

# A TYPOLOGY OF PERSONA AS SUGGESTED BY JUNGIAN THEORY AND THE EVOLVING PERSONA STUDIES LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

*What is persona? Is there a single definition that all Persona scholars agree on? Are Persona scholars all using it in the same way? These are questions that I set out to answer in this paper, exploring both the contemporary persona studies literature and the Jungian concept of persona that is frequently cited as the intellectual root of the discipline. I begin by looking at the definition of persona in core persona studies texts, move on to Jung's writings on the topic, and then examining the definition and construction of persona in the early volumes of the Persona Studies journal. On the basis of this literature I draw together a typology of persona that reflects the interests and perspectives of authors who have contributed to the development of this discipline. It comprises four categories: 1) persona in the Jungian tradition, a continuous performance pertaining to an individual; 2) generic persona that relates to a particular group of individuals, such as professional personas; 3) fictitious persona that is created in order to serve a specific purpose as art or entertainment, or to inform product design and marketing; and 4) attributed persona, where the characteristics of human persona are applied to a nonhuman entity such as a product or institution. I conclude with a number of suggested directions for research that builds on the Jungian foundations of persona but that draws on other relevant theory from psychology.*

## KEY WORDS

Persona Theory; Jung; Psychology

What is persona? Is there a single definition that all persona scholars agree on? Are persona scholars all using it in the same way? These are questions that I set out to answer in this paper, exploring both the contemporary persona studies literature and the Jungian concept of persona that is frequently cited as the intellectual root of the discipline (notwithstanding its origins in Classical theatre). Does it matter if persona scholars are importing their own discipline-focused definitions of persona into the field? A new multidisciplinary field succeeds partly because it opens up an academic space for interests that are not adequately addressed in its parent disciplines, but arguably it will only succeed if scholars from those disciplines identify common goals and interests. In part, this exercise is intended to frame a set of core assumptions that authors contributing to the field have made about what persona is. To address this end, I begin by looking at the definition of persona in core persona studies texts, move on to Jung's writings on the topic, and then examining the definition and construction of persona in the early volumes of the *Persona Studies* journal. I conclude by drawing together a typology of persona that I

believe reflects the interests and perspectives of authors who have contributed to the development of the field.

## THE THEORETICAL ROOTS OF PERSONA STUDIES

Persona studies is a multidisciplinary field with diverse influences, but its fulcrum is the work of P. David Marshall and colleagues based in media and communication departments in various Australian universities. *Persona Studies* is hosted by Marshall's own Deakin University: its editorial board is exclusively Australian, although this is supplemented by an international board of media, communication and cultural studies scholars, mainly from English-speaking countries. Along with the journal's opening position piece (Marshall & Barbour 2015), Marshall and colleagues have authored articles situating persona studies in other publications (notably, Marshall 2014, and Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015). These, along with the publication of the first major book in the field, *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (Marshall, Moore and Barbour 2020), can be regarded as constituting the intellectual foundation of the discipline.

In terms of its latent historical roots, persona studies derives from the similarly multidisciplinary field of celebrity studies, where Marshall's (1997) work *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* is a seminal text. In many respects, persona studies has arisen as an alternative way of conceptualising the impact of digital culture on celebrity, as well as a way of resolving some of the contradictions inherent in celebrity culture. Marshall's semiotic construction of celebrity (as a 'sign construction' housing, somewhere, a 'real person') left open the matter of agency, an issue not quite as problematic in the broadcast era of celebrity (at least in the disciplines of media and communication) as in the contemporary environment. He began to develop the ideas that eventually constellated into persona studies in the first issue of the *Celebrity Studies* journal (Marshall 2010) as the challenge posed by 'presentational media'. The new means of self-presentation in social media required an intellectual framework that went beyond celebrity, beyond technological affordances, and which can allow us to examine the 'interface' between the 'real person' and the 'public self': as initially defined, "persona studies is an investigation of the presentation of the self" (Marshall 2014, p. 166).

Gradually, the theoretical development of persona studies explored the genealogy of persona as it relates to self-presentation, first through Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach (Marshall 2010), then back to Jung (1986) and the Classical practice of dramatic masks that informed his use of the term. Although it would be wrong to claim that persona studies is founded upon a Jungian conception of persona, his work is quoted at some length, particularly in Marshall and Barbour (2015) and Marshall et al (2020), and so I think it is important to evaluate the existing literature from this particular position.

In Marshall and Barbour (2015), the authors explain that they privilege the psychological perspective of Jung over Freud because Jung's definition of persona as "an arbitrary segment of the collective psyche" (Jung 1966, p. 157) matches more closely their interest in the predominantly digital persona encountered in contemporary society. It allows them to conceptualise persona as a deliberately "strategic form of communication", of "presentation and performance" (Marshall & Barbour 2015, p. 2), rather than synonymous with the individual self. To the Jungian foundation, then, are added the performance theory of Goffman and performativity theory of Butler to build a case for studying online presentations of self as distinct from the individuals that co-ordinate them. Persona, then, is a "performance of individuality" (Marshall et al 2020, p.3), but it is not the individual itself.

