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The socio-political conditions that enable celebrities to migrate from the entertainment to the political field are specific to their national and historical contexts (Ribke 2015). A significant feature of contemporary politics in the UK is a decline in support for the established political parties (Keen 2015) alongside a pervasive sense of disillusion with parliamentary politicians (Jennings et al 2015). While the professional political class are seen as increasingly indistinguishable as they argue over the bureaucratic minutiae of managing the post-crash budget deficit, charismatic individuals have emerged aligned with new social movements and captured the popular imagination. We have chosen to focus our attention on one such figure, celebrity entertainer and comedian Russell Brand whose turn to political activism has attracted widespread media attention. He has been described in an influential current affairs magazine, as:

> 'the spiritual leader of Britain's disaffected anti-capitalist youth…dismissed by his opponents as a clownish opportunist and even a hypocrite due to his own wealth, he is nevertheless the most charismatic figure on Britain's populist Left' (Prospect 2015).

Brand's migration began in the autumn of 2013 when he took up an offer from Jemima Khan to co-edit an edition of *The New Statesman* (2013), a weekly political magazine in the UK. At the time he was touring his new stand-up show, Messiah Complex (2013) which was markedly different from his previous shows in its overtly political focus. To promote The New Statesman he was interviewed on the BBC's flagship daily current affairs show *Newsnight* (2013) by Jeremy Paxman, its star presenter, who has a fearsome reputation for intimidating politicians. This provoked widespread hostile reporting of Brand's scepticism towards voting alongside speculation about his motives. Brand has not sought election but after just eighteen months, he had gained sufficient credibility to be courted by a potential Prime Minister when the leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, chose to be interviewed on Brand's daily Youtube show *The Trews* (2015) just a few days before the general election.

Our research aims to discover how Brand used and adapted his persona and performances to gain legitimacy in the political field while maintaining the authenticity and popularity of his celebrity brand. In order to demonstrate how this worked in practice, we have selected two contrasting performances to show how Brand used his cultural capital as a comedic performer to challenge the political status quo. Our textual analyses of his stand-up show

Messiah Complex and his *Newsnight* interview reveal how Brand uses persuasive rhetorical strategies, comedic spectacle and autobiographical storytelling to emotionally engage audiences with his political critique.

We also aim to contribute to the mapping of global variations in celebrity politics with Brand exemplifying a wider trend of comedians moving into politics (e.g. Bordignon and Ceccarini L 2013; Ribke 2015; Wheeler 2015) The cultural status and embedded values of the genre in which a celebrity first comes to prominence were found by Ribke (2015) to affect the degree to which media attention could be transformed into political power. We identify the particular challenges and opportunities arising from Brand's origins in stand-up comedy, such as the use of his comedic skills to counteract media hostility and his embracing of his outsider status in opposition to the political establishment to lay claim to be a spokesperson for 'the people'.

Celebrity Mediated Politics

First we want to introduce the concepts and research questions that underpin this analysis and how we build on previous empirical studies of celebrity politics that use Bourdieu's theory of the social, cultural and symbolic capital which reproduce power and status within social fields (see Driessens 2013; Ribke 2015).

We use Driessen's understanding of celebrity as 'an additional form of capital, namely celebrity capital' which he defines as 'accumulated media visibility through recurring media representations, or broadly as recognizability' which can be transferred across social fields' (2013:18). Celebrity, as Driessens elaborates, is a process that involves not just the person whose qualities, skills, and charisma are the focus of widespread attention, but also the media platforms which showcase their talents, the publicity industry that competes with other contenders for recurring media exposure, and an engaged audience. The question that we address is why Russell Brand's initial appearance on *Newsnight* created such an extraordinary amount of ongoing attention given the competitive struggle for media visibility.

It is important not to conflate this visibility with the forms of recognition that Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital. While celebrity capital is the ability to attract widespread attention symbolic capital is a form of legitimation (Driessens 2013). The conversion of celebrity capital into symbolic power depends on winning public recognition from those with established power in the field. Brand sought that recognition from *Newsnight's* star presenter on the nation's most authoritative current affairs programme. Whatever their original field, the celebrity's ability to perform well in television interviews is essential to their success in politics (Ribke 2015) and lends weight to our choice of the Newsnight interview as a

privileged site for analysis of Brand's ability to adapt his performance skills to an unfamiliar genre.

The skills that performers bring to the political field contribute to their popular appeal. While eloquence and the ability to address the public have been identified as a factor in political success (Ribke 2015), we question what this means in practice in the two performances we have selected to analyse in depth. The cultural performance of politics enabled by media visibility creates an alternative source of political legitimacy for unelected celebrities to represent the views and values of others in a process of 'creatively constituting a political community and representing it' (Street 2004:19). Using Conversation Analytic models of 'the floor' (Sacks et.al. 1974), and drawing on previous interactional observations about political interviews (for example Clayman and Heritage 2002, Heritage and Clayman 2010) we ask: How does Brand resist Paxman's sceptical and derogatory framing and use the innovative potential of the 'hybrid political interview' (Hutchby 2011) to establish a legitimate speaking position as a representative of 'the people'? The critical question for political legitimacy of this nature is how 'authentic' the audience perceives the celebrity performance to be.

