

Monitoring Persona: Mediatized Identity and the Edited Public Self

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ABSTRACT

One of the key transformations in contemporary culture is the insistent demand to construct a public persona. Constructing a persona for navigating through life is not new; what is new is the naturalization of producing a mediatized version of this public self. The complexity of producing an online public identity involves the labour of monitoring and editing ourselves, connecting with strategic

purpose to others and building recognizable reputations. This article both identifies and concludes that what we are experiencing is the work and relative value of producing a mediatized identity—a persona—which is a form of identity often linked to celebrities in our traditional media industries and now pandemic in contemporary culture.

Introduction: The Emergence of the Mediatized Self

There is an expanding form of communication in contemporary culture. It is intimately connected to what can be described as the “intercommunication industry”¹: an array of online applications and social media programs that channel the flow of information through very personal filters and gates. The intercommunication industry helps define this new form of communication and can be thought of as the companies and their applications that facilitate our personal online activities including such everyday activities such as using *Google* as a search engine, posting and sharing a picture on *Facebook* or *Instagram*, or even setting up an online account on *Airbnb*. In all these cases we allow ourselves to be reproduced as information and communication where we blend simultaneously highly personal registers of communication with those that are highly mediated (see Marshall, “Intercommunication and Persona”). The implications of this different structure of communication are many and varied, but at its core is the persistent and insistent push to construct a public persona. What follows is an exploration of this public presentation of the self that moves the individual into producing a mediated identity. This public persona is organized through different commercial applications which work to produce information about the self that is not only shared by the individual, but also becomes a source for further commercialized sharing. Because of that, it is best to imagine this form of production as an elaborate system of monitoring by both the individual *and* the intercommunication industry. Monitoring one’s persona has become an essential experience of contemporary life where a constant ritual of editing, writing, connecting, and publicizing a public persona defines the sense of self. It does this on an individual level as well as in a collective sense, creating therein a new generation

1. “The term ‘intercommunication’ can be defined as the layering of forms in an inter-related structure that moves between types of interpersonal communication that are integrated with highly mediated presentations. Intercommunication acknowledges a shifted public sphere where the interpersonal is overlaid onto its flows of interpretation and meaning from the outset. Intercommunication as a concept helps us to understand this new mix of representational and presentational culture and how they are interconnected in complex and intricate ways” (Marshall, “The Promotion” 35–48; “Intercommunication and Persona”).

of media and advertising industry. Our personal mediatized identity becomes the new vehicle for the movement of information. This article is an investigation of the implications of this new individualized, yet collective contemporary experience.

It is important to understand that this emerging and general mediatized identity that I am describing as the production of a public persona has been advancing incrementally and, for most us, almost as a form of second nature. As we become familiar with using and navigating online programs, applications on our smartphones and tablets—subscribing, setting up and using our “accounts” for various online activities—we have also become used to how using these applications produce versions of ourselves. Each of these applications invites us to produce a public self for our own use and for sharing. From the perspective of thirty years into the past, the sophistication of the mediated self that we now produce and reproduce daily through these applications in terms of the panoply of media forms is astounding, from printed texts to photos, images, animation, charts and graphs and videos in related, captioned, and edited structures on our social media account sites. In addition, the capacity for us as users of these applications and social media sites also extends to the production of audiences who serve as a further form of the mediatization of our identity.

Self-Improvement, Fitness and the New Monitored and Shared Self

Because of the complexity of the monitoring and production of this mediatized public self, it is useful to introduce self-monitoring and its ultimate production of a mediatized self through the simplest of examples. What online culture has been very successful at reproducing is how needs and wants can be re-expressed through particular programs and applications. For example, Micki McGee has identified the longer history of what can be described as the self-help movement throughout the 20th century. The self-help movement, as McGee’s work maps, articulated a strongly individualized need to transform the body and mind into a better being that perhaps was effectively adapted to changing conceptions of success and achievement. One

of the current generations of programs that has linked successfully to this long-perceived need and desire to transform the self and produce the improved self can be found in fitness applications, which work to provide an incredible amount of information about the self. Here are three simple fitness-related examples that help us see this migration of self-help and its perceived needs into both the monitoring of the self and the production of a version of the self eventually to share:

1. Recently, a mother with a Fitbit band described how bouncing and caressing her young baby girl produce a skewed reading²: the apparent movement counted as “steps” which, according to the mother, produced an inaccuracy in her exercise monitoring.
2. Using a fitness application on his iPad called *MyFitnessPal*, a man struggled with its calibrations of calories when he attempted to enter the exact products he was eating while trying out what 20 minutes of vacuuming was worth.
3. An individual recently purchased a smart phone and realized there was an application called *Move*, which could help him reach a desired fitness goal of 10,000 steps in a day. He now diligently carries the phone everywhere to ensure that the monitoring of his exercise would be both accurate and complete.