Later on in Marshall and Barbour (2015, p.5), effectively the starting point for the *Persona Studies* journal, a second definition of persona is proposed: as an "identity for various

individuals to inhabit”. While the first definition, drawing from Jung, seems to attach persona to a specific individual – so we might talk about Stefani Germanotta performing the persona of Lady Gaga, for example – this alternative concept envisages persona more as a kind of generic social role, or template, that individuals could use in order to fashion their own specific personas. This is evident in several of the case studies of persona that the authors go on to present in Marshall et al (2020), such as “the artist persona”, “the academic persona”, and so on. This is a treatment of persona that we do not find in Jung, as I will go on to discuss in the next section.

These two approaches to persona would seem to lend themselves to forms of research that explore persona as largely a discursive phenomenon: how an individual uses language/discourse to construct a version of themselves to interact in a specific medium. However, the authors use a variety of methodological approaches, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a largely interview-based method devised by the psychologist Jonathan Smith (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009), which has been used extensively in health and clinical psychology as an alternative to the ‘suspicious’ modes of enquiry such as discourse analysis, precisely because it does not try to frame individual accounts of experience as subjective accounts of reality. This fits with Jungian psychology in that it allows access to an agentic self ‘behind the mask’ who is performing the persona and it enables the researcher to explore the ways that those individuals construct their (largely online) personas (Barbour, Lee & Moore 2017; Marshall et al 2020). At the same time, the ‘interpretative’ aspect of IPA allows researchers to acknowledge their own analytic input into the meaning-making process (rather than taking interview accounts, at face value, as undisputed ‘truth’).

In a broader sense, persona research is guided by five dimensions outlined in Marshall et al (2020) that connect the individual to the collective: the public-facing self (Lady Gaga as celebrity); the mediatised dimension (the persona as dependent, to an extent, on the affordances of specific media); the performative “routines” or patterns displayed by the persona; the collective dimension (its interaction with a ‘micropublic’); and a kind of evaluative dimension that links together “value, agency, reputation, and prestige” (VARP). This model might not have much obvious connection to Jungian theory, even if there is some common ground between the basic ideas, and ties persona studies very firmly to digital culture.

For this reason, it is clear that a literal application of Jungian theory will not work for persona in contemporary culture. However, Marshall et al (2020) do conclude by calling for the consideration of “ordinary or everyday personas” (p. 213), to deflect some of the attention away from the more predictable investigations of celebrities and other elite figures. This, and the willingness of researchers to explore ‘behind the mask’, to examine persona in the making, suggest that a reappraisal of Jung’s writing on persona is beneficial at this point, before going on to survey the treatment of persona in the persona studies literature more widely.

## PERSONA ACCORDING TO JUNG

The first thing to emphasise about Jungian theory is that his concept of self does not quite align with the social constructionist approach adopted by most persona studies authors. While the mask analogy may allow Marshall and Barbour (2015) to construct persona as ‘strategic’ and ‘agentic’, it simultaneously invites us to remove the mask and peer behind. Who is this individual performing the “labour” of “persona work”? While the performative approach to persona might allow us to discuss *Lady Gaga* as a social construct, the idea that the persona is “nothing real...a compromise between the individual and society... a secondary reality” (Jung 1966, p. 157) begs the question as to what the primary reality might be. Who is the arch-

strategist Stefani Germanotta, who has fabricated, and profited from, this phenomenally successful persona?

These questions may, of course, be more pertinent to a psychologist than to a cultural scholar. Yet if we are going to probe behind the mask, interview the string-pullers, and analyse their subjective experiences using IPA, it behoves persona scholars to engage a little with the psychological. And in Jungian terms (and, indeed, most versions of psychoanalytic theory), this means engaging with a “self” that is believed to be “true” or “real”<sup>1</sup> as distinct from the unreal, fabricated persona. To ascribe agency or strategy to the individual who fashions the persona is to call into being this “true self” as a locus of action, perhaps a seat of consciousness. To what extent is persona construction deliberate, though, and to what extent is it under the control of this conscious self?

Jung’s writings on what lies beneath the mask, or persona, are somewhat obscure. In his ‘Definitions’ section of *Psychological Types* (Jung 1921/1986, p. 99) he refers to “the real individuality” as “the subject”, but he also equates this with the unconscious. The subject comprises “all of those vague, dim stirrings, feelings, thoughts and sensations...[welling up] from the dark inner depths”, and includes “inhibitions, fancies, moods, vague feelings and scraps of fantasy”. We might, then, conclude that personas do not fantasise or dream: this is some kind of interior experience, elsewhere referred to as “private life”. The persona is the vehicle that connects this locus of experience to “objects”, effectively other people or society.