Media visibility has intensified the personalisation of politics so that people respond not only to how something is said – its style - but also to who says it - the emotional impact of personal charisma produced through the individual's body, voice and gestures (Pels 2003). Audiences develop attachments or antipathies to these embodied personal 'brands', their overall image and style, that persist over time (Van Zoonen 2005). How does Brand's use of an individualistic mode of [auto] biographical storytelling in his *Messiah Complex* stand-up show create the performed authenticity and passion required by celebrity politics? In stylistic terms how does his use of dramatizing techniques to communicate political ideas through stories, visual imagery and spectacle enhance audience identification (see Street 2003; Van Zoonen 2005)? How does his use of humour (see Gray, Jones and Thompson 2009; Richardson, Parry and Corner 2012) foster audience solidarity with the ideologies of his political and spiritual heroes and also undermine established political power?

In the course of this analysis we will be contributing to the existing debate about Brand's significance to UK culture and politics. Political commentators in the media have regarded Brand as either an entirely trivial distraction of no consequence, or worse as a harmful influence by discouraging voting, or conversely as a potential political leader and conduit to reengaging a wider section of the population with politics. Similarly, academic debates about celebrity politics are divided on its general significance for political engagement (see Street 2012 for an overview). We build on the argument that it is the ability of celebrities to resolve and thereby obscure fundamental contradictions in the society which explains their

significance (Dyer 2004; Ribke 2015). Where Brand differs, partly as a result of his opposition to the dominant values of consumer capitalism, is by self-reflexively drawing attention to and articulating these contradictions, and thereby exposing them to scrutiny rather than resolving them. The ability to adapt his brand in response to the shifts in values of a changing socio-political context is vital to maintaining his celebrity power (Lury 2004). The resulting semiotic multiplicity creates a degree of openness allowed by the process of shedding and incorporating new elements, a process of 'becoming celebrity' that is never finally fixed into a determinate form. How might Brand's celebrity be understood in these terms, through the contradictions in his performance of a classed and gendered identity and in his deployment and critique of celebrity and media culture?

In summary we are investigating how Brand's abilities as a celebrity performer, storyteller and self-publicist translate from comedy to politics. After a detailed examination of his stand up show and interview with Paxman we conclude by arguing that Brand was able to secure an alternative form of political legitimacy by creatively constituting a political constituency through his ability to construct himself as an authentic anti-austerity spokesperson for the disenfranchised left in UK. In order to do so he repurposed his celebrity apparatus for gaining media visibility to political ends and successfully deployed the cultural capital he had developed as a celebrity comedian in his subsequent media performances.

Messiah Complex: Storytelling, Personalisation, and Dramatisation

Brand's stand up show is designed to counteract the dominant narratives of popular culture. His call for a revolution is framed as a quest for renewed meaning in a world that has become dominated by the material goals of global capitalism. Alongside these broad themes he rails against celebrity culture, the drug laws, and the emptiness of consumerism, and he critiques the false dichotomies of the news media and its stoking of fear and anxiety.

Using well-honed skills in story-telling and dramatic performance to create an emotional impact, he introduces us to the four political heroes on which he says his own transformation depended, men who, despite their flaws, can lead us to a better life and a measure against which to find our modern day politicians lacking. The spectacle of their images are dwarfed by a towering icon of the comedian himself, visually encompassing the overarching personal narrative around which the humour and politics of the show, and his rebranding, is structured.

Brand's storytelling is in the western tradition that centres on the actions of charismatic, individual men whose physical prowess, rhetorical skill and moral values mark them as

extraordinary and able to overcome any obstacles to their goals. He uses his own life story of spiritual and political transformation as a moral fable, offering himself as a modern day hero, to inspire us to undergo the same kind of personal changes that are necessary to the revolution he advocates. Brand's failure to find fulfilment through fame, his disappointment that limitless attention, money, sex and drugs didn't bring lasting satisfaction, is used to persuade others to seek alternative, more meaningful goals than consumer capitalism can offer.

The show is also a rebranding of his celebrity persona. This requires him to deploy his cultural capital as a performer to integrate his scandalous past (Arthurs 2014) with the show's political orientation. In doing so he combines self-ridicule with exaggerated claims for his own importance - veering between comic bathos and hyperbole. He shows photos of himself looking deranged and tells self-deprecating stories about his pathological need to be the centre of attention. He refers frequently to his scandalous history of addiction to drugs and his sexual promiscuity – a past from which he now distances himself but still underwrite his legitimacy as an authentic moral guide to personal transformation while simultaneously creating humorous self-ridicule. He also uses self-aggrandisement to underwrite the political message of the show - the possibility of bringing about transformation. He constructs the whole show around the proposition that he is: 'a little bit like' the iconic figures he admires – Ghandi, Che Guevara, Malcom X - heroes that like himself are presented as flawed, unlike the melodramatic dichotomies of the tabloid press that he decries.