The three examples above appear to be fairly innocuous activities that hundreds of millions of people participate in daily if not hourly. Indeed, there is something incredibly positive about this monitoring of the self that allows technology to assist us in self-improvement. More than that, these applications generate new ways of interacting with personalized data. For instance, the *Move* application allows its user to see what they have done in terms of steps, but it also provides a minute by minute mapping of where the exercise took place. These extra dimensions of

2. The Fitbit band or “flex” is a device that is worn on the wrist to track movements and activities. When reconnected to a computer, the band or flex downloads its collected information from the user’s movements. It can be used to track sleep (or moments of waking) and can be worn while track swimming as well.

applications, or “apps” as they are known, actually are their abilities to connect to other apps. These connections, also called “APIs” (Application Programming Interface), allow part of one program to be made accessible to another program. In the instance of the *Move* application, it possesses some connection to perhaps *Google Maps* or the geolocation application *Foursquare* in order to provide a precise map of where you have been and have exercised.³ If you search a little further into any of these applications you will quickly notice that they allow for all kinds of connections to other apps: you can link it with further information related to heart rates or calibrations of body fat or body temperature, or you can cross-link it back into a form of data control of your eating habits or sleeping patterns.

In health and intercommunication industry parlance, what is generated by these exercise-monitoring applications is the “quantified self” (see Wolfe; Lupton 860). There is no question that there are many advocates of this development of the monitoring of the self and as Wolfe expresses it, the digital tools and the information generated is fundamentally there to help make “better” people:

I’d like to tell you that it’s also for self-knowledge. And the self isn’t the only thing; it’s not even most things. The self is just our operation center, our consciousness, our moral compass. So, if we want to act more effectively in the world, we have to get to know ourselves better.

It is important to understand that this generation of monitoring the self is also a form of production of the self. Most of the applications allow for a quick production of progress visualizations, of the conversion of steps into calorie burn, as well as lovely charts that identify weight gain or loss in a monthly or weekly line chart. All of these conversions of raw data that the individual monitors are not just information, but become

3. *Foursquare* is a mobile application that allows users to identify and evaluate their experiences in their local settings. It both identifies or geo-locates where one is and links it to services, businesses and activities that may be of interest to the user based on past inputs into the application. These located experiences are shared with friends and the shared experiences of trusted friends helps the user determine the value of new places to go in future.

the outlines of a “narrativized self.” To understand this further leads one to see the link to past forms of diary writing from the nineteenth century. For the most part, what is generated is designed to be read, rewritten, updated, and read again. The applications—such as *Move* or *MyFitnessPal*—are techniques that simplify the generation of the narrative of the self the same way that the paper binding of a journal helps the diary writer generate the flow of their self-narrative and assist in collecting it into one location.

Augmenting this construction of narrative material is an extra dimension of the digital monitoring of the self that goes beyond the “diaristic.” Almost all of the applications encourage their users to share their “progress” and achievements. Though in general the word “sharing” is used to indicate the process of externalizing personal data, it must be understood as more than a personal form of communication: “sharing,” in the digital contemporary, is far closer to forms of active publication than it is to interpersonal communication. Like a company publishing its annual report or a television network teasing its audience to watch the news through a tantalizing headline, the sharing of our exercise achievements is a heralding of a public version of ourselves, a version that in many ways remained in the private and domestic sphere in previous centuries but is now publicly visible.

