

POLITICAL PERSONA 2016—AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

It seems politics invades everything. We can rarely think of any activity, any building, any human-to-human interaction and not see some political dimension infiltrating and shaping it. And this very interpretation, in its language of invasion and infiltration, implies that politics' ubiquity is not necessarily a wanted accomplice in our human world. Nonetheless, its presence is expected, its strategic intentions acknowledged and negotiated.

What is interesting is that persona—at least as it has been explored and defined in *Persona Studies* so far—always has a political dimension. It has been identified as a strategic identity, a form of negotiation of the individual in their foray into a collective world of the social (Marshall and Barbour). Persona is a fabricated reconstruction of the individual that is used to play a role that both helps the individual navigate their presence and interactions with others and helps the collective to position the role of the individual in the social. Persona is imbued with politics at its core.

In this issue of *Persona Studies*, we explore political persona, a characterisation roiled in redundancy if our definitions above are adopted. The essays gathered in this collection debate these definitional affinities, and augment and nuance many other dimensions that help delineate what constitutes *political* persona. In this introductory essay, we will use the collected work on political persona that is developed in this issue to better define political persona. But before we evaluate and identify the intersections of our contributors' work, we want to begin our exploration with what makes political persona constitutively different today than in the past. Can we identify through some of the most prominent political personas—Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders in the United States' 2016 Presidential campaign, for example—and through a study of a major political event—Brexit in 2016 in the U.K.—whether something has shifted and changed in these cultures?

So here is our opening premise before we explore these political personas and political events, before we work out how Trump emerged and triumphed or how Brexit happened. First, that the changed media environment we now inhabit is producing a new, unstable political environment. This alone is an incredibly grand—perhaps technological determinist—claim. Nonetheless it is a claim that is linked to very visible transformations transnationally in our media production and media use. To particularise this further, central to this instability is the massive mediatisation of the self through the integration of online culture into everyday life. What we would like to claim is this: persona is a way to explore and investigate this shift and moment of instability, both in the way it operated in the past as a mediatised identity, and the way it is now pandemic and pervasive as a way of being in contemporary culture. What is emerging in our political cultures is a new competition between what we call a *representational media and cultural regime*—where the systems of representation and the array of individuals privileged in both politics and media are relatively stable and mutually legitimising—and the

emerging *presentational media and cultural regime*—where the pervasive mediatised and public self and its online performance, networking and sharing, operates as a complex filter for both the organisation and meaning of politics and culture.

To make this claim that there is some tectonic shift in our cultures, and that this particular tool of persona research can in some way elucidate how it has occurred and how to comprehend some of its future directions and manifestations, it is important for us to identify political persona more completely. So our first step in this introductory essay is to ask what kinds of ideas inform the concept of political persona. How is political persona connected to pre-existing fields and disciplines? From that basis, we might be able to discern the particular and peculiar dimensions of contemporary political persona that have led to some of the strangest political campaigns to emerge in the United States and the United Kingdom—and, as some of our articles in this special issue identify, well beyond these settings—in 2016.

POLITICAL PERSONA RESEARCH TO DATE

Research that specifically identifies political personas is quite recent. In political communication, there has been some exploration related to persona around authenticity and image. For instance, one of the most interesting studies tried to determine the relationship between the performances of the public persona and private persona of two American presidents (Sigelman). Through a comparison of public speeches and what Richard Nixon and Lyndon Baines Johnson actually said in the White House in private conversations, Sigelman was able to ascertain that, with a few exceptions (particularly around profanity) their speech patterns were similar. However, after Nixon's collapse through the Watergate scandal, which was exacerbated by the blatant and sometimes tampered-with private conversations, no future presidents recorded their private conversations for posterity, and thus no new research has advanced to determine these different registers that politicians employ. Nonetheless, this research underlines that there are different registers of performance and that further analysis of this separation of identities into strategic personas needs to be explored and developed. A politician structures a distinct identity in these different registers: a television interview, for instance, is a different constitution of persona than a televised speech, despite the use of the same technology of communication. And we can readily observe how current politicians use different registers of performance between their online Twitter posts and their political rally speeches.

Other research in political communication has investigated whether there is a recognisable difference between a politician's persona and their position on issues (Hacker et al.). Persona, in this research, is clearly identified with a candidate's image as it is perceived by the electorate. Through a survey of issues and perceived image of Bob Dole and Bill Clinton in 1996, Hacker et al. discovered that there was a high correlation between their perceived persona and the issues represented—a finding contrary to assumed understanding that image and issue were separate and distinct in politics (233-234).

Another research trajectory that provides an understanding of political persona has emerged from the study of politics and its peculiar transformations through contemporary media. John Corner began developing the idea of how the political persona was a mediated entity and how strategically politicians worked and performed within the exigencies of that particular arena. Building from Machiavelli and paralleling the current research in Persona Studies, Corner explains that politicians work towards particular ends via the tools and techniques that allow for the expression and articulation of power, "playing off the 'outer' [self] against the 'inner' [self]" (387). Corner's analysis directly builds on Goffman's work on the

presentation of the self. Furthermore, Corner's insight is expanded in his subsequent work with Pels, with their research including a further focus on an aspect of contemporary politics that has some resonance with the current Trump campaign of 2016: that is, the blending of entertainment values with political values in the mediated representation of politicians (Pels and Corner). This perceived migration of politics into the realm of entertainment was the trajectory of some of the original research into celebrity culture (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 203-247) and has led to extensive literature that deals with celebrity and politics that Mark Wheeler has pulled together in his recent book *Celebrity Politics: Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications*.