His final, most outrageous claim performatively rebrands his reputation for sexual excess from the carnal to the spiritual. The culminating joke is introduced by an extended sexual description accompanied by obscene gestures before extolling the creative forces of female sexual energy as a route to a revolution in consciousness through spiritual enlightenment. He concludes with:

> 'You gotta make them come first. To access the revolution within them and that's within every one of us. Any woman I sleep with will always be the first coming. And I will be the second coming, which is why I'm a little bit like Jesus'.

This is a joke but there is also a serious intent in that he clearly wants to be remembered for doing something meaningful and thereby changing 'the destiny of his people' as he says of Malcolm X. He has proposed himself as an equivalent to these heroes, using his charisma and leadership qualities ('great hair, cool beard - a little bit like Che') to transform the people's consciousness rather than being a transient celebrity that he complains we: 'over-

value, over-worship, overpay, over-extol the virtues of, celebrate unduly'. He wants to be worthy of our adulation.

Yet at the height of these hyperbolic claims he is simultaneously presenting himself as vulnerable and psychologically damaged. It is a confession of delusional, 'mad', thinking, making him 'a little bit like' the mental patients with a Messiah Complex he referred to at the start of the show when explaining the significance of the show's title. The authenticity of this claim is underwritten by his previous accounts of bi-polar mental illness, already established as a facet of his celebrity brand in his best-selling autobiographies (Brand 2007 and 2010). This self-reflexive acknowledgement of his faults and weaknesses distances Brand from the 'armoured masculinity' that is still the default identity in contemporary UK politics where breaking the illusion of infallible prowess is often a precursor to shame and political downfall.

He also translates his carnal enthusiasm for women into a more spiritual creative energy that he argues must underpin radical political revolution, echoing a Marcusian belief in the necessary link between sexual and political liberation. Although he has toned down his bohemian image as a 'rock star' Lothario he is aware of the continuing power of his sexual charisma, in contrast to UK political leaders whom he ridicules as sexually inadequate.

The Newsnight Interview

Another socio-political change in the UK to which Brand has adapted is the reputational damage caused by illegal phone hacking at the Murdoch-owned tabloid press. Revelations at subsequent trials reinforced the sense that the police, the media and politicians are a self-perpetuating establishment acting in their own mutual interests (Jones 2014). Brand takes up and develops this critique in his *Messiah Complex* show but also through appearances on news and current affairs programmes in the USA and Australia and the UK. We have chosen to focus our attention on the *Newsnight* interview with Jeremy Paxman in October 2013 because it was this interview that captured public attention for Brand's political views and, drawing on his social capital, attracted over10 million subsequent viewings of the clip on YouTube, making it one of the top ten most watched videos of 2013 (Williams 2013). Here we trace the linguistic and interactional aspects of the interview to show how Brand uses his cultural capital as a comedian to reposition Paxman as an apologist for the establishment and to assert his own position as an authentic voice 'of the people' in order to claim legitimacy in the political field.

The 'Paxo treatment' and interview style (Tolson 2012) is a hybrid variation of the canonical form of the televised political interview, the 'hybrid political interview' (HPI) (Hutchby 2011). HPIs combine formal features of the news interview (Clayman and Heritage 2002) with 'features of the argumentative and confrontational exchanges often found in other forms of broadcasting such as talk radio and topical debate shows' (Hutchby 2011: 116). They are characterised by a lack of neutrality and 'interview-like talk that is recursively in breach of that primary norm' (ibid). According to Hutchby, the HPI shares many features of the adversarial 'accountability interview' (Montgomery 2011) but can be characterised as 'hybrid' not only by its interdiscursivity, 'shifting between speech exchange systems otherwise associated with non-interview settings' (Hutchby 2011: 116), but also by the interviewer's licence to personalise arguments. HPIs are also characterised by the interviewer tending to 'foreground his or her agency as a spokesperson 'for' certain political stances or social forces' and finally, by the interviewer taking licence 'to engage in belligerent and emotionally heightened episodes of direct confrontation with the interviewee' (Ibid). It is therefore a form that contributes to the growing personalization and dramatization of mediatized politics, and through generic innovation, enables new speaking positions, claims to authority, and new norms of political subjectivity to emerge in the public sphere.