Visibility is a critical dimension of the monitoring of the self and this dimension produces two significant axes of value. For the individual, the visibility that we have defined here as simply revealing elements of the private exercise regime for others to see, is a way to produce a version of the self, potentially and hopefully a “positive” version. Like a weight loss program or an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, the revealing discourse of sharing is designed to make one’s achievements acknowledged by others and hopefully celebrated by others. The visibility also is designed perhaps to hold you to your ambitions and objectives in exercise and fitness: by revealing these narratives of the “fit self,” we are opening ourselves to the regular gaze/reading of others about what we deem as significant to our understanding of our own self. In essence, our monitoring and publicizing our regime is constructing a persona, that is the projection of the self outwards. It is a version of the self specifically designed for public display and is a form of

exiting the interiority of identity. Derived from its use in classic Greek performance to designate a mask and appropriated by Jung to identify the psychological state of being, designed for collective and outer view (Jung), it is often thought of as something that is less true or false; it is, however, more accurate to think of this persona and its construction as a strategy for coping—if not thriving—in that public world. These simple fitness personas that are built from shared and collected archives are one example of an individual's repertoire of visible public identities that may or may not be linked.

The second axis of value emerging from self-monitoring is industrial. The “sharing” of personal information is a prevalent invocation in the intercommunication industries. The *collection* of this information is one of the key monetizing structures in the contemporary online culture and industry. As Deborah Lupton identifies in her article, “Wearer Be Warned,” health and fitness information gathered through various apps becomes the property of the application site where it may be used for positive pro-social research, but in the more mundane world of the intercommunication industry, it is a technique to develop patterns of information on individuals that feed back into directed advertising. The act of sharing is one of the best ways for an application to expand its reach. This technique of sharing has been the basis of the online industry since the original *Hotmail* accounts in 1996 as *Hotmail* worked to connect users directly and thereby used interpersonal connections to build its original email base of users from zero to 12 million in 18 months (see Richardson and Domingos 61). Our desire to monitor ourselves and then share/publicize that presentation of the self nurses not only our own visibility and persona, but also the outlines of a commodified persona for ourselves that is sold back to us as well as a component of aggregate personas that organize the online economy further.

Reconceptualizing the History of the Internet: The Increasing Mediatization of the Self

What I have so far identified through fitness applications and mild social media connections is a basic contemporary form of monitoring the

self and making the self *visible*. The affordances that are attached to the platforms and applications allow that monitoring to produce a particular persona with remarkable ease. The simplicity in the production and its resemblance to past media forms such as magazines is part of its appeal: the narrative with its graphic charts, its text and its different calibration of statistics require little work on the part of the person for the production that looks like a more highly mediated publication.

It is important to understand the ways in which the monitored fitness and quantified self is very much linked to the longer historical trajectory of the Internet and online culture. At the very core of online culture, two major meta-narratives have organised its satisfaction of apparent needs and desires: the first is the increasing value and importance of the personalization/individualization of its uses/practices via technology and the second is the increasing value and significance of the mediatization of the self. Over time, these two meta-narratives have blended into the production of an online persona. For instance, hypertext mark-up language or html, the basic text coding of the Web, originally presented a relatively easy way to produce texts that resembled newspapers or magazines in terms of their finish. The key transformation of the 1990s, what I have called elsewhere as the “Graphic Internet Stage” (Marshall, “The Commodity and the Internet”), was the production and exhibition of these kinds of visible materials not by elaborate media organizations, but by individuals. The “homepage” of a website with its specific url allowed the individual to produce a presentation of their interests. With computer technology via the home computer and the laptop individualizing the experience of its use, the World Wide Web permitted increasingly elaborate and graphically enriched forms of communication. Personal websites in the 1990s were the first incarnations of the move from the diarization of the individual to the mediatization of the individual. In reality, the number of people who actually saw any of the many millions of websites produced by individuals generally did not come close to the numbers in audiences generated by television, radio or film at the time and thus the media *exhibition* quality of most web sites was more mythic than real. Nonetheless, there was an “aura” quality in the production of the website itself, which identified its value and its significance

in the presentation of the self (See Schaur and Gilly 385–386), in a mediatised style and language that was, at that particular time, still the privileged form of expression in the public sphere.