Much of the research on politics and celebrity has a direct value to the constitution of political persona. Research, such as John Street's work on categorising celebrity politics and political activity, can be usefully applied to various forms of negotiated public identity that express the notion of political persona and its sometime dependence, liaisons with, and appropriations from other forms of identity that are predominantly connected to the world of entertainment (Street 435-52). The extensive work on celebrity activism, where celebrities become associated with particular causes, has also served to underline the moving constellation of what constitutes politics and who can be thought of as a political persona (Tsaliki; Fridell and Konings). It is now surprisingly commonplace to see figures such as Bono, from the rock group U2, comfortable at summits. Similarly, Angelina Jolie has become a legitimate presence within the UN, the American Council on Foreign Relations, and the London School of Economics (Totman). Part of this capacity of celebrities to move across fields of activity is connected to the way that politics and its public display are seen synergistically with these wider dimensions of performance. Although not identical, a successful politician often has to have the same mediating abilities to attract attention, to express emotion, and to build audiences as followers as a leading actor or popular music performer must do. And it is interesting that several of our contributors in this issue have explored the link between politics and cultural forms such as film and popular music.

These qualities of political persona can be collectively understood as processes of mediatization, broadly conceived and reconfigured into political practice, staging and, perhaps most specifically and visibly, in election campaigning. Although mediatization of the public self is differently constituted in different political contexts and ecologies, over the course of the twentieth century it has converged towards a much more commodified identity. Part of this transformation of the politician into a commodity is related to the way advertising and promotion has become a shorthand of political messaging specifically in democratic election campaigns.

The commodified political persona has been most thoroughly explored when it has been linked to political marketing. In that particular research context, persona becomes close-to-synonymous with the brand. Brand identity simultaneously generates and depends on the emotional connection between the politician and the voter, and thus works in the space that can be thought of as the territory of persona. In *Persona Studies*, persona can be thought of as neither individual nor collective, but rather the way the individual negotiates their move into the collective and the way that the collective interprets this now organised individual entity. From its corporate legacy when it began to be employed with serious intention in the late nineteenth century, a brand was meant to contain the value of the product through its consistency and its readily identifiable form (Moor 26). The brand was the embodiment of the corporate ethic and integrity and its array of products. With simple variations and consistencies in design, the brand clearly differentiated one product from other products in the marketplace.

In politics' reconfiguration into political brands attached to individual leaders, professional practitioners working in campaigns have advanced on research that identifies the kinds of "affinities" that can be established between an electorate and a leader. As Cwalina and Falkowski underline, political brands have some qualities that make them "fuzzier" or more openly defined than product brands precisely because of the human dimension of politicians (Hampson and Goldberg, cited in Cwalina and Falkowski 156). In their reading of political brands, they identify two "basic aspects" that are reconfigured somewhat by the political: "brand awareness and brand image" (156). In their research on the Polish Presidential election of 2005, Cwalina and Falkowski claim that the real work of political marketing is to simultaneously blend positive associations with the political leader and mitigate negative associations so that the political brand image is best connected to the electorate most likely to vote for a given candidate. Their research recognises that the political leader is perceived differently by different demographics, and thus there is a need to make the "associative affinity" match with the way that politics is actually thought of by different groups (161).

In related research, Speed, Butler and Collins emphasise the "human" element of the political brand scene (129). In its adaptation of approaches from business marketing, political marketing has to identify the "product" more clearly and thereby formulate the "political offer" that is conveyed to the electorate (129). The personal dimension of politics is central, as it becomes the way that parties and policies are made real and realisable, and this close affinity to the personality is the critical difference in politics. The objective, then, is to translate and link party to leader and electorate to leader, where the human element of the leader's brand is not just an endorser of a position like a celebrity endorsing a product, but is what they call an "organizational actor" (145). Because of this potential "human" brand dimension, a focus on establishing the "authenticity" of the leader's message is critical to both party and elections (147).

In a very direct way, what is evident from this research is that political marketing is devoted to the construction of strategic public identities—personas—that can be deployed for political agendas and outcomes. The objective of blending image and associations, of authenticity with authority and organisational identity in political marketing is to build the identities so that they function effectively and win elections. This research on political brands and the field of political marketing also reveals the way that the "personal" figures so largely in how politics is both conveyed and sold. The personalisation of politics is often configured as a threat to "real" issues; emerging from leadership studies, personalisation is perceived as a move away from rational decision-making into emotional associations (Garzia). Joshua Meyrowitz provocatively claimed in 1985 that leaders had lost their aura via the blanket and microscopic coverage by the media (cited in Garzia) and this has led to the further expansion of the personalisation of politics. Poguntke and Webb have linked this shift in international politics to all countries—even those without presidential and republican systems of government—and found their political forms of promotion have become progressively more "presidentialized" where the entire political system is focused on the singularity of leadership that the presidential system expresses (3).