The hybridity of the Paxman/Brand interview is obvious from the start in that it takes place in a hotel room as if it were a celebrity publicity interview, underlining Brand's status as a celebrity entertainer and not a politician. Drawing on a Conversation Analytic model of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) we can see that formally, the interview is structured into paired utterances; a quarter of Paxman's first pair parts which should conventionally be formulated as questions are actually assertions, and a further quarter of the first pair parts are questioning turns taken by Brand, breaking with the convention that the interviewee is restricted to responding to the interviewer's questions. Therefore only half the pairs fit the conventional interviewer question - interviewee response form said to be typical of the news interview. Extract one (below) is taken from the beginning of the interview and shows Paxman's assertions on line 21 ('they get power by voting people in that's how they get power') and line 26 ('in a democracy that's how it works'), and the subsequent succession of questions from Brand (lines 28-9):

Extract 1:
Transcription Key: <u>Underline</u> = particular emphasis on word or syllable
[= beginning of overlapping utterance] = end of overlapping utterance

1   **Paxman:** Russell Brand, who are <u>you</u> to edit a political magazine?

2 **Brand:** Well, I suppose like a person who's been politely <u>asked</u> by an attractive <u>wo</u>man. I

3 don't know what the typical criteria is. I don't <u>know</u> many people that edit political magazines.

4 Boris he used to do one, didn't he? So I'm a kind of, a person with crazy hair, quite a good

5 sense of humour, don't know much about politics, I'm <u>ideal</u>

6 **Paxman:** But is it true you don't even <u>vote</u>?

7 **Brand:** Yeah, no, I don't <u>vote</u>

8 **Paxman:** Well how do you have any authority to talk about <u>politics</u> then?

9 **Brand**: Well I don't get my authority from this pre-existing paradigm which is quite <u>na</u>rrow

10 and only serves a few people. I look <u>else</u>where, for alternatives, that might be of <u>ser</u>vice to

11 hu<u>mani</u>ty. Alternate means; alternate political systems.

12 **Paxman:** They <u>being</u>?

13 **Brand:** Well I've not in<u>ven</u>ted it <u>yet</u>, Jeremy. I had to do a magazine last week. I've had a lot

14 on me plate. But <u>I</u> say, but here's the thing that you <u>shouldn</u>'t do. <u>Shouldn</u>'t destroy the

15 planet; <u>shouldn</u>'t create massive economic disparity; <u>shouldn</u>'t ignore the needs of the

16 people. The burden of <u>proof</u> is on the people with the <u>pow</u>er, not people, like, doing a

17 magazine for a novelty.

18 **Paxman:** How do you imagine that people <u>get</u> <u>power</u>?

19 **Brand:** <u>Well</u> I imagine there are sort of hierarchical systems that have been preserved

20 through [generations]

21 **Paxman:** [They get power] by being <u>voted</u> in, that's how they [get it]

22 **Brand:**   [Well you say] that Jeremy

23 **Paxman:** You can't even be arsed to <u>vote</u>?

24 **Brand:** It's quite a narrow, quite a narrow prescriptive pa<u>ram</u>eter that changes within in the

25 er the

26 **Paxman:** In a de<u>moc</u>racy that's how it <u>works</u>

27 **Brand:** Well I don't think it's working very <u>well</u>, Jeremy. <u>Giv</u>en that the planet is being

28 destroyed. <u>Giv</u>en that there is economic disparity of a huge de<u>gree</u>. What are you <u>say</u>ing?

29 There's no al<u>ter</u>native? There's no al<u>ter</u>native? Just <u>this</u> system?

30 **Paxman:** <u>No</u>, I'm <u>not</u> saying that. I'm

31 **Brand:**   [<u>brilli</u>ant]

32 **Paxman**: [<u>saying</u>] if <u>you</u> can't be arsed to <u>vote</u> why should we be asked to <u>lis</u>ten to your

33 political point of <u>view</u>?

Paxman's unorthodox interviewing strategy is 'explicitly face-threatening' (Brown and
Levinson 1987), implying that Brand does not know 'how democracy works' and 'how people
get power' and constructs Paxman as an expert in contrast to the lay person, Brand, who is
ignorant of these fundamental political concepts. The assertions are 'authored' by the

interviewer himself, which defies the neutrality of the conventional news interview and heightens its adversarial nature (Montgomery 2011;Tolson 2012).

Paxman's opening question on line 1 of the extract above: 'who are you to edit a political magazine?', referring to Brand's editorship of the New Statesman, is important in establishing the non-neutrality of the interviewer. Although in the grammatical form of a question it also implies an assertion/accusation that Brand is not a suitable person to take on such an editorship. This is therefore a highly personal and aggressive opening move. Paxman's next yes/no question is equally confrontational as it contains the implicit assertion that 'you don't even vote' (line 6), a theme he pursues through to the end of this extract in an attempt to equate Brand's refusal to vote with a lack of political authority. Brand is forced into a series of defensive responses marked by the opening discourse marker 'well'. Paxman repeatedly interrupts his replies, culminating in an extremely marked shift of register with '*You can't even be arsed to vote*' (line 23), using non-standard taboo lexis more appropriate to conversational argument formats (Hutchby 2011:129). Notably, Brand then seeks to gain the interactional upper hand by taking up the interviewer's position with a series of assertions and questions (lines 25-27) that culminates in his challenging Paxman: *What are you saying? There's no alternative? There's no alternative? Just this system?* (lines 28-9). Paxman concedes this shift of interactional roles by answering the question '*No I'm not saying that* (line 30), before he regains his original theme and his interviewee role at the end of this extract by using the 'can't be arsed to vote' formulation once more (lines 32-33).

