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What is Donald Trump? Forms of ‘celebrity’ in celebrity politics

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Abstract

It is widely assumed that Donald Trump is a ‘celebrity politician’, and that he has cashed in his success on the reality show *The Apprentice* to secure political credibility and attention. In this respect he fits what Matthew Wood et al (2016) have labelled the ‘superstar celebrity politician’. This characterisation is the latest in a number of refinements to the definition and understanding of the celebrity politician. While this is a helpful move, I want to suggest that it might overlook one key dimension of the phenomenon. Definitions of the celebrity politician tend to focus on the source of their ‘celebrity’ – how they became famous, rather than on how they act out their celebrity role. This latter dimension features in media

coverage, where journalists and commentators borrow from showbusiness to describe politics, but is less often analysed in the political science literature. It matters because, I want to suggest, celebrity politicians like Trump act as stars, whether of reality television, rock music or film. They do not just resemble stars; they are them. This is evident in how they are represented, how they perform and how their 'fans' respond to them. It is also symptomatic of wider changes in the conduct and form of the contemporary, mediated political realm.

Media reporting of elections and of political leaders draws parallels with the world of entertainment. Journalistic metaphors and analogies are designed to capture the style of the politician and the response they elicit; they also serve to explain them. Here are three examples:

Emmanuel Macron is getting rock star attention and audiences to match. He's not quite biting the heads off bats yet, but his rallies do have a particular kind of energy.

(Lucy Williamson, *Today*, BBC Radio 4, 26th January 2017)

Chavez was a rock star for the global left. (Ioan Grillo, 'Requiem for Venezuela', *Time*, 22 August 2016)

Not long ago Boris Johnson was a comedy subplot in British politics ... This fairground Falstaff is now Foreign Secretary. (Rafael Behr, *Guardian*, 27 July 2016)

The suggestion of such reports is that we understand better the political process by seeing its participants less as representatives and their citizens, and more as performers and their fans. And that doing so provides insights into their behaviour and their success. So it is that when Donald Trump proclaims 'I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters' (Reuters, 23rd January 2016), this is not to be regarded as a wild and implausible exaggeration, but rather as an illustration of how he regards himself and how he is regarded.

This paper asks whether we should take seriously these journalistic tropes. It does so by reflecting on how the idea of celebrity politics has been adopted and deployed both by the media and by political scientists. My argument is that, without necessarily embracing the more hyperbolic claims made for the 'celebritisation' of politics (we might reasonably suppose that Trump would be arrested and charged with attempted homicide), we do need to develop our understanding of celebrity politics by considering the *forms* of celebrity that

are adopted by politicians or constructed by their media coverage. In making this case, I will focus on the example of President Trump.

By concentrating on the phenomenon of the celebrity politician, it is important to acknowledge the wider context in which it is located. The celebrity politician is, it might be argued, a feature of wider processes of the mediatisation (Hjarvard, 2008; Esser and Stromback, 2014) and the personalisation of politics (Langer, 2012; Ribke, 2015), and of the rise of populist politics (Moffitt, 2016). '[P]opulist leaders', writes Benjamin Moffitt (2016: 85), 'can become quasi-celebrities, known as much – or sometimes more – for their media performances and stylistic outbursts than for the “content” of their politics.'

The paper uses the case of Donald Trump to argue that, as political analysts, we need to look more closely at the behaviour of celebrity politicians *as celebrities* (as opposed to politicians), both because this helps us to understand their behaviour, but also because it helps us to comprehend their popularity. In what follows, I begin by reviewing existing definitions of 'celebrity politics' as they are used by political scientists. I then contrast these with media representations of Trump and his celebrity persona, arguing that they raise questions and issues that are not fully acknowledged by the political science literature. The paper ends by exploring the implications of this refined definition for our understanding of celebrity politics in general and Trump in particular.

1. The 'celebrity' in celebrity politics

Much of literature on celebrity politics has been taken up with the question of definition. If the claim is that the 'celebrity politician' is significantly different from the 'traditional politician', then it is reasonable to ask how and in what way they are different. Typically and

unsurprisingly, the definition of the 'celebrity politician' has focused upon the political dimension of the phenomenon, to the exclusion of the celebrity dimension.