The 1990s personal web site's "aura" and its apparent privileged position were precisely derived from the resemblance these sites had to the most influential media forms of the twentieth century—magazines in particular but also graphically related to film and television in their capacity to have animated gifs or actual videos embedded in their pages. Walter Benjamin in his most famous 1930s essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," used the idea of aura to describe the singularity of an artwork: the distance from the viewer's experience in a very real sense where the artwork was untouchable in its uniqueness and produced a cult-like and ritual sense of connection (222–223). Benjamin identified the moment of the mechanical reproduction of artistic forms as the destruction of that aura: it either made the artwork infinitely available and a changed relationship to the audience or it produced what he saw as a new form of shock as film performed with the machine gun-like flow of the film reel's images projected to produce motion (238). By the early Web era of the personal website, the aura of distance had migrated to these new twentieth century media forms: television, film, magazines and radio with their amazing powers of production were almost untouchable as forms of direct expression by individuals and became the province of powerful industries that produced entertainment and news for distribution. However, a new aura surrounded these personal websites in their capacity to reproduce what was always thought of as something that could only be manufactured by the largest of entertainment industries. For a moment in the 1990s, the individual, through their personalized website, inhabited a space that was seen as powerful and significant in its mode of expression. Embedded in this shifted power and this temporary aura was the new digital—not mechanical—democratization of media production where the individual could now produce in a manner equal to the culture industries themselves. The personal website heralded the destruction of its own aura as much as the media industries it replicated in its formats. Online culture had produced an era of pandemic media production that was at least partially driven by individuals producing their own media content.

The Mediatized Self = Online Persona

The concept of mediatization has been developed with a certain vigor over the last decade and it is critical to our understanding of this transformed public self (Lundby). Although there are many definitions of the word, its most pervasive use in scholarship has understood mediatization similar to Pierre Bourdieu's reading of the influence of television: increasingly media have determined the way that we see and structure our world-view and our sense of self—it serves as the arbiter of significance. Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp's research takes mediatization further in seeing it as a form of social constructivism: it is a way to describe the generally accepted mythic power and centrality of the media in understanding contemporary culture (Couldry and Hepp; Couldry). Imbricated into this pervasive naturalized and normalized mediatization, is the way that the online persona articulates a *mediatized identity* (Marshall, "Mediatizing Identity"). Constructing and maintaining a mediatized identity is a further extension of the pervasiveness of mediatization. Research into online culture has attempted to capture this new sense of being through a variety of terminologies. For example, Zizi Papacharissi focuses on the "networked self" which expresses the interiorization of the formation of identity through online experiences in particular, but more specifically on the transformation of the self through its regular connection to others. Harrison Rainie and Barry Wellman capture a similar conceptualization through their "networked individualism," but perhaps express the exteriorization of the self through a certain pervasive and social conceptualization of being. In their collection which attempts to link life writing, autobiography and online media studies, Julie Rak and Anna Polletti use the term "identity technologies" in order to understand the active construction and a kind of new productivity of the self that new media forms invoke and evoke.

In all these efforts at comprehending the formation and construction of online identity, one can see an effort at understanding that at least part of that identity formation is an appeal to something clearly outside of the self. Online culture provides the technology to produce not an audience, exactly, but clearly a sense that whatever is produced online, will be watched by others. Charles Ess captures the philosophical

dimensions of this best in seeing how media technologies have built an emotional and “relational” self: new media forms accentuate the relational by underlining the continuous sense of connection to others in the various platforms and applications that have developed particularly in the era of Web 2.0.⁴ What he identifies is the combinatory constellation of communication forms—from text to audio, to image, to moving image—that online and mobile culture have provided, and how they have also produced the possibility and reality of continuous connection and thereby “amplified our connection to others” (Ess 680).

The mediatized identity that online and mobile culture engenders pulls the individual user into an imagined sensorium where the produced identity—the persona—is at least self-read or monitored through the lens of how individuals are celebrated in the media culture. Terri Senft’s close ethnography of webcam girls,⁵ traced from the first decade of the 21st century was one of the first to link perhaps what we could call the “first world” of media (that composed of television, film, radio, and print) to the mediatized, self-presentation and projection of the “second world” of online media. Both these worlds organize their significance through forms of public individuality. With the first world of media, there is the concentrated celebration of certain public personalities generally called celebrities that help position the attention of the media technologies. In the second world of online media, Senft employs the term “micro-celebrity” to

4. Web 2.0 refers to a generation of the World Wide Web that is normally associated with the emergence of social media applications. Thus, *MySpace* followed by *Facebook* and *Twitter* are examples of a web organized and dominated by the sharing, following and “friending” techniques. It is roughly identified as the period post-2004. Some argue that we are still in the Web 2.0 phase; others have made the claim that we have moved into a “smart-web” era sometimes called the “semantic web,” as it works to collect, aggregate and reform information and data for re-use (see Allen).