As well as his unmitigated adversarial challenges, Paxman also makes extremely personal and direct attacks on Brand, calling him 'facetious' and saying 'you really are a trivial man' (extract 2: line 47 below). A measure of the extent of this 'cut and thrust' across the whole ten minute interview shows that Paxman has an extremely high frequency of turns per minute coupled with a very short average turn length, which has been claimed to show an 'intensity of interrogation' (Tolson, 2012). Paxman's adversarial turns dispense with the norms of journalistic neutralism in the interests of 'truth advocacy' (Hutchby 2011: 132) speaking on the audience's behalf as a 'tribune of the people'. This tribuneship is manifested through the interviewer's 'explicit foregrounding of agency' by 'the often forceful expression of opinion, the use of unmitigated evaluation, or the personalisation of accusations and insults directed at the interviewee' (ibid).

We now turn to Brand and the ways in which he uses his cultural capital to resist Paxman's framing of the interview and to bring his own political agenda to the fore. We show how he

uses the innovative potential of the HPI by drawing on comedic codes of interaction to refuse his positioning by Paxman as an illegitimate political actor, and to make a claim for legitimacy as a spokesperson for those sections of 'the people' who feel disempowered by the current democratic system.

The 'Brand treatment'

Paxman constructs himself through assertions and interruptions as the political expert, and Brand as the political novice or autodidact who does not have the authority to publically comment on politics. Brand resists this through a discursive shift to the comedic, which is most apparent in his control of the HPI 'floor'. At the beginning of the interview he makes an ironic orientation to this persona, by drawing on the rhetoric of 'being a little bit like…' used in his stand-up show, in this case comparing himself to Boris Johnson who before he became an MP and Major of London edited the *Spectator* magazine. '*Boris, he used to do one, didn't he? So I'm kind of a person with crazy hair, quite a good sense of humour, don't know much about politics, I'm ideal*!' (extract one lines 4-5). The plausibility of this comparison makes it work as a joke with the visual comparison of their 'crazy hair' foregrounding the comic absurdity of either of the men being serious political commentators - and yet it also implies that if Boris is taken seriously then why not Russell too?

Extract two below shows an example of Brand, the comedian, positioning Paxman as the comic 'stooge' as a strategy to counter Paxman's adversarial questions, and possibly to evade them. After breaking with the conventions of the interview by asking a question, and at the same time orienting to his own emotional state '*How come I feel so cross with you*?' (line 41), he then adds a highly personal, comic comment on Paxman's beard, describing it as 'gorgeous'. Paxman attempts to answer Brand's question (colluding with Brand by taking on the interviewee role), but Brand violates the turn-taking system and interrupts Paxman just after he has started to respond in order to extend his comic routine. He mocks Paxman for being subject to the Daily Mail's critical commentary about his personal appearance, just like any other celebrity entertainer, and ridicules him further by conjuring a visual image of his beard tangling with his armpit hair (lines 44-46). He implies that Paxman is not so different from him – Brand's 'great beard' is used in his stand-up show to compare himself to Che Guavara and Jesus.

Extract 2.

34   **Paxman:** You don't believe in democracy. You want a revolution <u>don't</u> you?

35   **Brand:** The <u>plan</u>et is being des<u>troy</u>ed, we are cr<u>eati</u>ng an underclass, we're exp<u>loiti</u>ng poor

36   people all over the world and the genuine, legitimate problems of the <u>peo</u>ple are not being

37   add<u>ress</u>ed by our political <u>clas</u>s

38   **Paxman**: <u>All</u> of those things may be <u>true</u>

39   **Brand:** They <u>are</u> true

40   **Paxman:** But <u>you</u> took I wouldn't <u>argue</u> with you about <u>many</u> of them

41   **Brand:** Well how come I feel so <u>cross</u> with you? It <u>can't</u> just be because of that <u>beard</u>, it's

42   <u>gor</u>geous

43   **Paxman:** It's <u>pos</u>sibly [because

44   **Brand:**   [and if the] Daily <u>Mail</u> don't want it I <u>do</u> I'm against them grow it longer

45   **Paxman**: [You are a]

46   **Brand:**   [<u>tan</u>gle it into] your <u>arm</u>pit hair

47   **Paxman:** You are a <u>very</u> <u>triv</u>ial man

48   **Brand:** What you think I am, <u>triv</u>ial

49   **Paxman:** <u>Yes</u>

50   **Brand:** A <u>min</u>ute ago you were having a go at me because I wanted a [revo<u>lu</u>tion

51   **Paxman**:   [No I'm asking you]

52   **Brand:** now I'm <u>triv</u>ial, I'm [bouncing about all <u>over</u>] the place

      NVC: [Brand touches Paxman's knee]

53   **Paxman:** I'm <u>not</u> having a go at you because you want a revolution, many people want a

54   revolution, but I'm asking you what it would be <u>like</u>.

