

# INTRODUCTION: PERSONAS AT WORK

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In 2001, Canadian performance artist Chris Lloyd began a multi-year performance piece entitled *Dear PM*. The project sought to both critique the Canadian political system and challenge the uni-directional flow of information between political figures and the everyday citizen. It began as a “daily-style” letter-writing campaign and eventually moved online where it remains to this day (<https://dearpmprojects.wordpress.com>). However, the scope of *Dear PM* is considerably broader and includes international exhibitions of these letters, papier-mâché Canadiana (presumably crafted from shredded letters), videos such as the one on the front cover of this issue, and participation in a variety of political forums, including membership in all of Canada’s major political parties (McKenna et al).<sup>i</sup> In May 2015, it was this latter art/practice/work/performance that swiftly propelled Lloyd and the question of legitimate work personas into the national spotlight.



Fig 1: Lloyd as Conservative Candidate



Fig 2: Lloyd with Prime Minister Stephen Harper<sup>ii</sup>

Images courtesy of Chris Lloyd

Critical of Canada’s “first past the post” electoral system and the Conservative party mandate that did not seem to allow for deviation from party policy, Lloyd adopted a Conservative political “persona” (Hamilton; McKenna, Daigle, and Rubinger) and entered the political fray. Without difficulty (and, he claims, without misrepresenting or obscuring his previous political and artistic activities[“Information”]), Lloyd found himself the Conservative candidate for the Papineau electoral district in Québec, a hopeless but rather famous riding for being the constituency of Justin Trudeau, the Liberal party leader and national celebrity.<sup>iii</sup> His platform, he argued later, was to adopt the party line and see if he could render it “unpalatable,” and to contribute to the vote-splitting that could, potentially, “take down Justin Trudeau in his own backyard” (Hamilton). However, the creative foundations for this work did not sit well with either the media or the Conservative party. In a dramatic news report on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) implicated that Lloyd could not be a serious or sincere politician because he was a “performance artist” pursuing an “art project” (McKenna).

Within 24 hours, representatives of the Conservative party were on Lloyd’s doorstep demanding his resignation. The issue at stake was not whether Lloyd was doing his job but, rather, how he was *seen* to be doing the job. It was, ultimately, a question of image management.

For the Conservatives it was necessary to rapidly distance themselves from Lloyd, not simply because his work seemed to render them ridiculous and incompetent (at least in terms of how the media and other parties represented the events), but also because Lloyd's candidacy betrayed how easy it was to adopt a Conservative persona, and revealed such an identity as a performance rather than a sincere and authentic representation of the self. Such a creative play of surfaces is dangerous in a profession where work personas are expected to function as though they are expressions of an identity also performed in non-work contexts, and disciplined if they do not. The public attention that attended the revelation of Lloyd's work persona as performance seemed to overwhelm him and he resigned as requested. Former Radio-Canada journalist, Yvon Vadnais, was tapped to take his place. After a brief reprieve to regroup, Lloyd rejoined the Papineau political race: this time as an independent candidate with a brand that clearly highlights an artistic and coolly detached approach to politics and self-representation.<sup>iv</sup>



Fig 3: Lloyd's New Independent Platform  
Image Credit: Clément de Gaulejac

These events remind us that the legitimization of our labour depends a great deal on the persona perceived to perform it. It is not sufficient to simply do work and/or do it well, but its cultural, economic, and political value is shaped by the identity that performs it—hence why former US President George W. Bush could not only command an exhibition of his rather uninspiring portraits of world leaders (Stengle), but why the Canadian public initially believed a satirical article that claimed the Canadian government paid 1.5 million US to secure Harper's portrait (The Lapine). However, if politicians, especially retired ones, are permitted to dabble in the arts, and artists are expected (if not encouraged) to use their work to political ends, then why the great fuss over Lloyd's work? The scandal of the situation, it appears, owes a great deal to the discourses that rendered it: the CBC reports were replete with strategic emphasis that suggested the subversive and untrustworthy nature of *performance art* and *artists*, and depended on "behind-the-scenes" discourses that construct false fronts and "real" depths (McKenna; McKenna et al; "Information"). In this linguistic economy Lloyd's Conservative political persona becomes both subversive and a false front, and the artist persona becomes the real identity responsible for the production of all labour.