5. Webcam girls were an online phenomenon emerging in the late 90s with the introduction of cameras either directly into personal computers or as an addition to a computer via a USB port. Along with web cameras simply aimed for example at a street scene in a city, in a place of work (both popular webcam content) and “netcast” or livestreaming the video feed from the camera, certain individuals began livestreaming their lives on to the Web. Jenni-Cam was one of the earliest and most successful of these. Because they were continuous feeds of individuals’ bedrooms, the webcam phenomena became a place of revealing the private in the most public way by these girls. Over time, the phenomenon morphed into a form of pornography; but in its initial stages, the revealing of the body was just one of the reasons people chose to watch webcam girls (see Senft; Marshall “New Media Cultures” 54–55).

express the desire to make one's self visible and to attract attention. The webcam provides an endless feed with the possibility and potential of further bodily revelation and exposure by the performer. The webcam girl situates herself consciously for an audience and reconstructs what may appear to be just "reality" into something that is always conscious of the possible observers as subscribers and/or "lurkers." By extension, all social media users are producing a para-social connection⁶: much like how a fan is connected to a star, the mediated production of the self creates a constructed distance which is not directly interpersonal but reconstructed via the *Facebook* page or the *Twitter* feed as a mediated connection.

The development of online persona over the last two decades is an extension of at least some of the techniques and directions that celebrity culture in its intense focus on a constellation of public individuals has developed for more than a century via various media. In my own work, I have described celebrity culture as an elaborate pedagogy for the way in which individuals now produce themselves through online social media in particular (Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self" 35–48). The difference is the individualized gate keeping that structures the contemporary moment of online users. In subsequent work, I have expressed this distinction between the individualization of celebrity culture and this emerging persona culture as the movement from a predominantly *representational* media and cultural regime to a *presentational* media and cultural regime now organized around personal websites, weblogs, and social media personal accounts that provide the channels through which online culture is organized ("Celebrity and Power" xxxii–xxxvi). In addition, our presentational culture best expressed through our online activities also identifies how we have normalized the gaze of others on our activities. Like celebrities, we have become habituated to being watched and observed and taken

6. Horton and Wohl (1956) used the term "para-social" to describe the relations individuals developed with persons who appeared in the mass media. It has been extensively employed in fan studies that have emerged over the last thirty years in an effort to describe the various affective connections and bonds individuals develop with their idols (see Hills). I am using the term to describe how these kinds of bonds are paralleled when individuals produce online versions of themselves for others.

on this new Bentham-like panopticon by systematically monitoring ourselves. Reality television equally serves as a marker of the normality of the “surveilled” individual and its internalization in our mediatized and monitored self (Marshall, “Specular Economy”). The extension of these activities into the everyday identifies an expanding “persona literacy” emerging in our presentational media and cultural regimes where we as individuals are mastering our production of a mediatized version of ourselves as well as reading the various forms of the production of personas by others.

The social and interpersonal dimensions of blog culture can be rethought of as the formation of a presentational media form. On one obvious level, individual bloggers are composing a media text and thereby individually mediatizing their exposed and public identity. The success of the blogging and social media site *LiveJournal*, where more than 1.4 million users posted blogs by the time of 2005, made it clear that bloggers were producing and “performing” their blogs for a community of others generally defined by age and specific interest (Lindemann 355). By a variety of standards, the individual success of a blog and a blog post was determined by others and in specific instances were rated by readers. Thus *LiveJournal* was part of not only developing the mediatized and narrativized public self, but also defined value by attention, reputation, and influence in a way that resembled the operation of the celebrity industry. In a parallel universe, the expansion of blogging in journalism in particular from the late 1990s began to define how presentational media and influence was pushing its own individualizing attention economy back on to the traditional media forms.

Most of *LiveJournal*'s performance of personas through their posted blogs, texts and responses was predominantly in the realm of leisure and recreation broadly conceived. The expansion of persona culture with its production and monitoring has moved with major force into the production of professional identities in contemporary culture. This development can be seen with incredible clarity in the Internet and technology professional communities. Alice Marwick's major ethnographic research into the San Francisco/Silicon Valley tech scene's use of social media platforms revealed the significant role that

online monitoring and production of the self played in the employment hierarchy of the community. As early adopters, tech-related workers were among the first to invest in the production of an online self. Indeed, many attempted to use their online identities to build their reputations and even perhaps secure better or more prestigious jobs. In her analysis, Marwick concluded that promoting the self through all manner of online programs was perfectly acceptable for the rising tech stars, but totally inappropriate for those already with status (217). In essence, whether one observed the established entrepreneur or the rising figure that would blog/tweet/use *Foursquare* in an almost continuous fashion, the scene “rewards those who adopt such [neo-liberal] subjectivities” (Marwick 6).