The standard reference point for many definitions of the celebrity politician has been Darrell West and John Orman's (2003) *Celebrity Politics*. They identify five categories of 'celebrity politicians' (West and Orman, 2003: 2): political newsworthies, legacies, famed nonpoliticos (elected officials), famed nonpoliticos (lobbyists and spokespersons), and event celebrities. Their categorisation is framed by the political scene, and the categories refer to those within that scene who have achieved some kind of celebrity status. The categorisation itself is dependent upon the origins of the fame 'and the consequences for our society and culture' (ibid.). What this latter refers to is, in fact, the operation of the political system and the engagement of voters in it. Their story is one of 'crisis' in the political system and the harmful effects of celebrity culture on politics (West and Orman, 2003: 14 & 111-119). Their argument informs their definition, with the result that the character of 'celebrityhood' is seen only in negative terms and in relation to a prior set of assumptions as to who should be involved in taking political decisions (West and Orman, 2003: 116).

My own response (Street, 2004) to West and Orman was an attempt to both simplify their definition and to offer a more neutral account of the phenomenon, in which the focus was on the nature of their political involvement. I distinguished between the celebrity *politician* (CP1), the aspiring political actor who adopted celebrity techniques, and the *celebrity politician* (CP2), the celebrity who engaged with politics, but did not aspire to political office or responsibility. As others have argued, my approach was guilty of oversimplifying the idea. Hence, David Marsh et al (2010), in a detailed review of the literature, argue for the need to move beyond a categorisation based on either the origins

of the 'celebrity-ness' (*qua* West and Orman) or the nature of their involvement in politics. Their own five-fold categorisation was generated by combining the sphere from which the celebrity politician emerged (celebrity vs political) and the nature of their relationship to politics. This yielded the following typology: celebrity advocate, celebrity activist/endorser, celebrity politician, politician celebrity, and the politician who uses others' celebrity (Marsh et al., 2010: 327). While re-introducing complexity, this approach does issue in a richer appreciation of the political role played by celebrity politician, and retains an open-mindedness (*contra* West and Orman) to the consequences of such interventions. However, it also retains an indifference to the 'celebrity' dimension of the phenomenon. There is no attempt to distinguish between types or forms of celebrity. The distinctions are between kinds of political engagement, not of celebrity enactment.

In his book *Celebrity Politics*, Mark Wheeler (2013) has offered the most substantial account of the phenomenon, one in which he makes valuable comparisons across time and space. He too, though, begins with an attempt to define the term. In doing so, he not only sets himself apart from West and Orman, but also from the approach adopted by 't Hart and Tindall that underpins Marsh et al. He (Wheeler, 2013: 24) criticises the latter for not 'going beyond party systems or political institutions to seek the meaning of the democratic worth of celebrity activity. This ignores celebrity engagement in entertainment-driven or populist forms of politics.' To this end, he argues for the need to take *style* more seriously, and to make use of those who work on the interface between politics and cultural and media studies (eg Van Zoonen, 2005; Higgins and Drake, 2006).

There are signs that such injunction are being followed in one of the most recent contributions to the literature. Matthew Wood et al. (2016) introduce the contrast between

the 'everyday' celebrity politicians (ECP) and the 'superstar' celebrity politician (SCP). This distinction is designed to allow for 'the differentiated and often contradictory ways in which "celebrity" is constructed.' (Wood et al., 2016: 583) It is a response to the idea that there have been shifts in 'celebrity society' and in the ways by which the idea of celebrity is acquired and allocated. Using the example of Boris Johnson, they argue persuasively that their two types – ESP and SCP – develop through different media strategies and operate differently within the political realm.

Wood et al. (2016: 585-9) separate out the media platform, the marketing technique and the performance role in charting the acquisition of political celebrity. Their approach allows us to see, particularly in respect of the last element, how 'celebrity-ness' can adopt a range of styles. This further sensitises us to how celebrity politics might operate. Once again, though, these stylistic questions are, I would suggest, too simply divided between the 'everyday' and the 'superstar'. Each one, as the coverage of Trump suggests, might contain a host of different performative modes, each with their own consequences for citizen engagement and political influence. These various possibilities are well illustrated by the coverage of Donald Trump's campaign.

2. Donald Trump as a celebrity politician

It is widely assumed that Donald Trump is an example of 'celebrity politics', a view that, as we've seen, he himself endorses. He has been described as having a 'mastery of celebrity politics' (Schafer-Wunsche and Kloeckner, 2016: 2). His role on the US version of *The Apprentice* is taken as direct evidence for this assumption (Kuper, 2017a; Nussbaum, 2017a). But even without this element of his cv, his career would have established his

credentials as a celebrity politician. From his earliest days, he has sought and attracted the kind of media attention that guarantees attribution of the label 'celebrity', and his occasional ventures into politics have derived from, or depended upon, the fame and notoriety that he has acquired.