The aftermath of Lloyd's political persona performance reveals some deeply embedded assumptions and practices about the personas we mobilize at work. It is clear that we depend on work personas to, in a sense, "carry on" in the manner in which they are presented to us: we expect, hope, and need politicians (and workers in general) to remain true to the public identity they have cultivated so that we know how to interact with them. This does not mean we expect such personas to be "real," but they are a critical site of investment: hence, while Lloyd's artist persona seemed to compromise the legitimacy of his Conservative platform, it gave new life to his Independent platform. His performance of persona also seems to draw uneasy attention to the scaffolding of persona construction. As Lloyd argued in one interview, we all engage in persona work and "his Conservative straight-man persona was no more fraudulent than other candidates who profess to support every item in their party's platforms" (Hamilton). Nevertheless, the media coverage of the event betrays a distinct dis-ease about how to manage and engage with an openly-acknowledged persona performance—as though this changes the stakes and the legitimacy of the persona, its labour, and our interactions with it. Another interesting thread that develops from this scenario is how persona creation and performance becomes explicitly recognized as not just work, but *creative work*: while work personas can be put on like uniforms and set aside at the end of our shifts, they are more often embodied and performed in ways that demand our creative and artistic energies. And lastly, Lloyd's example

lays bare what a “delicate, fragile thing” (Goffman 56) our work persona performance is and how it is subject to conditions, surveillance, and disciplinary measures.

In this special issue we take up many of these threads in order to examine and to better understand the work persona as a public identity we mobilize and perform to manage the demands of our labour. In particular we are interested in work as a social condition that makes particular demands on us, and compels and inspires us to craft and perform particular identities. The ways in which our labour and our employers shape, influence, and discipline our constructions and performances of persona in work settings does not, however, negate our agency in this process: the negotiation and management of sometimes competing and contradictory roles, impulses, and desires can be a site of anxiety and friction but also of creativity. In this introduction to the issue, work personas are framed as necessary—perhaps even inevitable—identity performances that are a condition of work, working, and interacting with other workers. However, because the conditions of how, where, and why we labour and what constitutes “work” have changed significantly over time, so too have our strategies for producing and performing work identities. In our present moment, the work persona has explicitly and self-consciously entered the marketplace as a valuable commodity as both employers and employees become hyper-aware of the significance, function, and processes of image management. Moreover, the ways in which digital and social media have changed our work cultures now make it increasingly difficult to talk about and perform a work persona that is a distinct entity from personas performed in other contexts.

The second half of this introduction, “Shall Ye Know Them By Their Fruits?,” investigates how work persona production carries on in the fruits of our labour. It begins by looking to the ways that popular culture betrays our attitudes, ambitions, and fantasies about managing work as unique and autonomous individuals, and how we have used entertainment products like films to make sense of the public identities of the individuals who are visibly celebrated for making them. Our labour and the products of our labour do persona-work, and when our labour circulates away from us, the ways in which it performs a/our persona can rest in the hands of those interacting with it. Thus, in addition to offering up new perspectives on various performances of work personas, the contributions to this issue also do persona-work themselves and say something about the ways in which each contributor understands and performs his or her labour. That labour is the backbone of this issue, offering us the means to think through how personas work, do work, and are work. To that conversation, this introduction is something of a preface—a means by which to sketch some contexts and frameworks for thinking about these issues and to historicize some of their developments, and to help us understand how and why the art of work persona production and performance is, like Lloyd’s political campaigns, contentious, fragile, in flux, and potentially culturally, politically, and economically valuable.

## **WORK PERSONAS: MANAGING THE DEMANDS OF LABOUR**

In “Making Intellectual Room for Persona Studies: A New Consciousness and a Shifted Perspective,” P. David Marshall and Kim Barbour remind us that persona is an identity played and performed “by the individual in social settings” (2). Social settings both compel and shape the production of the identity and thus the performance and persona cannot be fully anticipated and predicted—it comes to life as it is produced and deployed. Nevertheless, certain social situations allow us to prepare our performances in advance and give us frequent opportunities to deploy them; in the contexts of our working lives, the personas we mobilize there are often the result of years of observation, conditioning, and practice. This identity that we learn to craft and mobilize in order to manage the demands of our labour (both paid and unpaid) usually has little to do with skills and knowledge accumulated through formal schooling.<sup>v</sup> More often, it is the product of some on-the-job training and a great deal of practice navigating the explicit

policies and implied cultures of our workplace. As a result, we learn a great deal from both our successful and disastrous performances at work.

