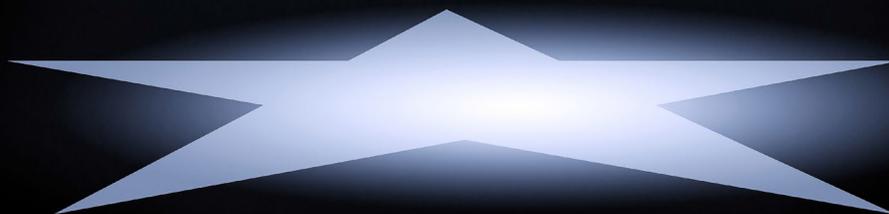




Desecrating Celebrity.  
Proceedings of the  
IV International Celebrity Studies  
Journal Conference

Edited by Romana Andò and Fabio Corsini



Edizioni Nuova Cultura

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Edizioni Nuova Cultura

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## INTRODUCTION

Romana Andò, Fabio Corsini

The complex process of being a celebrity is something that no one can predict. It is the variable, occasionally irregular and totally impulsive, result of a continuous negotiation of values and meanings between the audience, the market and the celebrity. Rather than being merely a media production and media texts to be consumed, celebrities are constantly crossing the audience/production boundaries, nurturing their relationship with them through very intense para-social and “multi-social” interactions, that are currently enhanced within the new media eco-system<sup>1</sup>.

To survive the flowing time and the constant rise of new celebrities, then, a celebrity needs an audience by which to be adored<sup>2</sup>, which means that the celebrity will be incessantly validated by the audience’s appropriation of the celebrity. In a sort of plug and play process, the celebrity becomes exploitable and definitely usable by the audience in their individual identity-building process, to the point that the emotional investment toward the celebrity’s success as well as their failure embodies the individuals’ attempts to face their own emotions and their rationalisation.

Traditionally, a huge part of this process happened in the audience’s imagination. Referring to Fiske’s theory about fans<sup>3</sup>, we may state that the appropriation of a celebrity consists of, firstly, the semiotic productivity,

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<sup>1</sup>David Giles, *Twenty-First Century Celebrity. Fame in Digital Culture*, Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Lisa A. Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

<sup>3</sup>John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”, in Lisa A. Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

namely the 'essentially interior' work concerned with how audience members understand media texts and, of course, celebrities. This work results in the articulation<sup>4</sup> between what the audience perceives and symbolically recognises in the celebrity's public representation and what this means for them in the reflexive private work on their own identity.

However, following Garfinkel's definition of degradation rituals, the degradation ceremony that assumes a close resemblance to ceremonies of investiture and elevation, has to be performed out loud and in public because the degraded person is defined as such by "the denouncer" and "the witness" who all together define "the perpetrator" as out of society's standards and motive as "moral indignation [as] a social affect"<sup>5</sup>. The role of the audience is once more crucial: accreditation and degradation rituals without witnesses do not have a social impact.

As sociologists and media and audience scholars, when we approached the theme of celebrification<sup>6</sup> and celebrity desecration to launch the IV Celebrity Studies Journal conference, held in Rome in June 2018, we were mostly attracted by the role of the audiences in this process; in particular, we were (and still are) interested in analysing how celebrities' public representations matter in both private and collective negotiations of social and moral meanings especially when it comes to the moments of celebrification and desecration or de-celebrification.

In this regard, one of the key relevant points is the relation between the audience's personal understanding, the elaboration of the celebrity and the practices of public scrutiny, and how this is changing in the new media ecosystem. As a matter of fact, for decades, audiences have been described as silent and passive in front of electronic media and this ordinary representation was totally incompatible with the idea of the public as "an orientation to collective and consensual action"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Stuart Hall, "Who needs identity". *Questions of cultural identity*, 16(2), 1-17. 1996

<sup>5</sup>Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies", in *American Journal of Sociology*, 61, 420-424, p. 421, 1956.