The writer Andrew Sullivan (2016) observed that 'the Donald has emerged from the populist circuses of pro wrestling and New York City tabloids, via reality television and Twitter', while others have added to Trump's celebrity cv his responsibility for the Miss Universe and Miss USA pageants, a televised Rolling Stones show, cameos in *Zoolander*, *Home Alone 2* and *Sex and the City*, and adverts for Pizza Hut. The *Financial Times* (Silverman and Bond, 2016) offered this summary:

Although he has never held elected office, he is a hands-on, detail-oriented professional showman whose career as a crowd-pleaser spans his entire adult life.

The over-the-top character presiding over mass rallies and shaking up television talk shows has been rehearsing for years.

In similar vein, Eliot Weinberger (2016: 8) argued that Trump

discovered that celebrity could be more lucrative than real estate. In the great American huckster tradition of 'a sucker born every minute,' he realized he could make a small fortune convincing all those losers out there that they can be winners too. As he wrote: 'I play to people's fantasies'.

In 2000, the man himself was predicting the course of his own career in similar terms (as quoted in the *Daily Beast* [2016]):

Many people find it outlandish that someone from outside professional politics should seek the American presidency. There is much wailing among pundits that we have become a celebrity culture in which athletes, movie stars, and businessmen are considered for public office. Sure it helps that 97 percent of people know who I am. But after that voters are looking for accomplishments and qualifications. Mine? I run a billion-dollar corporation. I have created thousands of jobs. I keep a constant eye on the bottom line to make sure my company is profitable. Perhaps it's time that America was run this way. ... I stand for getting things done. ... The whinnying culture critics and media hacks are ridiculous when they bemoan the rise of celebrity culture and warn about the decline of traditional political values. They're on somebody's payroll.

What Trump's self-assessment does, like those of others, is to suggest that his electoral success derives, not just from being 'well known', but for being known in a particular way for doing particular kinds of things.

What is less commonly observed is another theme. This is not about who Trump is, but *what* he is. It is a truth almost universally recognised that he is not a 'politician', either because he fails to meet the standards expected of a democratic representative or because he expresses no desire to be such a figure. But if he is not a politician, what is he? What role is he playing and what kind of drama is taking place?

For the writer George Saunders (2016: 58), the answer lies in seeing 'American Presidential campaigns' not as a debate about ideas, but 'about the selection of a hero to embody the prevailing national ethos.' This, of course, begs a further question. If the aim is to be a 'hero', what type of hero are we talking about? Heroes come in many forms, from

Forrest Gump to Superman, from *The West Wing's* President Bartlett to *House of Cards'* President Underwood.

Such questions have run through much of the coverage of Donald Trump. Journalists, novelists and commentators have sought to capture the appropriate metaphor, simile or analogy for Trump's political persona. Emily Nussbaum (2017b: 66) in the *New Yorker* saw Trump as an eighties comedy act, like the notorious Andrew Dice Clay. Where Barack Obama's 'sophisticated small-club act ... was dry and urbane', Trump 'was a hot comic, a classic Howard Stern guest.' '[Trump] was the insult comic,' continues Nussbaum, 'the stadium act, the ratings obsessed headliner who shouted down hecklers.' This comparison is not just an aside; it forms part of an argument as to what kind of politician Trump is:

Like that of any stadium comic, Trump's brand was control. He was superficially loose, the wild man who might say anything, yet his off-the-cuff monologues were always being tweaked as he tested catchphrases ('Lock her up!'; 'Build the wall!') for crowd response.

For Nussbaum, Trump's political persona is not just *like* that of an eighties stadium comic; this is how he operates. He *is* an eighties comedian. As one Trump supporter said: 'He's spending his own bucks – therefore he doesn't have to play the politically correct game. He says what we wish we could say but we can't afford to anymore.' (quoted in Von Drehle, 2016: 24)