So the persona as social media profile does not quite map on to the Jungian persona. Clearly there is much more going on behind the Twitter mask than “dim stirrings” and “vague feelings”, and the artists interviewed in Kim Barbour’s research (Marshall et al. 2020, chapter 6) report using careful strategies to craft their online personas, likewise Christopher Moore’s *gâmeurs* (game-playing and creating personas), and the various professionals discussed in chapter 8. The artists and other individuals here correspond more closely with what Jung calls “the self”, which comprises “my whole being”, and is “the goal of psychic development” (Jung 1962/1986, p. 234).

Of course, this notion of individual self has been sharply criticised in recent decades by psychologists working in traditions such as social constructionism, post-structuralism, and discursive psychology: for these authors, it is a Western fiction arising from historical economic conditions and ideology, ultimately a convenient tool of capitalism and patriarchy (Sampson 1989). A more flexible approach is the tripartite model of self suggested by Rom Harré (Harré 1998, pp. 4-5), which distinguishes “self 1” –the “I”, “the point of view from which one perceives the material environment and acts upon it”– from self 2 and self 3 (“the totalities of personal impressions we make on other people”). While self 3 is probably closest to the online persona, and self 1 probably captures the “dim stirrings”, self 2 is a more conscious structure that calibrates, on the one hand, the unconscious impulses, and on the other, the active management of social negotiations.

But all this is getting us away from Jung. If persona is the object-facing part of the individual, adapted for social interaction, some fundamental questions are raised. Is the persona a continuous performance across time and place and social context? How close is it to what social psychologists and others might understand as ‘identity’? These are important questions for those of us studying celebrity, social media, and other forms of what we used to think of as media-audience interaction. Here again, though, Jung is mysterious. Much of his writing on the topic (notably Jung 1929/1986, p. 95) suggests that persona is a more or less permanent structure, so one mustn’t create a persona one can’t live up to; one mustn’t over-identify with the persona (this being “a very fruitful source of neuroses”); one must fit one’s persona to the

role expected by society. “Each must stand at his post, here a cobbler, there a poet. No man is expected to be both” (Jung 1929/1986, p. 94).

This last comment appears to impose some rather stringent conditions upon persona construction, and may relate back to the professional personas discussed in Marshall et al. (2020). Clearly, for those individuals that wish to fashion a professional or generic persona (doctors, academics, lawyers), there is some kind of ‘template’ or model that the persona is expected to conform to. But does social media not allow the same individual to be simultaneously a fashion influencer specialising in designer footwear (to update Jung’s cobbler example) while sharing their poems in a different medium? Without any damage to the credibility of either?

The possibility of performing more than one persona did occur to Jung, however. In his attempts to separate such terms as “soul”, “personality” and “psyche” (Jung 1921/1986)<sup>2</sup>, he concedes that there may be individuals who do not always perform the same role in different social environments. “It frequently happens that men who in public life are extremely energetic, spirited, obstinate, wilful and ruthless appear good-natured, mild, compliant, even weak, when at home and in the bosom of their family” (Jung 1921/1986, p. 98). He goes on to say that such instances “represent two collective personalities, which may be summed up quite simply under the name ‘personae’” (Jung 1921/1986, p. 99).

So it seems that, consistent with Jungian theory, the individual may perform more than one persona at any given time, and by implication, modify or entirely change their persona(s) over time to adapt to changing circumstances. This would seem to fit well with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation and with the adoption of generic personas for professional interaction that can play alongside other personas for intimate or informal environments (which will obviously change more than once across the lifespan).

I will now return to the Persona Studies literature more generally, and explore the way that other authors have responded to Marshall and colleagues’ call for multidisciplinary work in the field, and to what extent these different perspectives on persona correspond to the Jungian model.

## **PERSONA ACCORDING TO THE PERSONA STUDIES LITERATURE**

In this section my focus is directed mainly to the virtual pages of the *Persona Studies* journal, but occasionally in other publications where authors have explicitly anchored their work within the persona studies literature (e.g. Polaschek 2018).

*Persona Studies* has published several special issues in its first five years that showcase work being done in different disciplines that are pertinent to the field. Of course, this information is a mere click away for those of you reading on a suitable device, but to summarise, these have taken in: professional (or “working”) personas (volume 1, issue 2); political personas (2,2); online personas (3,2); scientific/historical personas (4,1); design personas (4,2); music (5,1); and theatre (5,2). At the time of writing there is a call for papers for a special issue on games (6,2).