This discursive shift to the comedic is expressed in the interactional details of the exchange. After all, Brand does not normally have to share the interactional floor when delivering jokes on stage and can change topic, as he does in this example, abruptly and at will. His expansive gestures and tactile movements (see for example line 52 of extract 2 above) also dramatize the interview beyond its conventional form. The sheer unpredictability of Brand's comic responses function to further de-stabilise the interview form by his 'saying and doing things that were not specifically called for' (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 253) and by blurring the-taken-for-granted boundaries which turns 'a once predictable event into a fuzzy, locally non-predictable media encounter' (Fetzer and Johansson, 2008). Brand's comic topic shifts can therefore be seen as an extreme and perhaps novel strategy, especially as they are not accompanied by any of the mitigating moves said to be typical of such shifts in the conventional interview, such as showing deference, requesting permission or justifying the shift of topic to the interviewer (Clayman and Heritage 2002).

While some of Brand's responses show signs of interactional pressure (as many are linguistically marked by discourse markers such as 'well' and hesitations), the use of the first

name address form 'Jeremy' (for example lines 13, 21, 25 in extract one above) appears to strengthen rather than soften the response. Although first names can be used by interviewees 'in order to mitigate the potential face-threatening act of disagreeing with the interviewer' (Rendle-Short 2007: 399) this does not seem to be the case in this interview as Brand uses no other mitigating forms. His use of 'Jeremy' seems more aligned to a strategy in conversational argumentation as a 'preface for a non-conforming response' that emphasises the challenging nature of the response that is about to be given. Extract 3 shows an example of this, strengthened by the term of endearment 'my darling' on line 56.

Extract 3

55 **Paxman:** Well of <u>cour</u>se it doesn't work for them if they didn't bother to <u>vote</u>

56 **Brand:** <u>Jer</u>emy, my <u>dar</u>ling, <u>I'm</u> not saying…the <u>ap</u>athy doesn't come from <u>us</u>, the <u>peo</u>ple.

57 The apathy comes from the poli<u>ti</u>cians. They are apathetic to <u>our</u> needs, they're only

58 interested in <u>ser</u>vicing the needs of cor<u>por</u>ations. Look at ain't the <u>Tor</u>ies going to court,

59 taking the EU to court, because they're trying to curtail er bank bonuses? Is <u>that</u> what's

60 happening at the moment in our <u>coun</u>try? It is, innit?"

61 **Paxman:** Yeah

62 **Brand:** So what am I gonna tune in for <u>that</u>?

Together the address term and stressed endearment have the effect of belittling Paxman by stripping him of his institutional status. 'Jeremy, my d<u>ar</u>ling….' is a greeting we hear used in exchanges between celebrity actors and entertainers but not serious political journalists. He punctures Paxman's assumed superiority by drawing attention to current affairs TV as a form of entertainment fronted by celebrity presenters, thereby positioning them both as equals trading insults for our amusement. These conversational, informal and personal genres are also signalled in Brand's use of non-standard grammar (for example 'ain't; 'innit'), pronunciation (for example the glottalisation of /t/ throughout the interview) and lexis (see 'brassed herself', 'fucked over' and 'her gaff' on line 85 in extract 4 below), features that are not commonly found in the formal register of institutional discourse and which also perform the authenticity of his working class origins in Essex.

Extract 4

63 **Brand:** People for the <u>first</u> time in a <u>gen</u>eration are aware of <u>mass</u>ive, corporate and

64 economic exploi<u>ta</u>tion. These things are not <u>non</u>sense. And these subjects are not being

65 add<u>ress</u>ed. <u>No one</u> is doing anything about tax havens, <u>no one</u> is doing anything about their

66 political affiliations and financial affiliations of the Conservative Party, so until people start

67 addressing things that are <u>act</u>ually <u>real</u>, why <u>would</u>n't I be facetious, why <u>would</u> I take it

68 seriously? Why <u>would</u> I encourage a constituency of young people that are absolutely

69 indifferent to <u>vote</u>? Why <u>would</u> we? Aren't <u>you</u> bored? Aren't you more <u>bor</u>ed than <u>any</u>one?

70 Ain't you been <u>talki</u>ng to them year after year, listening to their <u>lies</u>, their <u>non</u>sense. Then it's

71 <u>this</u> one that gets in, then it's <u>that</u> one gets in but the <u>prob</u>lem continues. Why are we going

72 to continue to contribute to this fa<u>ç</u>ade?