The acquisition of a persuasive and authoritative work persona is a not insignificant asset for job security and serves a variety of other personal functions as well; however, as an identity created by and for a particular social situation, it has much broader social functions. As Goffman notes in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, personas crafted and mobilized for work situations are instrumental in establishing social ease between participants:

Instead of having to maintain a different pattern of expectation and responsive treatment for each slightly different performer and performance, he can place the situation in a broad category around which it is easy for him to mobilize his past experience and stereo-typical thinking. Observers then need only be familiar with a small and hence manageable vocabulary of fronts, and know how to respond to them, in order to orient themselves in a wide variety of situations. (26)

The work persona, whether we occupy it ourselves or engage with someone who does, may constrain us into particular patterns of behaviour, but it allows us considerable freedom from anxiety and the labour of negotiating new communication. The alternative is, frankly, terrifying: imagine if each time we bought a cup of coffee, the experience lacked precedent, as though we were about to participate for the first time in an unfamiliar and foreign ceremony. Work personas allow (and compel) us to assume identities and roles that transcend multiple scenarios and allow us to negotiate with relative ease, analogous situations, but, as a result, it can also make the unique identities of the individual participants irrelevant. You are a barista and I am a customer: so long as our roles ensure the ritual exchange proceeds seamlessly, each of us is interchangeable, disposable, and quickly forgotten.

The ways in which companies, organizations, and institutions work to keep us in those roles is the subject of intense study and research: identity and identity work in employment situations has been one of the preeminent sites of research and interest in the fields of organizational and management studies (Sveningsson and Alvesson as qtd in Brown 20). While persona does not form a critical or explicit discourse in these studies, these works nevertheless have a tendency to invoke similar theoretical frameworks as often used in persona studies.<sup>vi</sup> Of particular interest in these studies are the hard and soft mechanisms employed by organizations to manufacture, shape, and control the working identities of employees. The hard tools—those that are structural and explicit—include induction, training, evaluation and assessment, surveillance and discipline, promotion, and policy (amongst others). The soft tools—those that are cultural and implicit—include office cultures, peer pressures, discourse, and body language. Our physical and communicative interactions with others, for example, are governed by law *and* by our organizations and/or professional bodies but, depending on one's employment and/or the organization, one might find one's appearance, language, body language, mannerisms, and even emotions prescribed and monitored. In such ways, organizations dictate, pressure, or steer us towards particular kinds of work identities.

For my barista, then, there will be a range of acceptable professional identities he (or she) can perform and these will have been implicitly and explicitly, specifically and vaguely outlined by colleagues, employers, professional bodies, and work culture. Baristas are expected to look and behave a certain way because their work personas are critical instruments for efficient, speedy, and profitable transactions with me. Moreover, this persona is instrumental in conveying not just a cup of coffee, but an experience and a brand—the barista is supposed to embody and communicate a range of means that were once the responsibility of the product (Brannan, Parsons, and Priole 5). The performance of this role will be both supervised and under surveillance: like most service workers, baristas labour under the watchful gaze of strategically placed visual and audio recording devices. Those in hospitality are not the only workers to labour under such conditions: anyone who works with the public is usually expected

to assume a particular kind of persona which will be monitored and regulated by others. Indeed, all professions and forms of employment whether paid or unpaid have a range of specific and general expectations that govern what kinds of personas we should develop for the social nature of our work. Our performance in these roles is witnessed by others in some way and this has a significant effect not only on how we perform those identities and our work, but on our future prospects in that work: our work personas are, to invoke Foucault, disciplined and a form of discipline.

From a humanist perspective, then, the organizational work identity can strip us of our humanity—it is no surprise that dystopic representations of the future fixate on an automated, dehumanized workforce. In *Cloud Atlas* (2004), David Mitchell gives us a future where hospitality workers are “fabricants” grown to work and whose distinctive personalities and autonomy are chemically suppressed. Sonmi-451, who has attained consciousness and cultivated an identity distinct from her labour in a fast food chain, is no longer fit for work and is, presumably, destroyed. Such representations of tyrannical political or economic systems that exert supreme control over our labour and our identities are a hallmark of the twentieth century imagination inspired, no doubt, by the advent of the assembly line and mass culture; developments in communications technologies; global warfare, genocide, and other gross violations of human rights; a new global economy; environmental destruction, and the impact of all of these on our working lives. Despite our not-entirely-unfounded fears, we are not (yet) the labouring pawns and product of global multinationals. As many scholars have pointed out, we actively negotiate, respond, contest, and manage the organizational pressures that shape our work personas (Alvesson and Willmott 621; Tarnovskaya). We remain agents in our work identity production and performance:

Identities are neither simply chosen nor merely allocated but are instead the effects of identity work that occurs in the interstices between domination and resistance [...] Identities arise in a continuing dialectic of ‘structure’ and ‘agency,’ and are most reasonably described as ‘improvised’ or ‘crafted’ through identity work processes that are sometimes calculative and pragmatic, often emotionally charged, and generally social. (Brown 26)

As workers, a sense of our distinctive identities cannot be effaced because, at the most basic level, how we interpret and respond to mandated work personas and the organizational pressures to assume them will depend (to some degree) upon our personal skills, talents, and inclinations. To be an agent in this process, however, is to betray signs of actively negotiating these “structures”: to find strategic ways to occupy, resist, remake, or challenge this organizational identity in a way that might serve one’s own interests. This could mean performances that are designed to bring us personal pleasure or enjoyment, or that assert aspects of our identities cultivated outside of work such as how we fashion and groom our bodies and our work spaces, assert particular cultural or political investments, or showcase particular strengths and weakness of our personalities (such as a sense of humour or lack thereof). When we personalize and assert identities cultivated beyond organizational controls, we also affect how others read our work identities and, perhaps, work with us.

Our agency in work persona production is found not just in our personal idiosyncrasies and strategic activities, but also in our identity “play.” As Brown argues: “While ‘work’ is often associated with compliance, rationality, logic and a means-end orientation, ‘play’ implicates a different set of potentially generative ideas relating to enjoyment, discovery, intuition, imagined others, spontaneity and fantasy...” (25). To be silly, irreverent, inconsistent, ironic, imaginative and playful at work and in how we represent ourselves at work can be a means to escape, challenge, or subvert organizational or professional identity scripts. These activities also, importantly, disrupt and challenge organizational pressures that demand consistent, unified, accountable identities. Play allows us to introduce contradiction, and to draw attention to the performative, fragmented, unstable, and ongoing nature of identity work. Not surprisingly,

there are certain risks associated with such play: our ability to do our work or convincingly perform more serious work identities might suffer or, as Chris Lloyd discovered, we might find our work identity altogether discredited and formally delegitimized.

In the twenty-first century, our labouring lives continue to play a significant role in how we represent ourselves outside of work: as Sinéad Ruane notes, “We are socially programmed, upon being introduced to someone new, to ask ‘what do you do?’ We believe that ‘who we are’ is inextricably linked to ‘what we do.’ The assumption, of course, is that the ‘doing’ refers to employment...” (9). However, the mechanisms of “doing” have undergone a “radical transformation” (Brannan, Parsons, Priola 3) in the last two and half decades and, as a result, so too have the kinds of personas we are cultivating and performing for these new work conditions. One of the most significant and widely discussed changes arises from computing technology, or more specifically the use of those technologies for communication purposes. Social media has dramatically reshaped the media, mechanisms, and spaces of work, compelling us to perform new or altered personas through new media and for potentially unknown and unknowable audiences and contexts. Many forms of employment now require us to cultivate an online presence, and the performance of which adds considerably to our work and stress load as Sharyn McDonald examines in this issue. As media and working conditions change rapidly, our online work personas always seem to be both out-dated and works in progress as we struggle to keep up with new media developments, navigate the competing and sometimes contradictory impulses of our other labour persona performances, and manage the ever-changing bureaucratic and disciplinary infrastructures that constrain and regulate these performances.

These media changes to how we work have increasingly blurred what boundaries might previously have distinguished our labouring and non-labouring lives and the personas we performed in them. Although we are continually reminded of the dangers inherent in this “context collapse” (Marwick and boyd), and experts strongly advise us to distinguish between our professional and persona social media activities (Millennial Branding), the reality of the matter is that many of us don’t. While we do not lack for new media venues for strictly professional work personas—LinkedIn, for example, claims to have 380 million users (“About LinkedIn”)vii—venues that allow for more crossover between professional and personal lives, like Facebook with its 1.49 billion active users (“Our History”)viii or Twitter with 316 million active users (“Twitter Usage”), remain incredibly popular and pervasive. It would seem that we are not always interested in keeping our work and non-working lives strictly distinct: we still talk about work at home and of home at work, but we now increasingly take our work home and on holidays and sneak time for personal interests at work. Our labouring lives are losing those clearly demarked boundaries and “settings” (Goffman 22) for the performance of a work persona and it is social media and mobile technologies that allow and compel us to do so. Moreover, the repercussions of this are slowly becoming evident as individuals increasingly find themselves disciplined at work for activities and speech acts enacted in non-working contexts (usually on social media), a condition that, not long ago, had predominantly effected public figures rather than private citizens.