The increasing trend towards specialisation may reflect the diversity of perspectives that are being brought to the field, and it is quite clear from a quick overview of the contents of these issues that authors in different disciplines are further stretching Marshall et al’s (2020) already quite broad definition of persona. I have grouped these perspectives into four specific categories that could be held to represent persona studies as it currently stands.

## Persona type 1: The Jungian model

I am beginning with the treatments of persona that most closely map on to Jung's descriptions of persona as outlined in the previous section, and in general, these are the treatments that correspond with the model outlined in Marshall et al (2020) and in the earlier writings of the field's founders: namely, that persona is a continuous performance by a single individual. It must be noted at this point that none of these authors draws on Jungian theory as such in their work, so the application here is my own interpretation of their analyses.

A good example of this type of persona is van der Wal's (2018) study of the British historian Eileen Power, who in the 1920s and 30s developed a reputation for outstanding scholarship (as LSE professor) as well as being a successful broadcaster in the early years of BBC radio. Van der Wal's analysis of her correspondence and diaries leading up to this period reveals the strategies she used to fabricate her persona from various models on offer, whether in the domains of academic history, high society, intellectual pursuits, or feminism.

From the same issue, Erman's (2018) study of Belgian botanist Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry takes as its case an individual with conflicting identities – as teacher, scholar, and wife (of an already famous botanist) – who has to perform more than one social role in order to maintain a "multifaceted self". Erman describes this as a "hybrid persona", although, as discussed in the previous section, Jungian theory allows for these different roles to be conceived as discrete personas in their own right, all pertaining to the same individual who manages and performs them.

Like van der Wal (2018), Deflem's (2019) analysis of the Lady Gaga persona is more concerned with the maintenance of the continuous performance of the same persona. Unlike Eileen Power, however, Lady Gaga is more obviously a public performance, and Deflem's sources are not intimate writings and correspondence but her highly visible media presence (which, of course, includes social media, arguably the modern equivalent of letter-writing, but enacted, in Lady Gaga's case at least, in front of a huge watching audience). Deflem attaches much significance to the name Lady Gaga, and the point at which Stefani Germanotta began using it professionally. As with Eileen Power, there is a sense here of persona being an accomplishment, a status that the individual has worked towards, rather than a temporary 'mask'. Indeed, Deflem concludes that "Lady Gaga is now always Lady Gaga, there is no more private self that is not Gaga" (p. 42).

We might argue that this is the conclusion one reaches when so much persona analysis is invested in names. It might, alternatively, reflect the contemporary social media situation where, in Goffmanian terms, frontstage and backstage are melded together in one continuous performance. If all that lies behind persona is the unconscious "subject", consisting of "vague stirrings", this might be consistent with Jungian theory. But that same theory would not predict a happy outcome, regarding this as a clear case of over-identification with persona. So could a persona construct other, secondary personas, to perform other interpersonal work? Deflem specifically resists the notion of multiple personas, arguing that it is "conceptually sounder to adopt the notion of a [single] persona...that is multi-dimensional and versatile" (p. 42). But then Lady Gaga is reduced to a persona just like any other.

A more promising line of enquiry may be that adopted by an author in the same issue. Elliott's (2019) study of Bruce Springsteen examines his performance across his career of many different personas, informed by the author's previous research on the 'late voice' of other popular singers and the way they have adapted to the ageing self towards the end of their careers. His sources, like van der Wal's, are autobiographical, and seem to catch the 'I' of the

narrator distancing himself from other first-person positions in his songwriting and public statements earlier in his career.

Again, this author does not draw directly on Jung's work, but unlike the other studies mentioned thus far, he does explicitly reference Marshall and Barbour (2015) and adopts their definition of persona as "the relative and strategic posture of different versions of the self" (ibid, p.4). This is important, because it grounds the research clearly in the intellectual tradition of the field. It also allows us to see the individual who is Bruce Springsteen performing clearly delineated roles, whether in his persona as "the Boss", or as autobiographical narrator, as "regular person like us", or "rock'n'roll preacher". Some of these may resemble generic personas, but as the case of Eileen Power demonstrates, these are the cultural material available to us for persona construction, and the success of the persona may depend on how unique and original a creation we (and the public) make it.

You will notice, perhaps, that I have deliberately avoided creating a separate category for the online persona. This is because I think it is important for persona studies not to tie itself irrevocably to the twenty-first century, and it is quite plain from the journal's contents thus far that such a restricted definition would discourage many contributors. Furthermore, Marshall et al. (2020) explicitly call for work on "everyday personas" (i.e., persona that goes beyond its technological manifestation). For these reasons, I think it is important to accommodate the online within a more general model of persona, within which the online persona is, in theory, part of a wider performance, and at the same time is capable of containing other personas (so we might see Bruce Springsteen, on Twitter, switching between "The Boss" and "regular person" depending on the intended addressee (Marshall 2010) and others have already discussed the different forms of address that celebrities can use on social media).

