstances and the concept of his poem radically altered, so Pound was able to dwell on new and different aspects of his persona's varied experience. (Whitaker 1990, p. 37)

The loose and seemingly structureless style of the *Cantos* builds a presence, a layering of themes, scenes, and events which produced a persona to the work itself. The poem, although disjointed, constructs an edifice and an appeal for the value of art and literature over war, economics, and politics. Pound's own persona evolved over his career and lifetime and he himself became a literary persona: a luminary and enigmatic figure recognized for his ambitions as a poet and editor. Pound demonstrated an ability to strategically leverage his public persona in order to assist in publishing the works of T.S. Eliot, another major literary persona of the twentieth century.

The new literary traditions (see Marshall and Barbour 2015) appearing at the outset of the twentieth century, saw persona emerge as a term that poets, including Ezra Pound, labeled part of a movement called Imagism. The Imagists deployed persona as a description of the subsumption of identity into an objective, observable reality transformed by the new subject-object relationship they were describing. Everyday settings, items, tools, or people were expressed in a poetic language that produced a persona or character that was beyond the authorial identity. Pound stands in contrast to the affective romantic expression of the self with his use of a persona to separate the poet's identity from the poet's work. T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Faulkner, and others helped Pound to define a relationship to the self in modern literature divergent from the understanding of self as consciousness. Baddick summarizes this use of persona in literary criticism as "the assumed identity or fictional 'I' ... assumed by a writer in a literary work; thus the speaker in a literary poem, or the narrator in a fictional narrative" (cited in Fowler and Burchfield 2004, p. 588).

Persona in Performing Arts

Another term in the arts that involves the strategic construction of a persona is "method acting," which covers a broad range of performance training techniques orchestrated to allow for the performance of sincerity to register emotionally with an audience. There have been a number of important contributors to method acting, which has influenced the preparation of actors "getting into character" and greatly influenced Hollywood through the delivery

of affective and deeply expressive performances. The method acting system was developed by Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Sand Meisner, Stella Adler, and others and is part of the contemporary mode of screen acting (Vineberg 1991). Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish film writer and director, took the notion of screen affect into new psychological realms with his black and white film, *Persona*, in 1966, which was heavily censored by cuts to reduce its impact. *Persona* stars Bibi Andersson as Alma. Liv Ullmann plays a stage actress, Elizabeth, who has lost the ability to speak. The title of course implies the constitution of a fabricated identity but refers to the masks worn by actors on stage. The *mise en scène*, acting, editing, and general film language of *Persona* makes it narratively confusing, as the onscreen performances have a layering in its pictorial minimalism that adds up to an unmistakable identity of the film itself as bleak; there is an emphasis on emotions and condition of “the unwell,” focusing on mental instability and mortality.

Method acting strategies continue to be popular among Hollywood stars and celebrities to mixed success. For every Cate Blanchett, whose performances are described as “actor’s acting” “because it plays with the veils of identity and is a study on how those fabrications can become more real” (Marshall 2014) there is a dozen less-than-successful actors whose character performances fail to connect with audiences. Method acting has become part of the malady of Hollywood, suggests Richard Brody, describing the modern devotees of Strasberg’s method as an inclination “toward deformations of character” (Brody 2014). Reports of Jared Leto’s preparation for the role of the Batman comic book villain, the Joker, for the 2016 film *Suicide Squad*, include consumption of streaming media of brutal crimes and refusing to break character between takes. This is only one example among many such “heroic” lengths actors pursue which are used as part of the marketing strategies used to promote the movie. Ledger, De Niro, Hoffman, Bale, and DiCaprio have all publicly aligned themselves with “the Method,” but Anjelica Jade Bastien (2016) criticized the performance martyrdom of the trend in *The Atlantic* suggesting that:

The underpinning of this strategy is the belief that to create great art one must suffer. But method acting has also become wrapped up in a brand of identity politics that tries to make the art form resemble more traditional forms of male labour, and by extension limiting the kinds of actors who receive praise.

