

DOMESTICITY AND PERSONA

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Because personas are performances of identity, strategically enacted for an immediate or imagined audience, the study of personas to date has concentrated on the public realm of life. Professional personas enacted in workplaces have taken up much attention, whether for artists, comedians, scientists, actors, musicians, or politicians. Similarly (and often overlapping the professional persona), the performance of self online that is constituted in and through social media has proven a generative space for research. Mediatized personas generally open up a space for understanding persona performances, while the non-human, the institutional, the collectively constituted persona come as a logical extension of the theorisation of persona as strategic identity display.

The focus on the public and the professional, the online and the mediated, has become naturalised within the field. The five dimensions of persona (Moore et al. 2017) provide scholars with a starting point to explore these ideas, but does point us away from the private realm. When we attended to ideas of domesticity in 2016, the emphasis was less on the domestic persona itself than on consideration of the ways that more public forums such as social media sites were being domesticated by the inclusion of the personal: “the messy bedroom via YouTube, the untidy kitchen via Instagram, the unkempt backyard via Facebook, the uncleaned toilet via 4Chan, the dirty laundry via WordPress” (Moore & Barbour 2016, pp 1-2). This raises some interesting questions. Are we discomfited with the idea that the persona we enact in our homes could be analysed as *strategic*? Are we unwilling to turn a critical eye onto our own and others interactions within close relationships with the aim of digging into the performance of self through those interactions? In shifting from the public to the private, from the professional to the domestic, what opportunities are available to us to consider the role of race, or gender, or class, or disability? Finally, does engagement with the Goffmanian backstage feel too much like psychology, psychiatry, or psychoanalysis for those who work in this space (many of whom have media, cultural studies, literature, or communications backgrounds) to explore?

In constituting this issue of *Persona Studies*, we take a step towards the private persona by considering the role of the domestic. Domesticity, argue Heynen and Baydar (2005, p. 7) “is a construction of the nineteenth century”, when dwellings became increasingly closed off and limited to family units, and the division between work and home lives was matched by a division between men and women. The masculine sphere of labour happened in public, while the feminine sphere of the domestic happened in private. If one extends this formulation into Arendt’s concept of appearance, only on the opposite of the domestic space, the polis, is a human able to become the subject of recognition and remembrance, “wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action” (Arendt 1958, pp. 198–9). The private sphere, the oikos, is a space for mere survival and personal proclivities, not a space to develop political agency. Kennedy et al. (2020, p. 1) clarify that the domestic “is clearly concerned with ways of living, with dwellings, with families and housemates, and with how people live in their homes”, and that these concerns extend to include the accumulation of material possessions and devices that fill those dwellings.

DOMESTIC SPACES

The curation of home spaces provides an opportunity to write tastes, beliefs, and values onto the lived environment. The domestic environment can work as an extension of the self, collectively constituted in shared dwellings. For families, domestic spaces give a history of interpersonal relationships through objects and marks, colours and smells, presences and absences. Domestic spaces can also be shared outside of family relationships, feeling eclectic or sterile, while similarly illustrating the hegemonic structure of the dwelling. A lack of space, of furnishings, of expression of individuality could indicate a choice to embrace minimalism or visibilise material insecurity – a tiny home and a caravan can function similarly from a practical perspective, but are worlds apart in what meanings they convey about their occupants. The *where* of the domestic space give us hints of who people are and what they value regardless of whether we ever see beyond the dwelling's façade; the real estate agents invocation of 'location, location, location' rings true.

But if the industrial revolution shifted 'work' out of the home and firmly into the public realm (while minimising, feminising, and ultimately disregarding the labour of maintaining the domestic realm), our present age has seen a return of the home as a hybrid place for both private life and work. Part of this return is the result of shifting understandings of gender roles and the distribution of labour in families. As women entered the public realm via the workplace in roles and numbers too large to disregard, they have collectively continued bearing a disproportionate share of domestic labour (Baxter 2015; Ervin et al. 2022; Raday 2019; Sales et al. 2021). While this research indicates that the situation is not changing with any great speed, the discrepancy is at least being actively discussed and acknowledged as a problem. Domestic work, including when it is unpaid, is now more frequently acknowledged as labour. After all, it contributes to our social functioning, to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, and to our health and wellbeing.