Within this category then, I include several of the studies that have specifically focused on the online presentation of self, especially where individuals whose offline persona are already well-established (either from the pre-digital era, or through continuing forms of legacy or broadcast media), then go on to launch specifically digital personas for strategic purposes. Usher's (2016) analysis of political party leaders' Twitter profiles during the 2015 UK general election campaign is a good example. Here again we see individuals negotiating the demands of different social contexts by performing, often at the same time, a persona that is seemingly sincere (since politicians want potential voters to believe their promises), but is consistent with party strategy and principles (which may inevitably differ from personal opinion).

Like some of the other authors in this category, Usher's work is informed more by Goffman than Jung, although with explicit ties to the early persona studies literature, and the personas themselves are clearly tied to individuals even if they are carefully co-ordinated productions. While her focus is on the techniques used in order to create the most engaging online profile (which would of course have involved a whole campaign team so can scarcely be considered a personal project), these can all be regarded as performances of the self, and at an individual level one could argue that they are good examples of the cultivation of different personas to be performed by the same individual (the strong, consistent leader one minute and the ordinary person in touch with the electorate's concerns the next).

In an example taken from other literature, Polaschek (2018) draws on the persona studies work as well as star studies (e.g. Dyer 1979) to explore the persona construction of Amy Winehouse, specifically in response to a posthumous documentary film about the singer. Here, the author is explicit in her reference to the different personas performed by Winehouse during her career, created from public performance (records, concerts), public utterances (especially in interviews) and her "choice of clothing, hairstyle and body adornment" (Polaschek 2018). This

last element of persona construction is often overlooked by researchers but is of crucial importance for highly visible performers. Analysing her appearances on a TV panel show two years apart, Polaschek contrasts the (relatively) “demure”, accommodating persona allied to the *Frank* LP of 2003 with the aggressive, confrontational persona created following the release of *Back to Black* in 2006. Her visual appearance, as well as her verbal behaviour, was strikingly different on the two occasions, prompting the show’s host (in 2006) to yearn for “the old Amy Winehouse”. Winehouse’s reply was simply: “she’s dead”.

At the same time, Polaschek examines the Amy Winehouse persona as constructed, not by Winehouse the individual but by the director of the film *Amy* in 2015, four years after her death. Here, she argues, the radical, “subversive” persona constructed by Winehouse is “displaced by a conventional persona” (Polaschek 2018, p. 17) that draws, albeit sympathetically, on the stereotype of the psychologically damaged ‘victim’. In this way, posthumous persona creation becomes a negotiation between contemporary culture and historical (or archival) materials. In the ‘theatre’ special issue of *Persona Studies* (5,2) a similar point is made about contemporary representations of Shakespeare, trading in the “genius” persona constructed across previous centuries for a more ironic, comic persona to suit a more irreverent cultural zeitgeist (Luckhurst & Mayer 2019).

At this point, we begin to move away from the Jungian persona to consider personas more as cultural constructs than performances by specific individuals, as outlined in the three remaining categories of persona research.

## **Persona type 2: The generic persona**

If our interest in persona is more about *practice* than about person, more about general techniques than about specific performances, we might be more interested in the range of models available than in the unique expression of the individual actor. This certainly seems to be the case for many articles in *Persona Studies*, and has been a major consideration at the heart of the persona studies core literature from the outset. What kind of techniques do artists use to fashion an artist persona? What kind of considerations do lawyers, doctors and other professionals need to take into account when fabricating theirs (Lee 2015, Marshall et al. 2020)?

While this might seem to take us away from Jungian theory, the appeal of Jung to Marshall and Barbour (2015) lies in his locating persona within the “collective unconscious” and the use of masks to represent different roles that individuals can adopt (strategically or otherwise). As mentioned previously, the authors offer a second definition of persona as an “identity for various individuals to inhabit” (Marshall & Barbour 2015, p.5). In this way, persona comes closer to the theatrical mask where, in various traditions from Ancient Greece to Japanese Nô theatre, masks were used as a way to signify generic types (e.g., young man, old man, slave) as opposed to unique ‘characters’ (Coldiron 2007).

These theatrical masks might be better understood, in the Jungian sense, as cultural *archetypes*, symbols that represent “the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation” (Jung 1927/1986, p. 67) that are fashioned from cultural material, or “deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity” (p. 70). Likewise, the generic persona – the artist persona, for example – is a recognisable *type*, about which people have certain expectations, which impose constraints on performance but also allow for imaginative possibilities. Working with these types allows successful performers to subvert expectations and thereby shape future manifestations of the genre. In this way Eileen Power (discussed by van der Wal 2018), as a successful woman in an era where the expected historian persona was almost exclusively male, helped to break down gendered constraints for future generations of female historians.