<sup>6</sup>Olivier Driessens, 'The celebrization of society and culture: Understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture', *International journal of cultural studies*, November 2013, 16: 6, pp. 641-657, 2013.

<sup>7</sup>Sonia Livingstone, "On the relation between audiences and publics". In Sonia Livingstone (ed.) *Audiences and publics : when cultural engagement matters for the public*

Within this frame, the idea is an unbridgeable gap between the 'coach potatoes' in front of the television and those who witnessed the accreditation and degradation rituals described by Garfinkel<sup>8</sup>.

Actually, the private work of the audience is always a public matter if we consider that "'public' refers to a shared understanding or inclusion in a common forum (for 'audiences' may be similarly described)"<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the audience/fan constantly moves from the private (internal) understanding of semiotic productivity to public (shared out loud) enunciative productivity, that can "occur only within immediate social relationships"<sup>10</sup>. In other words, the reciprocal identification among the audience's thoughts and feelings occurs because of a shared public frame motivated by media content.

Today, the scrutiny power of the audience is more publicly performed than in the past, as a result of digital platforms (i.e., social media) where the audience may easily and immediately share their opinion and build a common framework. As a consequence of social media, audiences are now perceived as noisy again (as well as in the public forum described by Garfinkel<sup>11</sup>) even though they seem to have less time to consolidate the reflexive interpretation of the celebrity. In other words, the distinction between semiotic and enunciative productivity is definitely collapsing. Concerning group viewing situations, Jenkins stated that the distinction,

*between semiotic productivity (the popular construction of meanings at the moment of reception) and enunciative productivity (the articulation of meaning through dress, display, and gossip), . . . breaks down since the moment of reception [for the fan] is often also the moment of enunciation<sup>12</sup>.*

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*sphere. Changing media - changing Europe series (2).* Intellect Books, Bristol, UK, p. 17, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *op. cit.*, 1956.

<sup>9</sup> Sonia Livingston, *op. cit.* p. 1.7

<sup>10</sup> John Fiske, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *op. cit.*, 195.6

<sup>12</sup> Henry Jenkin, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 278.

More dramatically, as Hills suggested,

*in the context of web 2.0, 'group viewing' can extend to all those who are watching a broadcast and live-tweeting it via hashtags.[...]. As fan audiences watch TV and then live-tweet along, they shift 'interior' semiotic productivity into socially-shared enunciative productivity that's bound up with a particular moment of broadcast, and immediately switch that into the textual productivity of 'narrowcast' (if not actually broadcast) digital mediation<sup>13</sup>.*

What are the consequences of this shift in the processes of both celebrification and de-celebrification? Will this time shortening in audience practices result in a lack of time for self-examination? On the one hand, it is undeniable that the digital media (social media in particular) and their accessibility are going to totally rewrite the rules of celebrification and desecration and, more generally, the moral rules of interaction. As a matter of fact, we are faced with an increasing visibility of celebrities that is supported by the hybridization between top-down, broadcast-driven media logic and bottom-up grassroots forces that are nurturing the circulation of digital content about celebrities. Moreover, the strategy of involving the audience, seeking their engagement and stimulating their participation, may obviously result in a series of not necessarily conscious assessments and validation practices being made every day by the audience about celebrities.

On the other hand, the sense of memory related to celebrity imagery is partially overcome by a temporary, incidental reminiscence, whose social value, even if publicly built, is increasingly fragile. This leads us to the point that, compared to the past, the contemporary online celebrification and degradation ceremonies very often result in a more antagonistic debate, even in ferocious criticism, managed by the audience and the media industry in a reciprocal influence. Topics such as race, gender and religion are impulsively and superficially used in the

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<sup>13</sup> Matt Hills, "Fiske's 'textual productivity' and digital fandom: Web 2.0 democratization versus fan distinction?", in, *Participations. Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 1, 2013, p. 136.

online public interactions about celebrities, aiming at both supporting and opposing the celebrity.

