Politics of Celebrity
The Case of Donald Trump

While US presidential elections and their mediated events have long drawn attention on a global scale, reactions to the 2016 campaigns not only cover a broad spectrum from enthusiasm to intense anger, but suggest perplexity. Particularly Republican candidate Donald J. Trump’s strategic defiance of campaign etiquette and his provocative rhetoric have baffled commentators and pundits.

Drawing on the field of celebrity studies, this talk addresses the intricate relations between celebrity status and politics and reflects on the effects of words in a context of media-based performance. It argues that Trump’s appeal is not simply grounded in his nativist populism, but in his mastery of politics as reality TV entertainment. In a media environment in which the 2016 presidential campaign emerges alternately as beauty pageant, comedy, or celebrity deathmatch, Trump is not an apprentice, but a master performer of social scripts.

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