Dahlberg (2018) defines the generic persona very succinctly, as “an ideal-type or model of abilities, attitudes, and dispositions that on a collective level are regarded as crucial for the pursuit of a specific social activity with a corresponding social role” (p. 61). This understanding of persona comes, not from the same roots as the foundation persona studies literature (Jung, Goffman, etc.), but from the historian Herman Paul, who has defined persona as an “ideal-typical model” (Paul 2014, p. 348), himself following earlier attempts to characterise the “scientific persona”, “philosopher persona”, and so on (see Condren & Hunter 2008; Veit-Brause 2002). Here, too, persona carries a performative quality: these are the attributes that a scientist or philosopher is expected to possess, so persona cultivation is a strategic matter of an individual acquiring them.

Crucially, Paul (2014) and other authors studying scholarly and scientific personas have cautioned against the ‘mask’ analogy of persona, arguing that these personas are more deeply ingrained in the individual self and colour the individual’s interactions away from the professional audience or context. One does not stop being a scholar in the domestic sphere. This is quite different to the Jungian model where a different persona is adopted as one moves from one context to another. Paul argues that the scholar persona may conflict with other ideal-typical personas (such as “mother”) and this may be a source of tension in the self. Negotiating the boundaries between these generic personas is clearly a fruitful source of persona studies research and studies like van der Wal (2018) are exemplary in this area.

In Marshall et al. (2020), the artist persona is traced back to historical myths surrounding painters in particular that form a set of typical biographical elements (e.g. overcoming parental disapproval of seeking an artistic career) and, together with other artist representations (appearance, social class, mental health), continue to frame expectations of “artistness” that can act as a deterrent for some aspiring artists while offering opportunities to others. Examining persona construction in a highly diverse sample of creative individuals (including tattoo artists and street artists), Barbour’s research documented how contemporary artists both exploited and subverted these mythical representations to fashion (online) personas that were recognisable as artistic even though they work within non-traditional practices (Barbour, Lee & Moore 2017).

In terms of research, examining professional or conventional personas like those of artists and academics is a simple matter of identifying individuals from simple criteria: an artist is a creative individual, an academic someone affiliated with a university. On social media these criteria will usually be evident from their profiles. The interpretative work here is more about the manner in which the generic persona is performed: unless one sets out deliberately to explore borders, or compromised professional personas, the attribution of persona to individual is relatively uncontroversial. A more contentious treatment of generic persona is the character type, where the category of persona is based on the researcher’s own interests and perspective. Fairchild and Marshall (2019, p.12) refer to the “ageing rock star” persona as relatively “straightforward”, but at what point can a rock star be said to start “ageing”? Recognising a type, or pattern, in what Jung calls “humanity’s constantly repeated experiences” is clearly a matter of interpretation, but doing so may be an important task for Persona researchers.

### **Persona type 3: The fictitious persona**

The third type of persona addressed in the literature thus far is not a persona associated with a specific individual, or even a group of categorisable individuals. It is a persona that is fabricated out of nothing for a particular purpose – as art or entertainment (novels, drama, film), as a target consumer or user to inform the design of a product or marketing strategy, or as a participant in a game (an avatar, often representing the player). This kind of persona comes

closest to one of the oldest uses of the term, the list of '*dramatis personae*' appearing in the opening pages of a playscript<sup>3</sup>. Notably, in the special "theatre" issue of *Persona Studies* this type of persona was not referenced at all, the papers instead focusing on the individual (type 1) personas<sup>4</sup> of playwrights and actors (including dead ones, mainly Shakespeare) and stage performers in general (mainly stand-up comedians), along with one notable exception to be discussed in the next section (type 4).

Indeed, the persona as a fictional construction in art and entertainment has not really been touched on in the persona studies literature to date. Instead, authors have discussed the creation of personas in areas like marketing and design, tracing the concept back to the work of software designer Alan Cooper, who recommended the use of carefully crafted fictional personas to drive the design process. This was part of Cooper's broad aim to wrest the development of high tech from the quirks of programmers and adopt a more business-oriented approach. Personas needed to be psychologically convincing for developers to use them as imaginary users of their products. "We don't just say that Emilee uses business software. We say that Emilee uses WordPerfect Version 5.1 to write letters to Gramma" (Cooper 1998, p. 138).

A special issue (or section) was devoted to this kind of persona in volume 4, issue 2 of *Persona Studies*, considering the use of personas in architectural design as well as IT (Nielsen, 2018), and was also the subject of an earlier paper that discussed the use of persona to inform the design of Twitter (Humphrey 2017). Although these strategic fictional personas are designed from data collected through extensive research (analytics and user interviews, typically), both Humphrey (2017) and Salminen et al (2018) argue that, in practice, they are usually derived more from analytics and design company's assumptions than from the richer, more in-depth qualitative data, and as a result are often not representative of many potential product users.