As Giles<sup>14</sup> suggests, it is possible to recognise three stages in the celebrity phenomenon that are related to: a different media ecosystem (even if not from a technological determinism perspective), diverse ways of celebrity representations and storytelling, and distinct levels of audience engagement. If the idea of stardom and of untouchable stars is evidently linked to the origin of the movie industry since the 1970s, the so-called “demotic turn” and the very ideas of celebrification and celebritisation have been strongly related to the rise of phenomena such as reality television. In the same way, celebrity authentication processes and desecration may be read in relation to the digital disruptions led by social media when it comes to redefining concepts like proximity and intimacy between fans and stars.

To reflect on the sudden and unpredictable rise of a celebrity as well as on their evanescence becomes imperative. At the same time, it is also necessary to consider that due to the chronological interval shortening between celebrification and desecration, the degradation may even easily turn into a means of reconsecration, thanks to digital media exposure and audience participation.

We know that many celebrity biographies have been punctuated by phases of ascent and decline. In the contemporary radically transformed scenario, the sequence of celebrification and decelebrification moments seems to be enhanced and accelerated, and their outcomes have often been controversial. For some celebrities, the decline could have represented an opportunity for a further celebrification step (i.e., in the rhetoric of the beautiful and damned stars), while for others the desecrating moments could have marked the end of their long-lasting careers.

Considering now the following Rojek’s statement: “the fallen celebrity may never regain the former level of elevation in the public sphere. But confession can produce a more nuanced relationship with the public. [...] A sort of democracy is established between the celebrity and the fan on the basis of common embodiment, and the vulnerability

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<sup>14</sup>David Giles, *op.cit.*

that is the corollary of embodiment”.<sup>15</sup>

What if this “democracy” is experienced through the new media ecosystem? Within the social media the fallen celebrity may potentially reach an even higher level of elevation in the public sphere. As a matter of fact, celebrities exploit social media as a stage for lively emotional performances through which their sentiments can be scrutinised severely and intensely during ongoing everyday relationships with the audience. If the televised celebrity confessionals were, above all, an emotional form of communication that attempted to draw the fan into an affective economy of inner feeling and authentic sentiment, social media is enhancing the affective and impulsive side of the relationship, creating more experiential moments of greater involvement, whose effects, however, are more effaceable and less durable in the long run.

Therefore, starting from these premises, it is more appropriate than ever to focus on the celebrity as an ongoing process produced by a disorderly sequence of significant moments in the celebrity’s career and in the audience’s experience of it.

We have already stated that these processes connected to the making — and to the desecrating — of a celebrity are actually applicable to a variety of people, not only traditional celebrities but those individuals who are now exploiting the potential of the digital (social) media for transforming themselves into celebrities (and, consequently, into influencers) or for desecrating other people that are already popular. At the same time, audiences (and their practices of consumption) as well as media institutions (traditional and digital) are a significant part of these processes.

Consequently, the field of application (and investigation) of celebrity studies is vast which justifies the existence of a wide array of possible topics. The contributions we are presenting in this collection are no exception; they use a variety of approaches, employ different investigative and research tools, cover different media, touch on a variety of themes and have been applied to the understanding of events of past

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<sup>15</sup> Chris Rojeck, *Celebrity and Religion*, in Sean Redmond , Susan Holmes (eds.) *Stardom and Celebrity. A reader*. London: Sage, 2007, p. 179.

and contemporary phenomena. The 11 contributions of which this collection is made have been 'ideally' divided and grouped into three different, more general sections: Stars, Celebrities and Fame; Power, Politics and Prestige; and Celebrity Strategies for the Market and Beyond.