73 **Paxman:** I'm surprised you <u>can</u> be facetious when you're that <u>an</u>gry about it.

74 **Brand:** Yeah, I <u>am</u> angry, I <u>am</u> angry. Because for me it's <u>real</u>, because for me it's not just

75 some pe<u>riph</u>eral thing that I just turn up to once in a while to a church féte for. For me, this is

76 what I <u>come</u> from. This is what I <u>care</u> about.

77 **Paxman:** Do you see <u>any</u> hope?

78 **Brand:** Remember that yeah, totally, there's gonna <u>be</u> a revolution. It's totally <u>going</u> to

79 <u>happ</u>en. I ain't got a <u>flick</u>er of doubt. This is the <u>end</u>. This is time to wake <u>up</u>. I remember I

80 see you in that <u>pro</u>gramme, where you look at your ancestors, and you saw the way your

81 <u>grand</u>mother had to <u>brass</u> herself or got fucked over by the aristocrats who ran her <u>gaff</u>. You

82 <u>cried</u> because you knew that it was un<u>fair</u> and un<u>just</u>. And that was what? A <u>cen</u>tury ago?

83 That's happening to people <u>now</u>. I just <u>come</u> from a woman who's been treated like that. I've

84 just been <u>talk</u>ing to a woman, to<u>day</u>, who's being treated like that. So if we can en<u>gage</u> that

85 feeling, instead of some moment of <u>lach</u>rymose sentimentality trotted out on the TV for

86 people to pore over emotional <u>porn</u>. If we can en<u>gage</u> that feeling and <u>change</u> things, why

87 <u>would</u>n't we? Why <u>is</u> that naive? Why <u>is</u> that not my right because I'm an <u>act</u>or? I mean I've

88 <u>tak</u>en the right. I don't need the right from <u>you</u>. I don't need the right from <u>any</u>body. I'm <u>tak</u>ing

89 it

The final part of the interview shows Brand speaking emotionally and personally about his political convictions, outlining the public awareness of political corruption (lines 63-70), culminating in a series of questions, first rhetorical '*Why would I take it seriously*'(line 71) and then direct questions to Paxman '*Aren't you more bored than anyone*?' (line 73). Paxman orients to Brand's emotional state by alluding to his anger, but unlike the rest of the interview, his final questioning turn is not oppositional or adversarial but aims to elicit more of Brand's opinion (*Do you see any hope?* line 81). In reinforcing the salience of anger and hope, Paxman has aligned to Brand's vision of political change and the emotive language of radical politics (Ahmed 2004). He has left behind the focus on democratic systems with which the interview started.

However, Brand's response is to attack Paxman's authenticity by alluding to his appearance on 'Who Do you Think You Are? (2006), and his emotional response to discovering that his

Grandmother was a prostitute, exploited 'by aristocrats' (lines 93-96). Brand then sets up an opposition between himself and Paxman in relation to the authenticity of their emotions, with Brand claiming *I've just been talking to a woman, today, who's being treated like that* (line 87). He then extends this opposition by contrasting Paxman's '*moment of lachrymose sentimentality trotted out on the TV for people to pore over emotional porn*' (lines 89-90) with his own more authentic and immediate response of trying to help an individual in a similar position '*If we can engage that feeling and change things, why wouldn't we*' (lines 90-91). His turn culminates in a series of direct and confrontational questions refuting Paxman's authority and claiming his own 'right' to work for political change.

In constructing the opposition between Paxman 'the phoney', and Brand, 'the authentic voice of dissent and change', Brand aligns himself with 'us, the people' (See extract 3, line 56 above). In doing so he has taken up the role of 'tribune of the people' usually associated with the interviewer in the HPI. This has been achieved through challenging the authenticity of Paxman's claim to that role and usurping his position as 'public inquisitor'. Here it is Paxman, not the interviewee, representing both the political establishment and its voting constituency, who is asked to account for the failings of mainstream politics. In contrast, Brand is speaking for an emergent political subjectivity of global anti-capitalists, and giving 'expression to inchoate thoughts and feelings' (Street 2003:90) of the politically disengaged.

Conclusion

If that had been the end of it, the Newsnight interview would have soon faded into insignificance and been judged entirely as a publicity stunt. But since then Brand's celebrity apparatus has coordinated a global series of media events as a platform for his political views in the US, and Australia as well as the UK. Online his week-day YouTube news channel, The Trews (2014 -) has over a million subscribers. Within a year he had published a full length book, titled Revolution (Brand 2014) whose launch was marked by a Guardian newspaper public interview with the high profile anti-establishment journalist Owen Jones that was live-streamed to 200 cinemas across the country. This was followed by another combative appearance on Newsnight, this time with Evan Davies (2014), as well as on serious BBC panel discussion programmes such as Question Time (2014) and Start The Week (2015). In the run up to the election he starred in renowned director Michael Winterbottom's feature length documentary The Emperor's New Clothes (2015), a polemical protest against widening economic inequality. This output is an integrated multi-platform orchestration of Brand's celebrity capital.