Other writers have adopted this same kind of argument, but have drawn from different fields of the entertainment world, most obviously that of television. James Poniewozik (2016), for example, sees Trump in terms of TV formats: 'his tale has remained a kind of '80s prime-time soap of aspiration and ego. [H]e cited his TV ratings the way

another candidate might boast of balancing a state budget. Mr Trump's primary win was like having a niche hit on cable. In programming terms, his campaign is nostalgia based content – that thing you used to like, I'm gonna bring it back again! He's a classic TV show rebooted for Netflix: that old stuff from back in the day, but edgier and uncensored.' In *Time*, David Von Drehle (2016: 25-6) suggested that Trump's role in *The Apprentice* did not just make him famous, but gave him the particular kind of fame endowed by reality shows, as opposed to other TV genres: 'the craftier characters of reality TV experience a different kind of stardom from the TV and movie idols of the past. Fans are encouraged to feel that they know these people, not as fictional characters but as flesh and blood.' The suggestion here, as with Nussbaum and others, is that - by identifying the cultural genre in which Trump works - we can explain his political persona and, by implication, his success. Entertainment television and comedy, though, are not the only cultural forms used to account for Trump and Trumpism. Indeed, they are not the most common. That honour goes to the world of popular music.

Mark Singer (2016: 22 & 36), in his book *Trump & Me*, twice quotes a Trump associate as saying: 'Deep down, he [Trump] wants to be Madonna'. Quite which of Madonna's many incarnations they have in mind is unclear, but it is evident that the insight is intended to tell us something about Trump's self-image and about how this accounts for his behaviour. He wants to be a star as much as a politician. He wants to be adored as much, if not more, than he wants to be admired.

Bob Lefsetz (2016) takes the analogy with popular music one step further in a piece entitled 'Trump is a Heavy Metal Band': 'Yes, Donald Trump is a rock star, if you go back to what that once upon a time meant, someone who adhered to his own vision living a rich and

famous lifestyle who cared not a whit what others said.’ And for Lefsetz, it is the genre that holds the key to Trump’s ability to command an audience:

Metal... [s]old out arenas when no one was watching. Ain’t that America, where despite garnering dollars the establishment shies away from that which it believes is unseemly. And the reason metal triumphed was because it was the other, it channeled the audience’s anger, it was for all those closed out of the mainstream, and it turns out there’s plenty of them.

A similar comparison occurs to a journalist who finds himself at a Trump rally, in the ‘standing area directly in front of the stage, a kind of Trumpian moshpit ...’ (Freedland, 2016: 27) The music writer Simon Reynolds (2016: 14) also sees Trump in the guise of a rock star. Not, though, that of heavy metal, but of glam rock: ‘Trump surrounds himself with glitz. Trump and the glam rockers share an obsession with fame and a ruthless drive to conquer and devour the world’s attention.’

And so it goes on. Trump’s rise to power has prompted all manner of such literary devices to tell his story – most recently in Martin Wolff’s (2018: 22) *Fire and Fury*, in which the President is described as ‘a real-life fictional character’ like the wrestler Hulk Hogan. Other, more explicitly political comparisons have, of course, also been made with populist politics of all kinds, with the rise of Nazism and fascism and so forth. Explanations have been couched in terms of his personality traits and psychology. And there have been the inevitable explanations in the language of psephology and of post-democracy. It might be objected, therefore, that to focus on Trump-as-celebrity is to miss the underlying reality, and to dwell only on the desperate effort of journalists and others to make sense of what they are witnessing through the language and approach of their respective professions.

My argument is, however, that, insofar as Trump does fit the notion of the ‘celebrity politician’, these attempts to find an appropriate way of capturing the nature of his ‘celebrityhood’ is important and necessary. It speaks to a set of issues and concerns that have, I think, been neglected in the way that we (political scientists) have studied the phenomenon.

3. The implications of putting the emphasis on the *celebrity*

The need to focus more on the celebrity aspect of celebrity politics has been noted before. Philip Drake and Michael Higgins (2006: 98-99) observed in their comparison of political speeches by Bono and Arnold Schwarzenegger how

Bono’s performance is of a restless rock star, with a lilting, emotional voice railing impatiently against the slow pace of politics and willing it to make progress, whilst Schwarzenegger performs with a distinctive physicality embodied by his intimidating presence (his body is sculpted, muscled and barely contained by his suit) and his staccato Germanic vocal delivery that insistently recalls his career-making *Terminator* performances.

For Drake and Higgins, these celebrity politicians *act out* their politics. What they say, and how they say it, are inseparable, and are articulated through the form of their stardom – as rock star, as Hollywood superhero. It is not just a matter of using their fame to garner attention; the stylistic conventions of their art also form their politics. They too are suggesting that, in understanding what celebrity politicians are saying, we need to ask what

kind of celebrity role they are performing in order appreciate what they are communicating.