The first section, Stars, Celebrities and Fame, investigates the more 'traditional' topics of celebrification and celebrity desecration by analysing popular characters from the movies to ballet to the music industry. Cristina Colet in her contribution *RuanLingyu (1910–1935): Celebrating a Star, Desecrating the Woman* investigates the process of celebrification and creation of stardom in China starting from the dramatic case of actress RuanLingyu who committed suicide after being involved in a scandalous love affair. The second contribution, by Renata Gravina, celebrates the figure of dancer and artist Vaclav Nijinsky and his fame and popularity. In *Nijinsky and the Parable of Life as a 'Work of Art'*, the author focuses attention on the ascent and descent of the dancer reconstructing Nijinsky's life as well as his peculiar approach to dance. Ian Dixon in his *Fame Rotting on The Slimy Thoroughfare: David Bowie Desecrating Celebritization in 'Diamond Dogs'* focuses his attention on David Bowie and, more specifically, on the album 'Diamond Dogs', arguing that as an act of self-desecration, while risking Bowie's fame, it also helped to reinvent (and increase) Bowie's fame with only the outward appearance of desecration. The last contribution of the first section, by Francesca Moretti, *Beyoncé: The Black Goddess. How Her Pregnancy Revelation Mirrors Her Celebrification Strategy*, is related to the artist's strategy of using primarily Instagram as a medium of communication. More precisely, the paper focuses on Beyoncé's pregnancy pictures aimed at elevating the black female body while growing the accreditation of the artist.

The second section of this collection, Power, Politics and Prestige, is related to the ideas of prestige and celebrity strategies applied to different domains that are connected to 'power' issues. This section is opened by Arrigo Bonifacio whose contribution, *Celebrity Management and the Struggle for Power: The Case of Marshal Tito*, focuses on Marshal Tito's ability to use desecration processes to his advantage by turning them into tools for fostering notoriety and building a stronger public image. Fabiana Moraes, with her contribution, *Poverty, Status and Celebrification of Everyday Life: Questioning and Confirming the Model for Existence of Celebrities on Instagram*, transports us into the world of the less

privileged. The author, by focusing on three poor people that reached visibility and popularity through Instagram, connects the idea of celebrity with that of status, race, class, gender and social origin. The last contribution of this section, by Valentina Signorelli, *Famous Last Words. A Comparative Focus on Resignation Speeches to Trace Contemporary European Instability: The Cases of David Cameron and Matteo Renzi*, provides a comparative insight into both Cameron and Renzi's resignation ceremonies, which demonstrated the fall of institutional representatives, by analysing their words and communication strategies.

The third and last section of this volume is called *Celebrity Strategies for the Market and Beyond* and is dedicated to the different contributions focused on how celebrity status is exploited by micro- and macro-celebrities and perceived by their audiences. The first contribution, *Publishing Strategies and Celebrity in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands. The Case of Gerbrand Bredero*, by Jeroen Jansen, discusses some strategies of image manipulation used by publishers in the 16th century. The author focuses on the case of the literary career of Dutch playwright Gerbrand Bredero and the (promotional) strategies employed by his publisher. Neil Alperstein, in his contribution, *Selling out and Sailing Onward: How Micro-Celebrities Manage their Self-Presentation on Social Media*, takes us into the world of micro-celebrities. By analysing the case of micro-celebrity travellers, the author intends to demonstrate how important (but also how risky) of a strategy it is for these celebrities to present themselves in an authentic and sincere manner to gain the celebrity status. Elisabetta Zurovac and Giovanni Boccia Artieri's contribution, *Performing and Perceiving the Microcelebrity Status in Snapchat: an Italian Case Study*, investigates what kind of practices define the status of micro-celebrity in an on-line space such as Snapchat, and how these practices are perceived by others based on a one year online ethnographic study of an Italian network of users. Finally, in the last contribution of the collection, *Influencer Marketing and Redefining Fame in Social Media Advertisements*, Sinem Gudum deals with the relationship between celebrity culture and marketing. The author focuses on the role of influencers in the new media ecosystem and discusses the future of advertising in a context in which the 'watcher' and the 'watched' are the same.

The overall picture of all these different contributions — for which we would like to again thank all the authors — is complex, diversified

and, yet, coherent in reflecting the importance of scientific investigation in such a relevant area as the one of celebrity studies and celebrity cultures. As the different articles demonstrate, there is no field or theme left untouched. The processes of celebrification and desecration affect, on a daily basis, our public and private life. These processes are not only connected to the entertainment industry and our leisure time, but are gradually invading business, politics and our culture at large.