Partially emerging from a similar understanding of the personalisation of politics has been research that has worked to understand the increasing move to affect in politics. For Jessica Evans, the "mediated persona" is derived from celebrity and its discourse of "intimacy, confession and revelation" (73). Our connection to politics becomes "parasocial", as if the electorate know the politician (74-75). Evans' "psychosocial" approach explains this move to the personal as producing a dual "identity politics": voters are drawn to politicians who resemble their values and attitudes and politicians reconstruct themselves as personal

friends/recognisable personas that can relate directly to these identities (77-78). Evans exemplifies the complicated nature of personalised identity politics for the female public persona through an analysis of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in the 2008 US presidential and vice-presidential campaigns as a psychosocial problem that filled “contradictory demands” of public identity and performance (82). Similarly, Liesbet van Zoonen investigates the different way that women politicians are critiqued as they move into prominence in the political public sphere. The feminist adage of the “personal is political” is transformed via its political remediation and produces an identity scrutiny that continuously integrates judgements of beauty and femininity in a recurrent delegitimising counterpoint to expressions of power and authority that are somehow still seen naturally as the province of masculinity. Her analysis of the mediated political personas of the early career of Angela Merkel and the emergence of the first female Finnish Prime Minister Tarja Halonen elucidate their identities as personalised via the media, but their personas are arrested in their capacity to express a private and celebrityised identity in a manner that male politicians have been able to embrace more directly. There is no question that a complex variation of this form of political persona still lingers in our “reading” of Hillary Clinton and her run for President in 2016.

A final further area of inquiry into political persona can be seen in political biography. Lebow presents an interesting argument that biographers such as Caro have produced valuable forms of political theory in their interpretation of intentionality. Certainly, the contemporary political autobiography is used as a sophisticated production of legitimised public identity for emerging political figures. In the American context, almost all leading presidential candidates have produced a book to describe how their personal identity is connected to their political ambitions. For example, we can think here of Barack Obama’s *Audacity of Hope* or even JFK’s *Profiles in Courage* and its efforts to link past figures to his own desires. A similar pattern of strategic identity construction through autobiography is present in many other political systems and can serve as a useful primer for the ways that an idealised political persona can be constituted for strategic deployment in contemporary politics and a pathway to interrogate its formation.

As is evident, political persona has been explored in many fields and directions of inquiry. Although not always identified fully as persona studies, these approaches—from political communication, mediated politics and celebrity studies, political branding in marketing research, leadership studies, feminist and psychosocially-derived research, and political biography—reveal insights into the way that persona operates in political culture. As much as these approaches are valuable, they are also useful in identifying what is being overlooked with political persona and what areas—particularly in the contemporary moment—are emerging that are genuinely producing some new and perhaps dangerous configurations of political persona. From this mapping of political persona, we now return to investigating the issue that emerges from our original premise: that something profound is changing our political landscape, and persona is one channel to investigate this shift.

UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL PERSONA IN THE REPRESENTATIONAL MEDIA AND CULTURAL REGIME: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MACRO-ACTOR

The representation of individualised political authority is not new to democracy or even the nation-state. There is a long history of techniques to extend the power of an individual beyond their physical presence—or, in other words, to produce mediated versions of a political persona that can operate as a form of legitimacy. Mediation can be understood as the translation or communication of a message through a technology that extends that message or the intentions of the messenger outwards. Research into mediation has looked

predominantly at how our contemporary world allows more of its production of meaning to be translated into technological forms such as television or the Internet (Lundby). One of the best ways to understand this early mediatisation is not through poems or songs, but through its instantiation through coinage. Alexander the Great was one of the first to produce a stability in everyday culture by ensuring that coins bore his image, albeit sometimes twinned with ram's horns which worked to link his identity with the gods (Braudy). Because coinage is specifically designed for exchange, it linked Alexander with the most mundane activities, but specifically as a guarantor of value, where the coin had the assurance with his image imprinted that it was genuinely worth its weight identified in silver. This form of mediatisation of political leadership has continued ever since and can be seen in its peculiar and particular constitution through the living Queen Elizabeth II on coins across the Commonwealth. The Queen does not necessarily represent political power in its ebbs and flows of elections, but she does embody the nation and the security of its monetary system that transcends the change in prime ministership across the many countries her profile is used to guarantee monetary value.

A useful way to unpack contemporary institutional support for select individuals' political authority over people and land—and its current turbulence—is to consider Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's early reading of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Callon and Latour extend a strand of Hobbes' argument, in which Hobbes claims that a "person" can refer to a multitude of individuals if a single individual is authorised to act in the name of all (Hobbes 160), to a more general theory of how Leviathans (in the plural) assemble and legitimise their authority over micro-actors (Callon and Latour). In Hobbes' original text, the Leviathan was the product of a "Covenant of every man [sic] with every man" (168) to surrender their right of self-governance to one single "person": the sovereign/Leviathan. For Callon and Latour, a Leviathan arises from the apparatus that transforms a micro-actor into a macro-actor with extraordinary agency. Hobbes postulates a social contract that works to bind the social world together, where the sovereign/Leviathan fulfils their role of ensuring order and the people accept this macro-actor's authority. Callon and Latour break with Hobbes in asserting that a Leviathan cannot be maintained by a social contract alone.

In Latour's larger project of Actor Network Theory, he points to how objects, things, and environments serve as forms of agencies that establish and maintain social relations (Latour). Callon and Latour's interpretation of the Leviathan points to how all of these things, not just people, are micro-actors that are enrolled into the service of the Leviathan. There are many techniques that a Leviathan structures to make this seem normal and natural, and Callon and Latour point to these as apparatuses that hide the operation of power. The castle or the palace, with its intimidatingly grand architecture, works precisely to leave authority unchallenged.

Callon and Latour use the metaphorical expression of placing particular actors/objects in a "black box" when their contribution to the Leviathan's stability and power becomes "a matter of indifference," such that the contingency and necessity of their contribution is no longer readily visible (285). In our extension of Callon and Latour we propose that, over time, the Leviathans constituting Western political systems of government have developed a naturalised relationship with—or, have put into a "black box"—the technology of distribution of information, news and images as they circulate for the given purposes of the organisation of democracy.