There are three implications of this approach.

a) Media narratives

The first and most obvious implication is that we should pay attention to the metaphors and analogies that are used in reporting celebrity politics. One objection to this suggestion is that, rather than writing about how Trump, and other such celebrity politicians, actually operate in the world, we are merely focusing on how journalists report and represent Trump. And to an extent this is true, but the point is that journalists' metaphors and analogies are a significant part of the celebrity politician phenomenon. They are party to the mediatisation of politics. On the other hand, this does not mean that, just because Trump or Macron are described as 'rock stars', this is what they are. It may help us to appreciate what is going on. The candidate is framed as a star, the campaign as a sell-out tour, and the election as the Madison Square Garden finale. We are not obliged to accept these characterisations, but we should not ignore them either. They may well be indicative of how voters are responding to celebrity politics. Indeed, it is at this nexus of mediation and political strategy that Moffitt (2016: 77) locates populism and describes it as 'the media-political form par excellence at this particular historical juncture.'

b) Performance styles

Moffitt's story does not, though, end with the media. For him (2016: 83-7), performance and style are also key elements of populism, and 'celebrity' is one form they take. Thus, a second implication of further study of celebrity politics is the need to pay attention to the celebrity conventions that shape how the politician performs their politics (Alexander, 2011; Corner and Pels, 2003; Rai and Reinelt, 2015). To the extent that what we are analysing is

the rise of populism, then we are, as Moffitt and Simon Tormey (2013) point out, analysing a particular political *style*, and that what needs to be understood is how that style is constructed and communicated.

Populist style may take the form of celebrity politics, but not all celebrity politicians are necessarily aligned to populist movements. Arnold Schwarzenegger may be understood as a celebrity politician, without an associated populist base; just as Boris Johnson might be viewed as a celebrity politician who has moved between populism and other non-populist, political formations. In studying the celebrity politician, it becomes, therefore, a question both of what form of political engagement is involved and of what sort of stylistic conventions are being adopted?

With respect to the latter, this is a question of genre and of how genres mark 'authenticity', a key ambition of any representative politician, and especially the celebrity variant (Wood et al., 2016: 588-9). Achieving an image of authenticity may indeed mean defining oneself *against* the traditional politician. As Singer (2016: 97) notes of Donald Trump: 'That he did not sound or behave like a typical politician won him points for authenticity.' But performances cannot be delivered simply by virtue of what they are *not*. They have to *be* something too. Analysing Trump or any other celebrity politician means understanding their performance style, and this derives from the modes or genres that popular culture furnishes. Whether the Hollywood superhero or Howard Stern shock jock or Ozzy Osbourne frontman, each establishes a mode of being and behaving, a way of communicating 'authenticity', and each has its own associated political possibilities. Each invites a different understanding of what is being represented and what can be achieved.

Nahuel Ribke's (2015) comparative study of celebrity politics suggests that the notion of 'genre' helps us to appreciate the different celebrity forms. Celebrity performances are shaped by the conventions of the genre from which they emerge – the reality television host is bound by different rules to the rock star, and so on. Genres serve, too, to connect the performer to their audience. As Ribke explains (2015: 171): 'Genres, among other things, are cognitive devices that help us to process and categorize new information according to past experiences; and celebrities who are identified with certain particular genres fulfil a similar function.' This approach, with its focus on the generic character of celebrity, is further developed in work by Jane Arthurs and Ben Little (2017) on the complex interplay of mediating agencies and actors – 'assemblages', in their analysis of the comedian, film star and political activist Russell Brand - that construct a celebrity politician.

c) Audience reactions

The third implication of placing the emphasis on 'celebrity-ness' is that, in thinking about political performance in genre terms, we need also to think about how these performances are received. In understanding their reception we need to acknowledge a debt to popular culture. In one of his reports from the Trump campaign trail, Jonathan Freedland (2016: 28) wrote: 'Part of it [Trump's support] is sheer showbiz. Most powerful is the thrill Trump generates in the room...' This kind of audience reaction is also evoked in Dave Eggers's (2016: 2) description of what it was like to be at a Trump rally: 'it was clear that a good proportion of the audience saw the rally as not purely a political event, but as something else, too – an entertainment, a curiosity, an opportunity to sell merchandise and refreshments, a chance to do some late-afternoon groping in the parking lot.' Writing in the

Financial Times, Simon Kuper (2017b) contended that ‘many Trump supporters are more than just voters. They are political fans.’ In Kuper’s argument, it is the image of the football fan that he is evoking, using it to explain their unswerving loyalty to their club: ‘They cannot see their own team’s fouls, and so presume that referees are biased against them.’