Another significant shift in the work cultures of late modernity is the rise of job insecurity, part-time and contractual work, and self-employment, and the increased likelihood of changing jobs and/or careers (Ruane 13, 16) . Many, if not most of us, will wear different hats in part-time and full-time capacities in diverse and unrelated fields over our lifetime. In such a labour climate, we must necessarily be flexible and adaptable in our persona construction and this is not easy to do, as Andrea Sant discusses in this issue: the competing demands of our multiple spheres of labour are not always or easily reconciled and the attempt to do so can have significant personal and professional effects.

One effect of this job market that has attracted considerable scholarly and popular interest, is the rise of branding by and of individuals. In work contexts this has materialized as

two distinctive trajectories: self-branding and employee branding. In self-branding we take up the project of creating unique and remarkable public identities that can further our career prospects, a process that Christine Harold defines as part persona production and part marketing strategy:

Personal branding encourages workers to package and market themselves as an advertiser would a product, to distinguish themselves from the pack with a coherent online messaging and distinctive aesthetic. Done well, say advocates, personal brands should convey not only one's skill set, but one's personality as well. (342)

As Harold rightly points out, when we commoditize our identities and our labour in response to the market, we may very well find ourselves having to "continually reinvent ourselves as trends dictate" (350). This is rendered more complicated by the fact that personal brands are not just a reflection of the market, but they must *resonate* within it through the cultivation of "distinctive[ness]"—what the "Personal Branding for Dummies Cheat Sheet" disturbingly characterizes as an identifiable "freak factor" (Chritton).

Employee branding, on the other hand, is a corporate strategy for making workers over in the image of a company or product ethos. While this is not a new employment strategy, it has recently become more systematic, explicit, and robust (Brannan, Parsons and Priola 6). It seems to be simultaneously inspired by and fueling a marketplace where "much of the work that once was restricted to the materiality of the product, such as the embodiment of capital, quality, ethos, etc, can now be communicated by other means" (Brannan, Parsons, and Priola 5). One of these other means is the employee who, like my barista earlier in this section, is tasked with not only delivering a product, but infusing that product with further meaning and value through a work persona: this persona will be part of how I experience the corporate brand. It is worth noting that such human resources strategies do not affect all employees of the same organization or industry equally: frontline workers at coffee shops and clothing retailers, for example, are more heavily affected than agricultural and sweatshop labourers.<sup>ix</sup>

Self-branding and employee-branding, although strategic activities that originate at opposite ends (the individual works bottom-up and the corporation top-down), are not necessarily contradictory or competing projects. Individuals seek (for the most part) meaningful and stable employment and employers want employees whose work activities contribute to the image, well-being, and profitability of the company or institution. Both employee and employing body view the labourer's identity as *flexible, strategic, and capable of change*, as well as a *critical asset* in the marketplace. In many scenarios, the work persona project is not strictly a work performance: what is sought after in many cases (whether sincerely or superficially) is not an image contained to work spaces, but one mobilized across multiple spheres of activities and embedded in one's "lifestyle" (Brannan, Parsons, and Priola 4). Workers, particularly in corporate and institutional settings, find themselves encouraged to "model themselves after organizational images" (4) and training policies encourage employees to become and *to live* the work brand (Brannan, Parsons, and Priola 2). Elsewhere, hiring practices seek to use and capitalize on the trendiness of particular personas (think, for example, of the prevalence of the hipster aesthetic in certain urban businesses and industries). Not surprisingly, these efforts to breakdown or blur the distinctions between work and non-work lives have raised numerous questions and concerns about "what constitutes appropriate selves" in work environments (Brannan, Parsons, and Priola 1).