The acknowledgement of domestic tasks as forms of labour has also been connected to discourses of austerity and thrift initiated by the sub-prime mortgage crisis and global financial crisis. In 2013, Rebecca Bramall argued that the relationship between a privileging of domestic austerity and the contrasting positions of conservative politics, neoliberalism, environmentalism and others "provide new ways of valuing domestic practices such as baking, jam making, knitting and other crafts" (p. 113). While the resurgent value of these predominantly feminine-coded domestic tasks has been argued to demonstrate a more positive understanding of domestic labour, others disagree. Bramall (2013 p. 118) draws on Natasha Walter in arguing that "the fetishization of domesticity shores up an association between femininity and domestic tasks that feminists have long worked to break down".

A hallmark of modernity, argues Arendt, is the collapse of the public and private sphere into a "social" sphere, a blurred space of private intimacy and public plurality, "because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping" (1958, p. 28). In other words, human life is perpetual economic striving, what she considers a private concern, rather than negotiating the reality of all shared life. The public realm moved into our domestic spaces in a radically accelerated way in 2020 when around the world, many more homes became places where paid employment was also undertaken. Of course, many jobs have always occurred in dwellings – whether our own or someone else's. Other jobs are unsuitable for work-from-home arrangements, resulting in either retrenchment or the classification of people as an 'essential worker', those required to take additional risks by leaving the comparative safety of home. Where possible, however, and with technological facilitation, the last few years have seen

homes become schools, offices, doctors' offices, community centres, universities, investment banks, yoga studios, call centres and news rooms. They were often many of these things simultaneously. The labour of maintaining a domestic space expanded to include maintaining a space suitable to be seen (but preferably not heard) in the background of a video conference. Professional personas were enacted in front of those who shared our domestic lives, in a collapse of context in physical space that mimicked the context collapse seen on social media platforms. The collapse was perhaps more marked because it was not simply the people who were brought together, replicating having one's friends, colleagues, extended family and casual acquaintances all friends on Facebook. A Facebook profile could be constructed as a relatively neutral environment, after all. But in the widespread mediatization of working from home through video conferencing, both the audience and the setting of one's performances collapsed. The idea of the domestic realm as backstage and separate from the public realm of persona performance was infringed upon.

Simultaneously (and somewhat contradictorily), "domestic spaces quite literally [provided] a shelter from the threat of virus", while being "reconfigured as spaces in which multiple forms of waged and unwaged labour co-exist" (Martin 2020, p. 2). The austerity discourses in the United Kingdom have been amplified as a result of layered impact of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the negative impact of the pandemic on gendered divisions of domestic labour has also been studied in Australia, Brazil, Greece, India, the United States, South Africa, Indonesia, and elsewhere (Alon et al. 2020; Borah Hazarika & Das 2021; Craig & Churchill 2021; de Oliveira & Alloatti 2022; Parry & Gordon 2021). Women continued to bear the brunt of child care and domestic work, regardless of whether they were in paid employment, working from home, or had partners who worked from home. In contrast to the negative impact of the pandemic on women, Borah Hazarika and Das (2021) note that for men, while work related stress might have increased as a result of less stable domestic internet connections, they maintained their focus on their paid employment rather than juggling work and family life. Indeed, the fathers found enjoyment in being able to spend more time with their children outside of work hours as they were not restricted by the requirements to travel to an office, while the mothers in the study were exhausted from juggling work and child care across a day.