Something similar was observed by Tom Hayden, the US radical who was married to Jane Fonda: ‘By playing to celebrity, you undermine democracy by turning citizens into fans. You turn critical thinking into adoration.’ (quoted in Ross, 2011: 415).

Such judgements may or may not be valid, but it is apparent that we need to take the idea of political fandom seriously. This suggestion has been around for some time. Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005; see also, Braudy, 1997) made such a case more than a decade ago. It is an idea that is now, in the discussion of celebrity politics, regaining salience. Recently, Jonathan Dean (2017: 421) has argued that political scientists need to give proper attention to ‘fandom as a concept or as an object of study’.

It does appear that Trump elicits a form of adoration that closely resembles the behaviour of fans. Journalists’ descriptions of his campaign recall the account given of the flourishing of punk in the 1970s by the sociologist Nick Crossley. Drawing on Emile Durkheim, Crossley (2015: 88) talks of the ‘collective effervescence’ elicited by punk, when what is witnessed is ‘a transformation in patterns of interaction within a community which stimulates and excites those involved and which breaks down old conventions, generating new ones and also new identities, ideas and values.’ Moffitt (2016: 101ff) describes the ways in which populist leaders create ‘the people’, and manage its ardour, through their performative style and media strategies.

In research that I conducted with colleagues (Street, Inthorn and Scott, 2013), we found small indications of this process in the way that young people responded as fans to figures like Alan Sugar and Simon Cowell. They translated their responses into a view on what makes a credible political leaders. Sugar and Cowell were viewed as tough and decisive, attributes that were seen as necessary to effective political leadership. Their TV personas and performances were perceived as proxies for their capacity to provide what young citizens deemed as necessary for political leadership, an idea that was itself constructed through such shows as *The Apprentice*.

4. Conclusion

These implications, and the assumptions and arguments upon which they rest, are only sketched here. However, if it is felt that the ideas of celebrity politics and celebrity politicians deserve investigation and refinement, then it does seem that there are a number of themes and avenues that warrant further examination.

Rather than seeing 'celebrity politicians' just as embodying a particular kind of leadership or electoral art, it is important to place them within wider political processes and trends. The rise of populism, and how this is understood, draws the celebrity politician within its ambit, as does discussion of the mediatisation and personalisation of politics more generally. For writers like Moffitt and others, the celebrity politician is often a component of these political transformations. But while contemporary populism may be dependent on the opportunities afforded by media, the 'celebrity' element is not a necessary feature, even if it is a common one. In the same way, non-populist politics may also issue in celebrity politics. What differentiates these celebrity politicians is the style of leadership and

representation that they enact (or are seen to enact); and what sort of celebrity they are - talk show host, reality TV star, pro-wrestler, rock musician....

Wherever the celebrity politician is located in the larger scheme of things, it remains the case that the phenomenon itself needs further analysis, and an approach in which the 'celebrity' dimension receives equal attention with the formally 'political'. This begins with the media representation of the politician. It might be objected that I have made too much of the tropes and habits of journalists and other commentators. The analogies on which they draw are, it could be said, just that – analogies, mere literary devices - but equally it may be that they are capturing or shaping a reality in which the role of the politician is indeed becoming that of the rock star or film star or reality TV host. And that the answer to the question 'what is Donald Trump?' is that he is indeed a celebrity, and media representations of him as such are key to how he operates in the political world. This, in turn, leads to the question as to what *kind* of celebrity we are dealing with. The answer matters for how we make sense of both how the politician is reported and how she/he is perceived.

The art of politics becomes the art of performance, the art of being a celebrity. It is important, therefore, to develop the concepts and tools that enable us to understand better how political ideas are enacted, and how audiences – 'the people' - are created in the act of performance. And how, in turn, the passions of the citizen-fan are elicited and orchestrated. David Marshall (2014), one of the first analysts of celebrity power, has argued recently for further study of how the affective potential of celebrity is generated by the mediated persona of the politician. Such calls need to be heeded. Understanding the celebrity politician depends on us understanding the feelings and emotions, as well as the

preferences and interests, that are in play within politics. It also requires us to understand the celebrity role they perform and the style in which they perform it. ;

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