The technologies we are identifying are usually collectively called the media. Even this characterisation of the media as unified, already has embedded, in its meaning systems, those structures and techniques that are hiding their practices of naturalising our relationship to what is significant (usually characterised as news) and who is important (identifiable characters from

politics and entertainment). For the last two centuries, one of media's general practices has been to simplify the social in this way through image-making (broadly conceived, for it incorporates the image made by both text constructions and sound) around a small group of people in each polity and in each culture and across the transnational divides as well.

Identifying this pattern of power as a “representational media and cultural regime” (Marshall “Presentation of the Self”; Marshall “Mapping”) captures the way that our systems of political and cultural representation have been closely linked to our media systems, a relationship that has been building and normalising over the last two centuries. Employing Callon and Latour's notion of macro-actors, putting into “black boxes” the technology of media and the connected audiences that they produce with regularity, an odd but powerful paradox becomes apparent: media make certain people highly *visible* to a point that they become naturalised as legitimately representative of the populace across the domains of politics and culture, but the media are also making *invisible* their “social” work in constructing a coherent system of representation. In this essay, we are opening up this “black box” (Callon and Latour) by pointing to the way that the media work to both construct and make at least part of the social and political negotiation patterned and predictable. The array of leaders in a democracy—the visible faces of our contemporary Leviathans—are regularly simplified to a recognisable range and number through this highly visible process that is invisibly connected to the organisation of power.

This representational media and cultural regime has built through the development and increasing prominence of film, radio, television and the various iterations of the published press to what was its zenith from the 1960s to the 1980s in many democratically inspired polities. Television, as a technology of the social by the 1970s, was at its peak in terms of co-ordinating power and structuring attention, and provided a visual leadership and hierarchy of popularity and influence across media forms. News anchors and hosts, visible entertainment performers across film, television and popular music, and political and cultural leaders were the visible television identities that helped organise a stable system of representation, a kind of stability that didn't require deeper negotiation beyond the two hundred or so individuals already part of this “network.”

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PRESENTATIONAL MEDIA AND CULTURAL REGIME

Although still powerful, this representational media and cultural regime has been under some threat as many of its key agents and actors have been in transformation. The stability of the system of representation that television as its leader had provided began to be undermined by the mid-1990s, as the World Wide Web started to have both wider use and quite different relationships to the populace. The term “legacy media,” with its apparent first use in 1998 (Nielsen), captures both its power and its historically contingent configuration of power. On one level, legacy media produced the patterns that normalised the personalisation of politics, where leaders, like celebrities, were made more significant than either political parties or issues. Legacy media were “technologies of the social” (Marshall, *Celebrity Persona Pandemic* 38-39) in their capacity to build collectives as audiences. Simultaneously, these older media forms set up legitimising structures that allowed political leaders to lead and to become highly patterned and visible political personas as the few mediatised political identities in any polity.

Online culture from the 1990s began to produce a new “technology of the social” and a related reassembling of agency. From the original personal websites which resembled the look of powerful media forms via hypertext and integration of images (Wynn and Katz), to the development of weblogs that served as a traversal of personal mediatised activity into the

twenty-first century (Blood), a challenge to legacy media was emerging. The expansion of services such as YouTube, MySpace, Urkut and slightly later Facebook, Twitter and Instagram among many others produced new patterns in the movement of information, news and sharing (van Dijk). At the centre of this new organisation of media and communication operating as a structured intermediary was the individual “user,” to use a parlance from early studies of online culture.

Some Internet researchers in the 1990s and 2000s labelled this as more democratic, if not anarchic (Levinson; Cairncross; Benkler). A dominant “cyberlibertarian” ideology, espoused by organisations such as The Electronic Freedom Foundation and The Progress and Freedom Foundation, proselytised the libertarian quality of the emerging online culture and actively worked to avoid constraints, limitations and legalised policies (Bell et al.; Dyson et al.). Out of this emerged an odd but powerful information economy that generated several economic bubbles. The Internet became a territory for a new capitalist-like enterprise modalised around different models of value, but fundamentally organised around two parallel constructs: the individual as gatekeeper and the network of connections this individualisation produced as the economic generator and multiplier.

In contrast to the representational media and cultural regime with its legacy media and a system of public personalities produced by national and international Leviathans, a “presentational media and cultural regime” was in ascendancy. The fundamental component of this emerging regime was an extension of the personalisation complex that structured the highly systematised network of visible personalities of legacy media and its systems of representational legitimacy. Personalisation accelerated in several ways. First there was the personalisation of technologies through individualised devices such as *personal* computers and mobile phones. Second, there was the personalisation of the modes of individual activities and displays of the self through personal websites and blogs as described above. Third, and more profoundly, there was a new layer of personalisation proliferating through an expansive market and culture of apps and applications that emerged with, and were related to, social media applications that regularised individual participation, visibility, sharing and networking.

In contrast to a small number of individuals who were initially mediatised (with mediatisation the representational culture of images and texts of the famous as they were displayed through legacy media), over the last 12 years a system has emerged where billions are mediatised. Like their legacy media progenitors, these newly mediatised individuals managed their production, distribution and exhibition of themselves, developed something resembling audiences of follower and friends, and networked in a cultural world where their image, visibility and what they liked both appeared to matter and resembled past and current media (for a valuable extension of this, see Senft).

A massive and complex system has emerged via these technologies that has permitted a sense of agency as these billions of networked individuals produce forms of strategic public displays of themselves that are designed to move and connect to different collectives. Once again, as opposed to the relative stability of legacy media and its limited repertoire of recognisable personas and its construction of clearly identifiable and economically validated audiences, we now have a pandemic of persona construction.