Persona as Performance

The persona of performance, embodied by method acting, was extended as a ubiquitous experience in the dramaturgical analogy presented by notable twentieth-century sociologist Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life (1959). Goffman has regained attention as his dramaturgical analysis has proven to be highly fruitful in making sense of the increasingly everyday experience of social interaction online and the performed elements of persona. Goffman's account of the "front" and "back" stage elements of human behavior can be understood in terms of identity that is foregrounded or backgrounded by the individual. Goffman's contributions to the field of Symbolic Interactionism help to reveal the performed elements of identity and the connection between the self and a frontstage public or audience. His insights into the degree to which the self is partially a construction of its interaction with others take on new dimensions of importance when we start to consider the massive techno-social infrastructure of the hardware and software of the Internet age and its role on the individual's sense of self and their performed identities online.

According to Goffman, when an individual enters a social situation the conception of that person's self – their identity – is continually reassembled and performed as a composition of information about the individual, informed by the parameters defining the situation and any prior or advanced knowledge of the individuals, locations, and the relations between them. Individual expression in these instances is a sign system that conveys streams of information, which along with our judgments and assumptions about the given social setting, such as who is likely to be present and their relation to us, enable a degree of anticipated and understandable behavior. Walking into a high school classroom, for example, students can immediately understand their social identity roles as they are scripted by experience, and can judge the entry of other persons based on their relationship to them individually as well as how these roles are socially defined by the physical location itself. In Goffman's model, we understand that facts about individuals always exist beyond the time and space of any interaction. Other facts are deliberately concealed by individuals within the interaction with others, such as health conditions, beliefs, attitudes, or emotions: some of these conditions can be ascertained indirectly by others and circumvent the individual's efforts at concealment. As Goffman suggests, social signs, even overt or direct ones, do not always correlate with the senses. This noncorrelation with cognate senses can be magnified in the online environments of Facebook chats, SMS exchanges, virtual worlds, email, and Web forums.

Goffman (1959) divided such expression into two categories: "*given*" and "*given off*" (or projected). Given expression includes the verbal symbols of speech we interpret as conventional communication, which can be performed for reasons other than the apparent, including misinformation and direct deception. *Given off* expressions are involuntary, and since, as Goffman suggests, we live by inference and not by statistics or science, both types of expression will have a promissory character whose true value is known after their absence. The conduct of others toward the performed self, notwithstanding

individual objectives, is central to Goffman's inquiry. The desired responses of others are influenced by the expressions of individuals and the definition of the situation which others formulate enables the individual to influence others to act voluntarily and in accordance with their own plan without conveying impressions of invested interest. Goffman uses the example of the telephone call to demonstrate the socialization of public telephone use which can assist the receiver to impress their popularity on others involved in the situation (in his example roommates who are overhearing the phone call). An online equivalent might be Instagram, where a shared image is hashtagged with multiple and not-always-relevant hashtags in order to attract more views and likes and thereby give an impression to a social circle of being more popular and successful.

Persona Through Personalization

While software studies and political economy theory identify the potentially harmful influence of the algorithm at work in software platforms and social media, there is still an important degree of agency in the individualization and personalization that is afforded to users typically in the post-Web 2.0 digital environment. Devices that are worn, or are quite personal, such as the Apple Watch or the iPhone, are the same as everyone else's; yet each one, once observed, can demonstrate a massive range of personalization and are examples of the ways we all recreate ourselves in and with these media devices. This personalization also points to how central the devices are for many in accessing the Internet and producing themselves online. The Apple iPhoto roll is an example of this everyday phenomenon, and an example of the way and degree to which we recreate and mediatize our lives in all sorts of ways. We also share these images so that more of our lives become visible to our audiences and networks. What is new in the current situation is the degree to which **presentational media** has been made a cultural regime thanks to the ubiquity with which we all produce personalized content and the means by which we share such personal content with others. Everyone everywhere is making versions of themselves, in public, in private, at play, at work, and at rest, through ubiquitously connected devices and the result is a persona which represents the strategic public identity, purposefully and directed.

As introduced above, Goffman uses theatrical metaphors to highlight the contextual nature of expressions. His insights map directly onto the concept of persona as an analytical tool to explore the contemporary production of the self in an era of presentational media. The presentation of performance, not just the act of performance, is an extraordinarily important part of public life and the identity of a public figure. It has long been the case for politicians that popularity and the perception of their public performance of self has been a