In many ways, what Marwick has identified is a hierarchy of work on the public self that has moved pervasively through our cultures. For those with status, others actually spread the word, the text, the image and the stories. Like celebrities, the famed in a number of professions but clearly in the tech-related industries have enough persona-related capital that information and reputation is either generated by journalists, publicists or, with more authenticity and verve, the acolytes and those equivalent to fans of these stars in an industry. For the rest, the movement and construction of an online persona becomes an essential task of contemporary cultural work. With greater frequency, Marwick explains, through social media and its belief that it intersects with work, there are greater numbers of people that are “lifestreamers” (223), who actively and persistently work on an “edited self” (211). Interestingly, working on a strategically positioned “edited self” was not built on some established and externally recognized achievement: in the contemporary moment this edited self *predated* any achievement and has become intrinsically a way to draw attention to the individual that both personalized and accelerated the forms of publicity that the older representational media and cultural regimes would have implemented to draw attention to an individual (Marwick 193–194).

For some thinkers such as Alison Hearn, the online world produces an array of self-branding entities that through their acceptance of their personal identity as brands move into the commodified and monetized world of *Google* and *Facebook* seamlessly: with calibrators like Klout

they can quantify and produce comparable data as to their relative value as contemporary “influencers” in the online economy. Like Marwick, Hearn’s branded self is one that not only labours to produce a public persona, but also through the process of creating and connecting, labours for free in the production of information and data for the social media and wider intercommunication industries. This pandemic work on constructing and monitoring a public persona produces absolutely enormous amounts of data. Indeed, like the celebrity system’s fairy-tale narrative that anyone can become a star through countless examples, the contemporary online world has the array of *YouTube* stars who actually make money from just constructing a persona. For example, the Swedish *YouTube* personality PewDiePie has constructed a likeable and humorous persona who generally talks about playing games as well as related conversations each week. His *YouTube* channel in its intersection with the extensive gaming community has more than 23.9 million total subscribers and almost 4 billion views and estimates of annual earnings from this self-work of between 1 and 8.5 million (US) dollars depending on how advertising is calculated and divided with the *YouTube* channel itself (Jacobs). The significance of these kinds of earnings is not so much that they create a star system; rather, it is to underline the new anxiety in the contemporary moment that constructing an effective online persona has become normalized and connected to a sense of personal value.

Conclusion

Constructing a mediatized persona has become a regular and normal experience in the era of social media. Part of the reason for the pervasiveness of what can now be called a persona culture is the need to work out the new delineations of our presentation of public and private life. Persona, at least in its online constitution, has pushed us to reveal a great deal about ourselves and has therefore shifted the boundaries of public, private and intimate. The current moment is still a moment of persona literacy: we are at a stage where much of the monitoring of this mediatized identity is to work out the value of our various forms of revelation and exposure of the self. Monitoring ourselves has produced

a new specular economy (Marshall, “Specular Economy”; “Exposure”): we are constantly preening the various texts, images and media elements that we share with others; we are also constantly trying to determine what friendship and followers mean online and whether our common sense understanding of these terms needs to be rethought into some para-social construction of connection which comes close to the media personality’s relationship to its mass audience; we are working out whether the models of persona construction that we have relied upon from popular culture and media are worthy of emulation in our own micro-public worlds. Our conceptualization of a public identity and a public self often shift in different contexts as we adopt and adapt to different performative roles in our lives: thus at one point we are a parent and only recognized as such; at other moments we are a professional or working being. In the online world, the delineations of roles can be blurred precisely because the various platforms that are provided by the intercommunication industries are designed to make us reveal. Nonetheless, the move to construct, remake, reconsider and reform our online personas is producing a culture that is increasingly comfortable with the mask that expresses our public identity. While most of the representational media and cultural regime was concerned with revealing the true self, the presentational era expressed through online culture may be emerging as a moment where the search for the true and inner psychological self no longer defines our culture; instead we are increasingly comfortable with the public mask and the strategic persona that we use to negotiate this pervasively mediatized public world. After all, we currently live in a digital culture that has naturalized the conversion of our online persona into an aggregated commodified being that is sold on to advertisers, then back to us in various ways. Persona represents the new battleground for the contemporary value of the self.

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