This persona construction is a hybrid of forms and mediated speaking positions. Although social media sites differ in the way they give prominence to certain kinds of messages and posts, there is an emerging pattern where Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Weibo resemble each other in overall structure. The posts of microblogs on Twitter and Weibo correlate with the news feeds and walls of Facebook and Instagram. Images, still and moving,

abound and serve as forms of attention and attraction structures. Collectively, the material from the avatar/image that identifies the “source” as an individual to the flow of posts and news establishes the online identity of the user and is reinforced by the social engagement of perfunctory likes and comments by a network of friends. It is the intersection of the interpersonal with the highly mediated that produces a culture of “intercommunication”: users are drawn into levels of engagement that are a melange of personal, public, sometimes professional, sometimes intimate, and frequently connected to videos, images and other texts and comments (Marshall, *Celebrity Persona Pandemic* 67-75).

HYBRID MEDIA AND POLITICAL TURBULENCE

The effect of pandemic persona production and the emergence of a presentational media as a cultural regime on politics is generally one of destabilisation. Legacy media and structures of political representation are now challenged by a personalised attention economy where a layer of mediatised online identities structure the flow of news and the patterns of attachment and connection to an electorate. Andrew Chadwick explains that politics now operates in what he calls hybrid media—which is neither the traditional legacy media nor the online structures of social media, but a movement between these layers in an elaborate game of influence and power. Legacy media trawls online culture as a source of breaking news to maintain its currency. The wider dimensions of online culture structure odd forms of loose networks of connection that are based on hashtags, prominent online personas and further connections to political candidates, movements and party leaders.

The old conception of the personalisation of politics is a threadbare starting point of a new generation of personalised politics, where the personal is determined by online posts, photos and Tweets that attract emotive attention in a manner perhaps most similar to the operation of banner headlines in a tabloid newspaper. The difference from the tabloid overblown headline are two distinct levels of the personal. First, the candidate or the politician must produce a “feed” that allows it to be both picked up and shared by potential allies, constructing a “micro-electorate” (see Usher’s article in this issue). And second, it must generate a meme-like series of related posts by millions of interconnected followers who are similarly working through these political postures to construct their own public identity with their choice of sharing, their structure of added texts, and their relation to their audience of followers and friends who may or may not extend the emotional discussion as they also play in their construction of mediatised identity or online persona.

From this perspective of a new, layered personalised politics that works simultaneously through online culture and legacy media, let’s look briefly at our two flagged examples—Brexit and the 2016 US Presidential Election—to identify this transformed political persona. This is a persona that literally struggles to embody the body politic; the Leviathan of the contemporary that once was intricately manifested through the close and legitimising relationship between politics and the media.

BREXIT AND THE 2016 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Recent research from the Oxford Internet Institute has explored how online activities have produced what they call “political turbulence” (Margetts et al.). Although their research has been more focused on social movements rather than political persona, their approach does identify the sometimes-intense activities that individuals produce as a form of online identity formation. In their study, the researchers conducted a social experiment where they tried to determine the effect of participants’ support for a charity through shaming and visibility of their

activities of support. Their experiment, in its replication of online sharing of activity, pointed to how revealing the activity of others produced more support for the charity as individuals competed with each other for their level of caring (146-7). Their research reveals that online culture produces a changed political environment that privileges forms and strategies of higher visibility. In addition, their research explores how the usual determination of political activity is in flux through the use of social media. Instead of demographics being a predictor of political activity, where the richer and the more educated, for instance, are more likely to vote and participate, something else is arising—at least in the analysis of social media and politics—as a more accurate determination of engagement. Drawing on the five great personality traits originally developed in psychology research, Margetts' team of researchers found that personality traits that influence people's engagement with social media correspond with their online-inspired political activity. Specifically, the traits of extraversion and agreeableness match their previous research on the significance of visibility, and are instrumental in understanding the relationship that social media has with the production of contemporary politics.

In a follow-up blog that was attempting to explain the United Kingdom 2016 European Union Membership Referendum, commonly known as Brexit, Margetts concluded that there was a link between Brexit and the US Presidential Election in a visible era of political turbulence, all of which was connected to the new organisation of involvement and participation in online culture:

This explosive rise, non-normal distribution and lack of organization that characterizes contemporary politics as a chaotic system, can explain why many political mobilizations of our times seem to come from nowhere. In the US and the UK it can help to understand the shock waves of support that brought Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, Jeremy Corbyn (elected leader of the Labour party in 2015) and Brexit itself, all of which have challenged so strongly traditional political institutions. In both countries, the two largest political parties are creaking to breaking point in their efforts to accommodate these phenomena. (Margetts)

Margett et al.'s research is part of a growing body of work that is situating online activity as something that is transforming our culture in a variety of ways. If we look a little more closely at the statistics of engagement related to Brexit, we can discern that there was massive activity online by both the Leave supporters and Stay supporters, even if that activity was done simply as "liking" something and thus sharing that "like" with personal networks: basic Facebook likes of #StrongerIn were recorded at 568,363 during the campaign, while #VoteLeave generated 555,030 (Vickers). Online activity is evidence of how many people construct their own personas through political events and share those positions and postures with others. This identifies how politics via social media is a particular form of expression of the public self for sharing with others. Thus, what must be understood about political persona in the contemporary moment is that it is not only a construction of political leaders, but also a construction of how the political becomes part of all social media users' personas.