Humphrey (2017) suggests that persona studies' focus on digital personas is highly appropriate, since all Twitter users are effectively modelling themselves on the principles of persona construction used in software design. This opens up the question as to how fictitious online personas might be considered, although it is generally agreed, and consistent with Jungian theory, that all personas, off- and online, are necessarily derived in part from one's interaction with other people and often based on models or prototypes that can be generic or individual.

A more explicit type of fictionalised persona comes from the world of gaming, where fictional characters are often built into the narrative structure of the game and players have the potential to modify them in order to create bespoke characters (as discussed in Marshall & Barbour 2015). The process by which 'avatars' become personalised is somewhat complex, as described in an article by Milik (2017), where it is difficult to separate out the various layers of (text-based) character, personalised avatar, and individual player. Ultimately, for Milik, taking a dramaturgical approach, it is the last of these that emerges as the persona – the gamer who enacts a continuous performance across games, game characters, and other online interactions within the gaming community.

As mentioned previously in relation to theatre studies, the traditional form of fictional persona does not seem to have influenced the persona studies field so far, perhaps because the study of character creation for novels, plays and films has already been accomplished in literary fields. It may also be the case that this work – the creation of characters that inhabit specific texts – is regarded as a separate concept from the construction of fictional personas in other areas. Marshall et al (2020, pp. 20-21) rather gloss over the distinction, other than a brief

suggestion that fictional characters reflect the traditional literary sense of “dramatic personae” and that this is somehow distinct from persona in the present context.

I have no particular reason to see why this should be the case, however, and I would imagine there is some mileage in examining how literary characters can be treated as personas, sometimes escaping their textual moorings to become almost generic in nature (one thinks of characters like James Bond or even Hamlet as having a life beyond their original context). Indeed, Marshall et al. (2020) do consider Odysseus in this sense, adopted as a persona in the sense of a voice (or location of the “I”) in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*. (Incidentally, poetry in general is a potential goldmine for persona research, with writers frequently adopting alter-egos from which to speak, from Byron’s “Childe Harold” to the multiple heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa.)

#### **Persona type 4: Attributed persona**

The final category in this model contains studies where persona is not attached to an individual, class of individual, or fictional character, but to an inanimate object or concept. This type of persona is not really considered in the foundational persona studies literature. Indeed, when discussing professional persona in Marshall et al. (2020), it is mentioned that the legal profession has a recent tradition of using ‘persona’ to describe “corporations and commercial entities” such as legal firms who assume the guise of a persona as an explicit marketing strategy. This is referred to as a “markedly different” (Marshall et al. 2020, p. 191) treatment of persona to that considered in persona studies, perhaps better understood as *identity* rather than persona. However, the persona concept – complete with nods to Jungian theory and the identification of archetypes – has taken root in the academic marketing literature, where it is applied specifically to branding. One example here is the way that celebrity chefs have used their media personas to launch distinctive restaurant chains (Dion & Arnoud 2015).

Indeed, we can find a parallel treatment even within Marshall et al. (2020) itself, where the authors discuss the way in which games can acquire their own personas, especially those which are visually represented by a specific character (and may be named after it, like Cuphead and Mugman), whose attributes then shape the game as a whole to an extent that the game takes on the persona of its protagonist. In Fairchild and Marshall’s (2019) introduction to the special issue on music, similar uses of persona are alluded to in relation to music acquiring certain persona-like characteristics that either foreground the idiosyncratic nature of the composer or express human qualities. In effect, this is an anthropomorphic application of persona.

The most explicit example of this treatment of persona is found in Sedgman’s (2019) analysis of the UK theatre company, The Bristol Old Vic. Sedgman grounds her concept of persona in the architectural literature, where buildings or organisations come to acquire an “institutional persona”. This persona embodies all the characteristics of the institution’s history, its reputation, its corporate philosophy, and the collective of individual personas that constitute its workforce and the community it serves. So the Bristol Old Vic’s persona is more than just a corporate identity: it presents itself as “historic and forward looking, as theatre building and performance event – a public presentation of self that requires constant redefinition” (Sedgman 2019, p. 107).

Of course, we have left Jung far behind with this category. The mask analogy, despite its theatrical origin, seems hard to apply to an institution, especially if we associate it with agency and strategy. Hard as the marketing team might strive to engineer a persona for their organisation, they can do little about its history or reputation (and it must be conceded that the Bristol Old Vic is a relatively recent persona, at least as regards the theatre itself and its long

history). Nevertheless, the application of persona studies ideas to other disciplines is a potentially fruitful point of connection for the field. Mapping her analysis of the Bristol Old Vic on to Marshall et al.'s (2020) five dimensions of persona, notably the fifth (VARP), Sedgman sets up a comparative framework whereby other theatrical institutions might be compared and understood. This framework might also be extended to compare institutional personas in other fields of the performing arts and beyond.