## SHALL YE KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS?

In popular culture we are fascinated by this question of appropriate selves in the work place. In fictional television programming about work and work lives, for example, the drama or comedy of these scenes is often derived from the personalities at work rather than the specific

nature of the labour itself.<sup>x</sup> In American television, for example, characters with strong idiosyncratic personalities that seem at odds with the nature of their labour often become cultural institutions: think of those bumbling agents of the law like Maxwell Smart (*Get Smart*) and Lt. Columbo (*Columbo*), or irreverent professionals with weighty responsibilities like Dr. Greg House (*House*) or Captain Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce (*M\*A\*S\*H*). In films about work and work lives, the crux of the matter is rarely about maintaining a strict adherence to one’s professional identity and labour roles (such characters are often dystopic automatons, enemies, or great fools), but about being able to expand and adapt to the changing demands of the work. Characters are rendered distinctive, admirable, and triumphant because of the personal strengths and idiosyncrasies they brought to their labour. Box office favourites have included astronaut Ellen Ripley (*Alien*); spy James Bond (*James Bond*); police officer Axel Foley (*Beverly Hills Cop*); and archaeologist Dr. Henry “Indiana” Jones (*Indiana Jones*): all of these characters have been resurrected for multiple subsequent films.<sup>xi</sup> In television and film, these characters not only break with the protocols of professional behaviour, but also often manage to escape or sidestep the social, legal, or moral systems that might discipline such breaks in work persona. This we find if not always admirable, certainly entertaining.

These television shows and films—like all popular culture products regardless of whether they offer up representations of work or not—are also critical sites of and products of labour produced by particular personas. Typically only a narrow range of individuals find their labour and labouring personas made public in relation to these products: in television and film, for example, it is often the creators, directors, producers, and actors whose labour is publicly acknowledged and celebrated beyond the purview of production credits and award ceremonies. These are the *visible* workers with personas that are understood in relation to their labour and the products of their work. Yet, how that persona is framed as a work identity that arises from labour and skill can vary dramatically. In television programming, particularly non-fiction programs, the identities at work are often read as extensions of their “real” selves: that *really is* Oprah Winfrey (*Oprah*) or Ellen DeGeneres (*Ellen*). In such scenarios, the labour of producing a televisual self is made invisible (Bennett 117), and audiences can come to expect the off-screen identity to behave like the on-screen work persona. In the feature film industry, on the other hand, the labour of actors in the production of their on-screen characters is widely recognized and celebrated, often in terms of “craft,” “skill,” and “talent.” Nevertheless, even while we praise (or lament) an actor’s skills and recognize the distinction between the actor and the character, one’s persona as an actor can be significantly shaped by the kinds of characters he or she excels at representing and the kinds of cinematic projects pursued. Women in Hollywood, from Mary Pickford to Charlize Theron, have been able to cultivate reputations as strategic and independent actresses because they are seen to have chosen great films with strong female characters and to have skillfully portrayed those roles. John Cusack, on the other hand, is widely regarded as an intelligent and cagey actor because of his professional approach to Hollywood—he is, as Lorraine York argues, a “reluctant” celebrity (9)—and his penchant for pursuing independent and/or artistic films. Not surprisingly this persona is considerably buttressed by his skill at playing quirky, but usually lovable, characters who don’t quite fit into mainstream society. Other visible workers in the film industry, such as directors, are also publicly perceived in terms of their labour: Alfred Hitchcock and Quentin Tarantino, for example, are understood in terms of the recognizable style and aesthetic of their films and their films are understood as expressions of their public work personas.

Celebrity cultures remind us that certain cultural products circulate apart from the individuals who laboured on them and act as expressions of the labourer’s identity: in such a way, “things” become capable of performing personas. We are most accustomed to seeing this at work in the arts where traces of an author, artist, musician, or actor’s identity as an author, artist, etc. are perceived in the products of their labour. In the plays of Oscar Wilde, the novels of Margaret Atwood, the music of David Bowie, or the performance art of Chris Lloyd, we see in their works some inclination of the persona that produced the work: we often take some