Of course, domestic spaces are not all the same, and not everyone has access to secure dwellings in which to shelter and work. This, too, has drawn attention as a result of the pandemic. Jilly Boyce Kay (2020) argues that the hypervisibility of private homes as a result of lockdowns provides us an opportunity to unpack discrepancies in what domestic spaces mean and how they are represented back to us through media. Homes are exposed to (or obscured from) colleagues, clients, or students through video conferencing software as part of the work day. Homes are photographed and shared online through social networking platforms to maintain social relationships, functioning as the obligatory backdrop to experiences during lockdown and isolation periods. The presence of "carefully curated images of domesticity" proliferates, shared by "celebrities, micro-celebrities and ordinary folk" (Kay 2020, p. 884). But not all domestic spaces were and are visible. Kay prompts us to consider "What might it mean to understand and promote the private home as 'safe'? For whom is it so---and for whom is it not?" (2020, p. 886). She continues: "'Going home' is dominantly associated with safety, security and love, but for millions of people, 'home' instead represents precarity, violence and terror, either because of the lack of a materially stable home, or because of the violence contained within it, or both" (p. 887). Domesticity may be ideologically connected with safety and nurture, but for many it is structurally tied to risk and violence.

DOMESTIC PERSONAS

How do these concerns speak to ideas of persona? How have the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the ways that personas are enacted in the public-domestic domain? This issue considers these concerns through multiple lenses.

Devin Proctor examines the convergence of technological modernism and hyper-traditional domestic persona-creation via the “tradwife,” a movement that reinforces long-held Western gender roles, especially as they are expressed domestically. Proctor explores both the use of feminist rhetoric as inoculation from contemporary critiques of embracing hegemonic power structures within domestic spaces, as well as the coupling of such traditionalism with white supremacist rhetoric. Examining three profiles, Proctor explores the very possibilities behind publicizing domestic life for political purposes.

Tori Arthur also investigates the blurring of private life and public discourse through disability rights activist Imani Barbarin, whose TikTok account grew rapidly during the early stages of the pandemic. In an intriguing juxtaposition to Proctor’s focus, Arthur closely follows the ways Barbarin uses domestic motifs and spaces to develop a persona that resists, critiques, and disrupts entrenched stereotypes of queerness, Blackness, and disability using “digital alchemy” (Bailey 2021), transforming light, funny, and even bawdy, social media entertainment into powerful social justice statements.

Michael Humphrey, much like Proctor, takes his cues from traditional domestic persona-creation in digital spaces by examining Shaytards, one of the original YouTube family vlogs. But unlike tradwives’ upward trajectory in digital influence, Humphrey follows the collapse of Shaytards’ father figure, Shay Butler, whose persona of a fun-loving, devoted Mormon was harmed by a sexting scandal with video personality Aria Nina. Humphrey traces the narratives of Shay and his wife, Collette, as they navigate the damage to both their offline and online families, as well as the negotiation of meaning taken on by their millions of followers.

For Ferg Maxwell and Victoria Fleming, considerations of a domestic persona invites reflections on those who are excluded from their production. In their analysis of the persona that was built around Khaleel Seivwright through news media reporting on his ‘tiny shelters’ project—providing temporary shelter for Toronto’s unhoused population during the pandemic—Maxwell and Fleming consider how the persona constructed for Seivwright performed as a boundary subject between the news reading public, the City, and the unhoused. With public space reconfigured by encampments and temporary shelters due to risks of relying on the overcrowded City shelter system during the COVID-19 pandemic, Seivwright’s public persona stood in for residents in the encampments who were themselves largely denied the opportunity to enact a persona through media reporting.

The final contribution to this issue comes from Antonia Hernández. Combining ASCII images prompted by stills from sex cam rooms and poetry, Hernández explores the nature of spaces that are domestic *and* public, used for intimate acts shared on digital platforms. Through this creative practice response to the issue theme, Hernández posits the idea of post-authentic domesticity, where a facsimile of intimacy is for sale and home spaces are reconfigured into an appearance of domesticity that somehow belies their everyday reality: “Shiny sheets / not used for sleeping, / multifunctional gaming chairs, / purple lamps that do not / illuminate.”

As with so much of life over the past 3 years, this issue was disrupted and delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We thank the authors of the submissions included in this

issue for their patience and their commitment, as well as the peer reviewers who gave their time to provide excellent feedback on the submissions.

THANK YOU

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