To augment this analysis, here are some very basic statistics related to who voted in the Brexit referendum. This research revealed that as low as 36% of 18-24 year olds voted and the next lowest percentage of 56% of 25-34 year olds voted. In addition, less than 13% of 18-24 year olds actually registered to vote, which produced a massive skewing of referendum results to the desires of older Britons: almost 80% those aged 45 years and older voted and so that voting age dominated the final results (Vickers).

Many interpretations can be made from these voting statistics, but what is critical to understanding this changed politics is seeing that there is a disconnection between place and

online identity that is more evident in the younger age group. Older age groups physically voted and were connected to the way that representational systems have operated under the representational media and cultural regime. In other words, their identities were grounded in where they lived and their everyday lives, which included knowing where to vote within that community identity. We would conjecture that younger potential voters, however, were not as connected to actual voting, the polling booths and the community organisation of politics that has been part of this system of representation for generations. Their politics and the dimensions of their “political” persona were done in the performative moments of their public persona online. Unfortunately, the representational system of politics does not calibrate that online work: it is not voting!

This disconnection from the representational systems of government and media is complex and, as the Brexit referendum reveals, does not capture the entire populace within any nation or polity. Politics, like the media, has become hybrid as well. Political election campaigns and elections are navigating through old and new forms of connection to their citizenry, with varying results. In the American political system, it has been a truism for the last century that the key to victory has been getting your supporters to actually vote. Voter turnouts in the United States have not been above 60% since 1968 (Statista) and the political game is ensuring that likely sympathetic voters to your cause are registered to vote.

The 2016 Presidential Election in the United States provides some similar connections and disconnections with the political and media representational system that we have outlined above in interpreting the 2016 Brexit vote in the U.K. What can be seen much more clearly in a presidential campaign is how these shifts in online activity and relationship to place are articulated in the production of a presidential-level political persona.

Although there is not the space to present a full analysis of the 2016 Presidential Election and the ultimate success of Donald Trump, we want to situate the particular rise of this political persona as exemplary of this new era of turbulence where representational structures and institutions clash, compete, and sometimes exploit the newer presentational structures that are emerging. The former stability of the representational Leviathan that was dependent on a legacy media system to legitimise its power and presence is breaking down.

First of all, Trump’s status as a highly visible public persona in the United States has been dependent on the patterns of the representational media and cultural regime for very close to 40 years. Attached and related to his designed-to-be-prominent real estate development business, Trump made concerted efforts to be on national television with regularity. From television commercials promoting products such as Pizza Hut and McDonald’s, to other marketing efforts promoting his own products and others, Trump sold his own “success” as a persona. His ability to express a brash billionaire by the 1990s led to a series of scenes in popular film and television, including appearances on American situation comedies *The Nanny*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and *Spin City*, along with film cameos in such films as *Home Alone 2* (Weisman). Invariably, Trump played himself or on occasion, an acting personality that resembled his public identity. He also bought into programs and franchises that were televisual, with his Miss America Pageant perhaps being the most prominent. In the 2000s, Trump starred for eleven years as the boss in the reality show *The Apprentice* (2004-2015) where once again he played his own construction of a business tycoon making rash and quick decisions for the benefit of apparent profits.

The effect of this media work was two-fold. In its consistency and seriality (Marshall, *Celebrity Persona Pandemic* 48-63) across performances and public appearances, it constructed Trump as a character whose performative dimensions were over-coded and stereotyped. It also

constructed a somewhat unlikeable, unscrupulous, but opinionated individual who had achieved his right to the public stage through his wealth. Trump was, and is, a persona that was highly dependent on how legacy media has operated (for more, see Andrejevic). From those constructions and his own extensive work on making a public image that was an extension of his “work,” there is no question that Trump’s was, and is, a celebrity. As opposed to constructing a political biography, Trump’s business autobiography *The Art of the Deal* has served to establish how his business acumen represents his public skill and, by implication, his political value, but also exemplified his persona of political destabilisation in its disconnection from established political practice.

Hillary Clinton’s constitution of a public persona was predominantly derived from various fora into politics. The many political biographies about her (for example, David Brock’s 1996 *The Seduction of Hillary Rodham*) and her own autobiographies (*Living History* and *Hard Choices*, published in 2004 and 2014 respectively) establish her as a political persona, and the prominence of her positions—particularly as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013 under President Obama, US Senator from New York from 2001 to 2009, and her 2008 presidential candidacy—further accentuate this particular public identity. However, because of her status as the wife of Bill Clinton, US President from 1993 to 2001, this identity was somewhat conflicted by its identification with her role as “First Lady”—a quasi-official position that she politicised further during her tenure. As First Lady, along with her previous role as Governor’s spouse when Bill Clinton was Governor of Arkansas before being elected President, her identity became somewhat connected to a celebrity-like figure with its prominence and with the effects of the 1992 and 1996 sex scandals. Nonetheless, for over 40 years Hillary Clinton established herself as part of the political elite and establishment within the Democratic Party, as well as a visible champion of women’s rights and universal health care. From the perspective of legacy media and legacy politics, Hillary Clinton embodied a legacy politician status during her 2016 presidential candidacy, a kind of status that allowed her to legitimately embody a potential representational media and cultural regime Leviathan.