comfort and satisfaction in identifying and attributing a philosophy, a style, tone or political perspective apparent in a product to the persona perceived to have produced it. However, there is considerable scope to investigate how the labour products and activities of other kinds of workers reveal some aspect of their labouring identities. A wine list, for example, can reveal not just the conditions of the work (the type of place and consumers), but can also act as an expression of the sommelier's personality (Watson). It is not unusual for the activities and products of curating and collecting to be read in terms of the identity of the archivist or collector, particularly when such activities happen in public spaces and/or unsanctioned ways, as Jo Ann Oravec examines in her article on workplace hoarding. There are, in fact, many ways that working personas are revealed through labour, particularly when such work is perceived to be substandard, inappropriate, or too closely aligned with the personal and the private: the dog-eared essay suggests a careless student; the overly informal signature or avatar in workplace correspondence suggests a new, young, or, perhaps, uncommitted employee; and the antiquated websites and teaching tools of academics betray an ineptitude or, perhaps, indifference to the technological demands of their labour. The opposite conditions remain true as well: the timely submission of properly formatted assignments tells us a student cares about his or her work; serious and professional correspondence conveys experience and confidence; and the professor mobilizing multiple platforms for research and teaching appears worldly, competent, and significant. In the work of scientists, administrators, corporate executives, farmers, and others, I suspect, one also finds traces of the work identity of the worker though they may be only apparent to others in the same field or offer an expression of a general work identity: this memo bears the stamp of a public relations officer; these blasting marks suggest an impatient demolitions expert; the arrangement of these hay bales reveals an experienced agricultural hand.

Whether we “give”—intentionally produce—or “give off”—inadvertently perform in ways read and interpreted by others—these signs of our particular or general work persona in our work (Goffman 2), it is clear that our labour is part of a work persona and performs persona-work in its own right. It is thus, not a little self-conscious about my own work identities—both past and present—that I embarked upon this task of curating a collection of creative and critical works on the topic of work personas and crafting an introduction to it. In what ways will this introduction and issue speak (or be made to speak) to my own negotiation and performance of the labour of being an academic and new scholar in a precarious job market? In what ways do these contributions represent, reveal, and perform the academic *and* creative personas of their authors? In this issue, I have chosen not to organize the pieces according to their contribution to either a creative or critical component: all of these works, I would argue, are functions of creative and critical labour, although some more explicitly than others. All of these works are also engaged in their own performances of a labouring identity even as they engage in understanding and representing the work persona performances of others.

This issue opens with Sasha Colby's “Staging Nancy Cunard: The Question of Persona in Dramatizing Her Life and Work,” a contribution that offers up excerpts from different drafts of the author's work to create a play about Nancy Cunard, the heiress, fashion icon and political agitator whose image, style and political work had a dramatic effect on various Modernist writers. In her critical preface to these drafts, Colby details how Cunard's work and public identity have been variously constructed by different critics over time, and argues for the importance of recognizing both her labour and her identity as a labourer.

Drawing his inspiration from the photography and work of Allan Sekula, Brian Beaton explores the patterns and trends in how petroleum geologists eulogized each other through obituaries printed in professional publications. “Crafting a Work Persona in 1970s Petroleum Geology” demonstrates that there was a particular kind of public image these workers sought to create of themselves and their labour, and this image was somewhat at odds with both the publicness of the publication and the controversial nature of their work.

“Lipstick Bullets: Labour and Gender in Professional Gamer Self-Branding,” by Andrew Zolides, takes up the question of how professional gamers cultivate marketable personas that can last longer than their competitive careers. Using two case studies, he highlights the gendered nature of that labour and argues that female gamers find themselves under particular pressures to find creative ways to navigate this masculinized labour in a masculine market.

In “Responsible Management of Online Academic Reputations,” Sharyn McDonald explores the intense pressures academics face to cultivate an online presence as part of their professional identity. While there are significant advantages to this work, McDonald demonstrates there can also be far-reaching and troubling consequences. Her article usefully concludes with a series of recommendations that university institutions can act upon to manage this additional burden to academic work loads and mitigate the risks associated with an online presence.

Also engaging with the nature of labouring in academia, Andrea Sant’s “A Rehearsal for Revolution: The Hybrid Persona of the Graduate Student Teacher” examines the sometimes contradictory duties, inclinations, and labour of the graduate student who occupies positions as both student and instructor in one institution. Reflecting on her own experiences and attempts to challenge and manage this system, she reanimates a declaration of labour conduct crafted in her student days to guide her present labour practices.

In “Depraved, Distracted, Disabled, or Just ‘Pack Rats’? Workplace Hoarding Personas in Physical and Virtual Realms,” Jo Ann Oravec examines what it means to be characterized as a hoarder in relation to the collection of physical and virtual items. When such a persona is assumed or perceived in workplace settings, her article outlines, the responses and strategies of human resource staff can make an impact on how hoarding behaviours are managed.