factor in how policies are accepted or rejected. Celebrity performance is not limited to the text, but also includes the paratextual industries, creative industries, and the niche domains of fandom, through interviews, advertising, and commercial sponsorship. The private lives of celebrities too have become part of the panoptic gaze of their public consumption, reducing the boundaries of performance described by Goffman's sociological account. Goffman understood performance of the self as a conscious staging and managing of norms and expectations, defining a difference between the backstage and frontstage of self-characterization that has proven more historically liminal for celebrities. The ritual of self-performance in celebrity culture has revealed a more nuanced collaboration between the public and private; as Marshall (2010) notes, the actor Vin Diesel has used social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to carefully reveal aspects of his private self that he has used to connect to fans and promote his public and professional self, which is expressed through a range of interests from extreme sports to the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*. The personal is interspersed with more traditional elements of publicity such as behind-the-scenes images, production meeting lunches, and studio-sanctioned interviews. The notion of authenticity is reorganized to be understood as a public construction of the private, presenting an accessible but equally constructed "performance of the actor's everyday life" (Marshall 2010) as a series of strategies that can be replicated as a marker of success by his fans.

Today, more than ever, writes Glenn D'Cruz (2015), we find ourselves performing our personal selves in public as much as our professional ones – parent, worker, lover, friend, hobbyist. He argues that these multiple and conflicting identities have become more difficult to make distinctions in and between. Even in the home, he argues, there is a great deal of compulsion to adopt persona in order to make emotional connections, quell animosity and provide pedagogical guidance for those closest to ourselves, reducing those sites of "back stage" performance where we are not under the critical gaze of an audience.

The modernist, argues Gergen (1991, p. 272) understands the self as one who "should" possess a unified identity, and modernist discourse considered the self fully knowable and coherent. The challenge of technological innovation and its popular adoption gave way to the postmodernist inversion of the unified notion of the self, where "there is little lament, anxiety, or dread at aimless fragmentation, which simply becomes a way of life without strongly negative connotations." The postmodern sense of identity is a crowded population of multiple selves. The modernist concept of a "core" identity gave way to the postmodern realization of identity as forms of social construction of roles, costumes, and settings, simultaneously encouraging the development of the identity industries, where the personal is assembled according to the material outcomes of professionalism: the resumé, reference, or curriculum vitae. These

artifacts and practices all work to construct the individual and construct the reality of the actor. Klapp's (1964) contribution to the conception of a persona is derived from a social psychological perspective. Klapp identifies a type of influence that circulated between the performance and audience, as it circulated within and outside the entertainment industries, particularly Hollywood and television, but also radio and print. The imagined, constructed, and expressed desires of the target audience become symbolically significant in the representation of the professional performer.

Our inquiry into the dimensions of the public self and the formation of personality for popular consumption and derived from what might be called celebrity culture now sets the scene for the development of wide scale public individualism. For example, the subversive politics of hip-hop culture as its staged resistance through play and its adoption of the mask as a form of subversion, enables rap artists to confuse, divest, overplay, and undermine the music industry's unequal standards of authenticity and the requirements of advertising and marketing (Hess 2005). Hip-hop music, as Mark Fisher (2009) remind us, is entirely a spectacle of individualism that cannot escape capitalism. Its generic performance identity as producing the "real" or "uncompromising" self has enabled hip-hop's easy absorption into a "real" narrative of economic instability that permits the production and performance of "authenticity" in a highly marketable way.

Social media and social network sites are fundamentally organized symbolically and economically around the individual's presentation of the self and that presentation's relations to others in ways that have created a new hybridity of personal, private, interpersonal, and mediated information and messages that are distributed by what Marshall (2010) calls "presentational media." The celebrity discourse of the self foreshadows and provides pedagogical tools for the expanding domain of presentational media, which is not a shift away from representational media but rather its inculcation as an element in the DNA of new media culture.

Celebrity culture is an important tool for making sense of the new middle of self-expression that is part performance, part assemblage of objects, part mediation and part interpersonal communication. Stars, politicians, and public figures have been navigating this terrain intensely for the better part of a century and now find themselves often at the center of social media networks, Internet cultures, and mobile media consumption whose audience and participants reflect their activities. Despite ongoing criticism of the value of celebrity culture, its composition of famous individuals and their audiences continues to grow at the increasing cost of the personal. Prior to the Internet's domestication through home computers and its ubiquitous presence via smart phones and wireless devices, the transgression of famous figures' personal lives for public consumption was framed as tabloid consumption, at its best, and an

illegal invasion of privacy constituting criminal harassment, at its worst (Roberts 1997). We have now moved into a wider and more pervasive expression of public identity and looking at it through the lens of persona helps us understand its expression of individuality in a collective and mediated environment.

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