Donald Trump’s ultimate victory over Clinton was remarkable for many reasons. First of all, although Trump derived much of his symbolic power from his prominence in legacy media, his particular migration into politics was not twinned with the representational political institutions in any way. For instance, he had never held political office or had a public service position in his career, something that made him historically unique once he had successfully become the nominee of the Republican Party. And, as he pursued his presidential candidacy through the Republican primaries, he progressively situated himself as an outsider related to legacy news media. By Election Day, six papers (all of them from small or regional markets) had endorsed Trump, in comparison to 200 for Clinton and a further 12 or more endorsing what could be called “not-Trump” (Arrieta-Kenna). Although endorsements by newspapers are not generally thought of as politically-determining in terms of outcomes, this was the lowest by far for any major-party presidential candidate in history and did identify a disconnection from the news media (Arrieta-Kenna). When one considers how Trump first alienated conservative television news media such as Fox News, the more centrist services such as CNN, CNBC and the major national network news, and even most of the major coverage that looked at his presidential campaign from an entertainment/celebrity perspective, one can see that, at least strategically, what he presented was definitively not embraced by legacy media.

This disconnection from legacy media and legacy politics would in the recent past have determined the illegitimacy of Trump’s candidacy even as it surfaced. However, as we identified in the Brexit example, something different is occurring in the organisation of politics that is producing different effects and outcomes. Trump’s ascendancy is difficult to read, partially

because of the structure of media coverage which was conveyed via a nearly wholesale official rejection of the candidate, but more directly because of the way that the new “attention economy” now operates and moves through contemporary culture. Over the past eight years there has been a gradual migration of the production of attention—what we could call “media” attention through the broadest definition of media—via online forms and social media (Croghan and Kinsley). The different nature of this attention economy is the new intersections between the public, private and intimate that are promulgated in a world where individuals reveal themselves collectively, share those revelations and network with others in different constellations of public and publicity structures. Once again, this massive presentation of the self—a pandemic of individual persona construction for use in this online world—is instrumental for making sense of the movement of information, value and reputation in the contemporary attention economy.

Regarding the 2016 US presidential election, Donald Trump managed to shift the flow of public debate, whether in legacy media platforms or newer social media, through provocative posts and Tweets on different platforms that he also replicated in his public addresses. His extreme attacks on Hillary Clinton and other candidates often focused on very personal dimensions of these individuals, his persistent racist characterisations and his openly aggressive identifications of a need for a new American relationship to the world served as both click-bait for social media users and were too alluring as headlines for legacy news media coverage to not use as leading stories. In other words, for sixteen months prior to Election Day Donald Trump dominated the attention economy to a point where legacy news media followed him “live” to capture the possibility that something newly provocative would emerge from his mouth at any time, and they would fulfil their desired status to take the lead in routing what was said through the attention economy.

Central to this remarkable cultural dominance of attention was Trump’s peculiar ability to move the social media culture of personal revelation as a form of attraction in politics itself. His signature persona performance was to cross the lines of public and social etiquette repeatedly and with force never seen in public political performance. That challenge to public identity was oddly but persistently elemental to social media and individual persona construction online: Trump converted that affective attention economy of the personal and the private into contemporary politics and drew legacy news media to expansively participate in its conversion into a legitimate and now prominently visible form of contemporary politics.

Interpreting the actual result of this election from this perspective of political persona is even more fraught. Trump produced an extreme form of strategic public identity, built from his business man/art-of-the-deal celebrity persona but fundamentally organised to draw attention and congeal that attention around discontent. Legacy politics and its associated legacy media fell into a hybrid media structure and a dependence on this sensational persona, possibly with the hope of delegitimising the truth-claims of this Trump political persona. However, the instability that Trump generated may have been all that a disenfranchised populace was looking for: not some claim to authenticity, not some form of truth, but the sheer need for political turbulence in and of itself. With Clinton over-coded as the legacy politician, a persona with the quintessential embodiment of elite thinking and action (and who had already eliminated the left’s Trump persona doppelganger in the equally interesting persona of Bernie Sanders) Trump’s persona inhabited this territory with little challenge.

Our use of political persona and, more widely, persona to understand contemporary politics identifies pointedly how this changed cultural landscape needs the work of Persona Studies. Persona is a fictive public identity drawn from elements of one’s individuality but

designed for public use. We made the claim near the beginning of this introductory article that the massive mediatisation of the self has produced this new political instability, this era of persona generation, that challenges the organisation of citizenry as voters as much as it challenges those trying to represent the citizenry in the representational system. Like Brexit, one of the other transformations is a disconnection of some citizens from place as their online identity, and the massive active work that goes into producing a shared persona, produces a different and not necessarily geographically-defined identity.

There are many reasons why political experts and polling mis-predicted the results of the 2016 Presidential Election, but I think it is worthwhile to conjecture one further claim that has emerged from this destabilised mediatised system. We would claim that the presentational media and cultural regime does produce an active participant in debate—a very lively, sharing and networked pervasive political persona—but not necessarily active in the representational systems of government. Actual voting in its geographical and community specificity of polling booths is part of legacy politics and somewhat disconnected from this emerging presentational media and cultural regime. The disenfranchised individuals that have been identified as the Trump supporters are just slightly more likely to be in particular communities and not part of the disconnected online culture that is displaced from where they live. The attention economy produced the persona that aligned with this disenfranchised but more-likely-to-vote citizen because of their legacy-like cultural connection to place.

In the current cultural moment, the relationship between the individual and the collective is in turbulence. In terms of political persona, the fictive quality of political public identity can be traced via the transformation of the media-cultural regime that supports it. From Callon and Latour's Actor-Network Theory-informed reading of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the political moments of Brexit and Trump's election expose the contingency of the political apparatus of the Western liberal-democratic state—the representational "Leviathan"—and of tracing how the work of supporting and legitimising this representational "Leviathan" is being both challenged and co-opted. Thus, the democratic Leviathan is exposed in the new politics via the new political personas. The revelation of the fictive quality of political public identity is also exposed. The way that democratic politics absorbs the agency of many into a singular entity/persona as president is also made visible. From an Actor Network Theory approach, the current election exposed the sociality of agency and the instability of the Leviathan, as well as the apparatuses of governing and the technologies that have supported its structure.