In *Hell’s Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (1966), Hunter S. Thompson represents himself as simultaneously “one of the gang” and ethnographic observer, strategically outside and yet at the very centre of things. It was a style of journalism that made him famous but, as Jennifer Hagen Forsberg examines in “Working Through Hunter S. Thompson’s Strange and Terrible Saga,” it also necessitated that he work across class lines and posture a conflicted and contradictory professional identity. Using Peterson and Kern’s notion of the “cultural omnivore,” Forsberg examines how Thompson created a very marketable journalistic work persona.

In the last contribution of the issue, Ayellet Ben Ner offers a portrait of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann as told in fragments and images through an Israeli sex-trade worker. “Image of the Absent,” translated and published in English for the first time, troubles how we make sense of identities in relation to labour performed, implied, and omitted or absent, and how language, discourse, and photography make such identities simultaneously stable and unstable.

There are some distinct threads and emerging themes in how the contributors to this issue are thinking about, playing with, and performing work personas. There is clearly a great deal of interest in the capacity of life writing forms to reveal and perform persona; how the pressures and expectations of our labour and the job market influence strategic persona production; and how personal idiosyncrasies are expressed, repressed, or repackaged under particular industry conditions or within bureaucratic structures. Interestingly, most of these papers touch on more than one of these themes, but in distinct and quite exciting ways. There’s a rich and lively conversation here that is, at times, provocative, creative, and performative, but it is always, in some way, crucial and relevant.

For most of us, we shall spend a significant portion of our adult lives involved in some form of paid labour; many also have the additional work load of unpaid domestic responsibilities. It is, perhaps, not surprising then that the first special issue of *Persona Studies*

is dedicated to examining an issue that touches us all. However, this study of work personas matters for more reasons than the scope of its relevance; it also offers a precedent for examining either in broad or focused ways how particular social situations affect the production and performance of persona. It will encourage, I hope, further creative and critical investigations into how personas are regulated and disciplined, how they are strategically produced and managed, and what kinds of artistic energies and skills go into these performances. In the work of these eight contributors we have multiple, different models for how to proceed in this task, and for their intellectual and creative labour in assembling this issue, I give thanks and appreciation.

## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> For some of the exhibitions, images, and videos of the *Dear PM* project, see [http://dearpm.blogspot.com.au/p/dear-pm-exhibitions\\_28.html](http://dearpm.blogspot.com.au/p/dear-pm-exhibitions_28.html).

<sup>ii</sup> Harper lost the federal election on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, but retains the prime ministerial title until the swearing in ceremony (Treble).

<sup>iii</sup> Trudeau has what Chris Rojek would call “ascribed” celebrity (17)—fame cultivated by virtue of birth or position because he is the son of the infamous Margaret Trudeau and former Liberal leader and Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau. Trudeau is presently the prime minister-designate after winning the 2015 federal election. Already the texture of his celebrity is changing as news media and memes circulate in relation to his youth and appearance. See Jennifer Bell’s work on the Trudeaus and Canadian political celebrity.

<sup>iv</sup> Lloyd ultimately secured 1% or 512 votes. Trudeau had 52% or 26, 294. (“Canada Votes 2015”).

<sup>v</sup> For example, those who are employed in healthcare, childcare, and social work are typically formally trained in the cultivation of professional identities.

<sup>vi</sup> For example, scholars of organization and management studies usually represent identity as a constructed and social phenomenon, and might cite Goffman or use discourses of performance in their analyses.

<sup>vii</sup> “Users” does not denote good or active accounts.

<sup>viii</sup> Facebook reported 1.49 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2015 (“Our History”).

<sup>ix</sup> Interestingly, both groups can find themselves mobilized and deployed in strategic ways when corporations seek to manage the commodity activism of consumers: it is no longer unusual, for example, for coffee shops to prominently showcase images of happy agricultural labourers or offer manifestos of fair labour practices. See Marshall’s “When the Private Becomes Public: Commodity Activism, Endorsement and Making Meaning in a Privatised World” for further reading on how commodity activism mobilizes private citizens in public and corporate ways.

<sup>x</sup> In reality television, as much entertainment value as possible is mined from the personalities at work, but many programs depend upon the obstacles presented by the labour—renovate a kitchen with a \$500 budget or cook a three-course meal with squid ink—to create drama.

<sup>xi</sup> This list does not take into account comic book characters or fantasy genres wherein one’s labour is also a calling and/or personal quest. Such genres are amongst the most popular

box office draws: *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (18 films), *Batman* (15 films), and *Lord of the Rings* (6 films) are listed, respectively, as the first, fifth, and sixth most profitable movie franchises ("Movie Franchises").

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