We are suggesting that Brand's media visibility is symptomatic of our increasingly celebritized political culture (Driessens 2013a). His affective style and effective media publicity operation is well suited to this changing zeitgeist. Yet at no point has Brand sought political office and his only engagement with the 2015 general election was when he interviewed several of the party political leaders on The Trews in the final week of the campaign. While his subsequent endorsement of Labour's Ed Miliband' attracted a great deal of media attention, politically it was a failure when this intervention achieved no positive impact on Ed's crushing defeat at the polls and such a volte-face alarmed Brand's own followers: 'You have become part of the system, now who will lead us?' (The Trews 2015). It is this YouTube audience who now follow The Trews who had amplified the impact of Brand's Newsnight interview. They are citizen-fans who constitute an emergent form of political engagement, 'within a wholly different structure of feeling and generational logic of practice '(Hills 2015:89). Alienated from the modern bureaucratic processes of elections it is a culture more akin to the carnivalesque history of the hustings when mockery, playfulness and ritual entertainments enlivened popular participation (Coleman 2013).

The subordinated political field that Brand now inhabits and is the source of his symbolic power is an unofficial participatory culture of political dissent eager for a revolution in political thinking. Rather than gaining legitimation from an establishment that reproduces their own political power, Brand has succeeded at a national level in constructing himself as an effective anti-austerity spokesperson for the disenfranchised left in the UK. At the local level in his home town of London he has used his book profits to open a café on the New Era Estate to support the community there and continues to campaign with activist groups, in response to the housing crisis for example, by using the power of his celebrity capital to amplify media attention for their cause. It is a level of political commitment that is hard to dismiss as pure narcissism and, for now, has seemingly eclipsed his comedy career. While it is beyond the scope of this article to argue that Brand's activism could ever produce the revolution he advocates given the powerful global forces ranged against it, he can't be dismissed as a pure fantasist when there are prominent political journalists making the case that the capitalist era is drawing to a close (e.g. Mason 2015).

So why did Russell Brand's initial appearance on Newsnight initiate such an extraordinary amount of ongoing media attention and to what extent can this event be understood as an successful transition of a comedian's celebrity capital to the political field? The two performances we have analysed were highly significant first steps in Brand's subsequent media campaign. We have shown how he integrated his political perspective into his stand-up comedy and addressed his audience as citizen-fans and, conversely, how he has used his comedic skills in a political genre to gain recognition as the voice of the populist Left.

His stand-up show built on the existing social capital of his fan base as a successful comedian, playing to large audiences in a nationwide tour during the autumn and winter of 2013-14. Rather than preaching to the converted, few of the audience would have bought tickets expecting the show to be political. Self-reflexively integrating this new political persona into his celebrity brand, we have seen how Brand used an individualistic mode of [auto] biographical storytelling to engage his audience emotionally in a call to positive political and spiritual change that is very different in its effect from the negative satirical critique of most other politically-oriented comedians. However, the structural position of comedy as a 'licensed space for transgression' meant that Brand would need to move outside the genre to translate these potentialities into the mediated politics of everyday life.

Brand's status as a celebrity comedian, his scandalous past and his oppositional politics created major obstacles to gaining legitimacy in a mainstream political field regulated by different norms and values. Indeed, the credibility and authenticity of Brand's new celebrity persona proved to be newsworthy in itself when his transition to non-comedic genres met widespread hostility from political commentators. Critics were entirely sceptical of Brand's motives, seeing it as a cynical strategy to boost his own celebrity and attacking the BBC for debasing political debate by giving him a platform. Paxman spoke for this constituency when he accused Brand of being politically naïve in his rejection of voting and 'a very trivial man'.

Brand's resistance to Paxman's authority and derogatory framing of the interview enabled him to switch the agenda to articulate opposition to the discursive hegemony of austerity politics which was institutionally embedded in the UK political establishment at the time. The unprecedented number of people who watched the interview on YouTube was indicative of widespread anger at the handling of the post-crisis economy by all the major political parties. It is the historical specificity of this socio-political context, prior to anti-austerity movements in Scotland and Greece becoming front page news in the UK, which explain Brand's rise to prominence. Brand used this media visibility and the contradictions of his celebrity brand to draw attention to the continuing relevance of class politics through the prism of his own experience as a millionaire with working class loyalties, and as a celebrity using his influence to turn his fans against the consumer capitalism from which he has profited. He had begun the process of translating his celebrity capital from the entertainment to the political field.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] The normative form of the 'news interview' has been described in detail (Heritage 1985; Greatbatch, 1988; Clayman and Heritage 2002; Heritage and Clayman 2010), as an event in which 'interviewers restrict themselves to questioning, and interviewees restrict themselves to answering interviewer questions, or at least to responding to them' (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 97)

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