## WHERE NOW FOR PERSONA STUDIES?

In this paper I have tried to represent the state of the field of persona studies by identifying four broad categories of persona type that I believe capture the vast majority of studies conducted so far in the field. I may have overlooked some; there are clearly some grey areas between the categories, but in each case they are defined by the object that the persona attaches to: individual, genre, fictional creation, and non-human entity. I have argued that the first category is the one that most closely resembles the model of persona advanced by Jung (and Goffman) because the object in question is a specific individual.

Some readers might wonder why I have taken a Jungian perspective at all, when clearly so few persona studies contributors have cited his work. Almost invariably Goffman is the touchstone in these studies. Aside from disciplinary preference (as a psychologist), it is notable that Jung is frequently cited in the foundational persona studies literature and it seems that Marshall and colleagues view the lineage as important. Certainly, if persona is best understood in a contemporary (online) context we need to have some sense of what is actually going on “backstage” and this is where psychological theory can make a valuable contribution to the field.

As yet, it seems that contribution is fairly thin on the ground, so this would seem to be an area for future development in the field. While Jung's work is important, there are many aspects of Jungian theory that may cause contemporary researchers problems (not least the rigid gendering of concepts like *animus/anima*, which is bound tightly into some of his writing on the persona). As with Freud, it seems sensible to retain the ideas that have survived social and political change, and to disregard the rest. There are more recent developments in psychology that can also enrich the field, such as the tripartite self of Harré (1998, as discussed briefly earlier), and the postmodern “saturated self” of Kenneth Gergen (Gergen 1991; also discussed by Marshall et al. 2020).

More generally, there is the field of discursive psychology, which has taken traditional psychological topics such as memory, self, and attitude and reconstituted them as fundamentally discursive or interactional in nature (Edwards & Potter 1992). Here, the performance of persona might be reconfigured as primarily a discursive phenomenon, especially in the online environment where we perform, much of the time, via intertextual exchanges with others. It would benefit from taking a wider understanding of the discursive, embracing the Foucauldian notion of discourse as practice, so that persona construction is understood as a ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault 1988). Indeed, the ethical and moral dimensions of self-care that this practice is nested within can be easily mapped on to the Jungian model of persona.

There is no reason, it seems to me, why Jung's idea of the collective unconscious cannot be incorporated into a discursive understanding of persona. Kelsey's (2017) application of Jungian theory to mythological storytelling in the media explicitly combines the concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes with discourse analysis in order to explore the public impact of narrative construction. An important dimension here is the affective work performed

by such mythologies on their audiences, and, consistent with Marshall's (1997) semiotic theory of celebrity, persona might appear to function in a similar way.

Clearly the value of any new multidisciplinary field lies in the needs that it serves for its contributors, and it is wise of the field's founders that they have cast the net sufficiently wide to embrace a variety of perspectives on what personas are, and what intellectual purposes they address. The only risk that such an approach runs is the prospect of fragmentation, whereby researchers from different traditions and disciplines find themselves in conflict because they disagree over what persona should be and how the associated concepts apply to their fields of interest. This is why a framework such as this one might be useful, to enable researchers to specify the treatment of persona they are applying. It could even serve as a springboard for special interest groups within the field over years to come.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The idea that something lies 'behind' or 'underneath' the social actor is prevalent across psychoanalytic theories. While the relationship between ego, id, and superego is somewhat more complex, the 'id' is nevertheless submerged beneath the more socially-acceptable psychic structures. Winnicott (1965/2018) and Laing (1960/1965) both propose the existence of a "false self" that the individual adopts during early childhood as a compromise to their "true self" in social activity.

<sup>2</sup> Don't expect any greater clarity here, either: in his 'Definitions' section of *Psychological Types* (Jung, 1921/1986, p. 97), he calls *psyche* "the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious", which suggests, then, that the persona, as the conscious part of the individual (i.e. as distinct from the "subject" as discussed earlier), is subsumed within the psyche. *Soul* is "a clearly demarcated functional complex that can best be described as a 'personality'". But the two "personalities" in his example he then describes as "personae". So is the soul, after all, a persona? At this point, I would urge the reader not to give up on Jung. Not entirely.

<sup>3</sup> According to Pangallo (2015), the earliest instance of this was Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1602). In the early days the *dramatis personae* sometimes appeared at the end of the script.

<sup>4</sup> Luckhurst and Mayer (2019) insist on retaining the Latin plural *personae* over the Persona Studies preferred Anglicised plural, arguing that it reflects better the tradition of Theatre Studies that they are working within. Given that the *personae* they discuss are not of the *dramatis* variety, they are effectively breaking with tradition in both fields.

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