JOURNAL ARTICLE SUMMARIES

In this special issue of *Persona Studies*, we have published five articles that use political persona to engage with these issues of confrontation, co-optation and transformation. Many of the articles focus on moments of instability or conflict within existing political orders, and how political persona can help elucidate those moments. Each in their own way traces the trajectory of a political persona (or personas) in a contemporary cultural and political environment. Our contributors have considered a US president and president-elect, British parliamentary candidates, a politician and women's rights activist in Botswana, a paparazzi turned mayor of an Australian regional city, and a Polish rock musician turned national politician. Together, they trace the diversity of strategies and challenges around the operation of political persona today.

Usher empirically examines the strategic operation of U.K. leaders' political personas during the 2013 British election. Extending and reorienting the term "micropublics" (Marshall, "Mapping"), she highlights how the leaders of the main U.K. political parties used Twitter and Facebook to construct *microelectorates*. The variations in these political leaders' construction of

persona online suggest new and alternative means of attracting democratic participation, if not necessarily in-depth engagement, in a presentational media and cultural regime. Played out on Facebook and Twitter, these members of the established political parties each have carved out a niche for themselves within the structures required of them on newer media platforms.

While Usher's investigation shows how established political players can maintain continuity of political power in the new regime, others who have transferred status between cultural regimes have not so much transferred political power as translated their old celebrity status into a new political one. We have already mentioned Trump's rise to fame through legacy media. However, he is not the only beneficiary of prominence in the representational regime who has then translated that prominence into a political career. Two articles published in this issue engage in case studies of a celebrity-turned-politician and the difficulties that arose from conflicts between celebrity persona and the expectations of traditional political display. Notably both celebrity politicians examined, despite numerous differences in nationality, reasons for celebrity status, and even the level of politics in which they were involved, shared the common denominator of relying very heavily on social media rather than legacy media to present their political persona.

Casson investigates a celebrity-turned-politician at the level of local Australian government. Her case study is Darryn Lyons, the former mayor of Geelong, a large regional town in Victoria, Australia. She focuses on the framing in newspaper reporting and in online commentary of Lyons wearing a provocative t-shirt at an event he attended in his role as mayor. The apparent contradictions between the persona of celebrity and mayor do not appear to have been adequately resolved in this case, which has raised questions about the very process of mayoral election in the State of Victoria.

Olczyk and Wasilewski analyse the media presentations, both on television and on Facebook, of Polish rock star-turned-national-politician Pawel Kukiz. His engagement on Facebook, his political platform of change/risk in stark contrast to the mainstream political parties' emphasis on stability and security, and his dynamic performance on talk shows and televised debates, situated him as an explicit alternative to the political status quo. However, Olczyk and Wasilewski also point out the difficulties that such appeals to authenticity face when confronted with the requirements of existing political structures.

The question of conflict between authenticity and political structure looms large in Seru and Magogwe's contribution as well. Here, the division between role and persona, authentic presentation and artificial seeming, official position and actual intention, is examined in the conflict between the male-dominated politics of Botswana and prominent female member of Botswana and prominent female member of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), Margaret Nasha. While the BDP ostensibly supported gender equality, Seru and Magogwe use Nasha's experience within the party to show the contrast between the public face and the private actions of BDP members.

Although we have already discussed Trump ourselves, there is no doubt that further evaluation of the "Trump phenomenon" will be forthcoming in the coming months and years. Rademacher's article in this issue offers a unique take on Trump's persona. She offers an analysis of the resurgent genre of "noir" to illustrate the conventions utilised by both Trump himself and by the legacy media in the mediated presentation of a political persona. That persona, of the "hard-boiled detective," situates a particular, and a particularly American, mythology about success and power very uneasily in the current political context of America and Trump himself.

As we look forwards toward President Trump, we should not forget to look back on the persona of President Obama. Totman and Hardy query US President Obama’s political legacy, interrogating the relationship between his political persona and actual attempts to implement his foreign policy in the Middle East. They find little to support the early popular interpretation of Obama as a “man of peace,” and argue that his image even now stands in contrast to his political agenda. They also find that his various successes and failures have not significantly impacted his domestic popularity, and suggest that, at least for the moment, foreign policy in the Middle East does not play a strong part in either the production or the reception of the political persona of the US President.

CONCLUSION

As we stated at the outset of this introduction, persona—the negotiated construction of the individual in their interactions with the collective—is imbued with politics at its core. However, the means by which some individuals make a claim to explicit, legitimate political authority over others, and the means by which these claims are accepted, is the distinct domain of *political persona* investigated in this special issue. Existing research into political persona has demonstrated the wide range of matters to which political persona has relevance, from issues of authenticity and image, to issues of managing and making use of emotional presentations and connections. Brexit and Trump’s triumph suggest that many of the assumptions around how politics and political persona work must now be questioned.

With the apparent stability and naturalness of the political order in the representational media and cultural regime disrupted, and political power personalised in the new presentational regime, new negotiations of the relationship between individual and collective agency are underway. The study of persona is ideally positioned to examine questions of collective agency and political power that have been raised by the new vulnerability of these once seemingly unassailable Leviathans, as we, and they, enter new and unfamiliar political territory, armed—so far—only with the tools that have served us in the old. We hope that, at the very least, this special issue of *Persona Studies* will go some way to drawing up the map.

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