## Stars, Celebrities, and Fame



# RUAN LINGYU (1910-1935): CELEBRATING A STAR, DESECRATING THE WOMAN

Cristina Colet, *University of Turin*

## **Abstract**

On 8th March 1935 Ruan Lingyu, one of the most popular and appreciated Chinese star, died for suicide. On 14th March 1935 30,000 people crowded the streets in Shanghai to participate to her funeral. It was the first case of fanaticism with some following episodes of suicide between her fans. Considered one of the most influent actresses and renamed “the queen of melodrama”, becoming a model for the next generation of actress, she was victim of a scandalous love affair that produced rumors and gossips that circulated on each magazine and newspaper and that in few months changed Ryan Lingyu’s reception through Chinese audience, becoming a scandalous star. Her case was considered the first related to Chinese celebrity and stardom, as a model of emancipation for many women and stars, also because of her many performances that reflected the spirit of transformation of the country. The proposal wants to analyze the process of celebrification and creation of stardom in China through this particular and crucial case that changes the rules in Chinese Film Industry some years before the foundation of the Popular Republic of China (1949).

## **Introduction**

Ruan Lingyu (1910-1935) is considered one of the most influent and popular Chinese silent star in Chinese film industry during 1930s; together with her colleague Hu Die (1907-1989) she challenged the title as the queen of the silver screen for the contest promoted by Mingxing

Magazine in February 1933<sup>1</sup>, one of the most popular and specialized magazine about Chinese stars, and it's in particular with the genre of melodrama through whom she has started to symbolize the country representing with her characters of devoted mothers and women inclined to sacrifice themselves the struggle of the oppressed China because of the Japanese invasion in particular but also because of the Western occupation of numerous Chinese territories after many defeats (the two Opium Wars and the Boxers rebellion in particular), but as asserted by Zhang Yingjing<sup>2</sup> Chinese actresses could also be able to embody different female models that offered a varied possibility to translate the sense of modernity and its contradictions in China: *femme fatale*, modern girl, scandalous or struggling women, or devoted wives and mothers, this last one in particular representing the traditional and confucian model. Ruan Lingyu oscillates between different female categories always highlighting the main urgency for Chinese female audience: being selfish and emancipated by patriarchal society.

In a short lapse of time cinema has become the main tool to show female beauty because of its structure that allows to move close to details catching realism, and encouraging male audience to a voyeuristic attitude<sup>3</sup>, but above all an occasion to appear and affirm female social existence in a patriarchal realm. In addition of the popularity acquired, in China during 1930s becoming actress is a profession to obtain emancipation, an opportunity for many women to become independent and if this means a progression for the country it was also considered dangerous for the patriarchal society. Ruan Lingyu's

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<sup>1</sup> Starting from the beginning of January 1933 and for one month each one of the number of the Mingxing daily published the ballot slip to vote forcing readers to buy the magazine. The coronation ceremony held on March 28 1933, Hu Die got 21,334 votes, Ruan Lingyu was placed to the third with 7,290 votes.

Feide Shen, 'The grand spectacle of Hu Die's election as "Movie Queen"' (1933 nian Hu Die dangxuan 'Dianying huanghou' shengkuang), *Minguo chunqiu*, March 1993, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configuration of Space, Time and Gender*, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> Feng Ge, 'Funü yu dianying zhiye' (Women and Film Industry), *Funü zazhi* (Women Magazine), 13, 6, 1927, p.9.

case represents one of the early example of a celebrity who has been discredited by the press because of the role she fulfilled.

During her career Ruan Lingyu has played in almost 30 movies, becoming one of the major Chinese star of the period, a model of emancipation for female audience and a great example of modern actress because of her way to play role combining naturalism to a measured gesture, offering a modern example of playing roles and defined by many critics “the Chinese Garbo”<sup>4</sup>. Her face was reproduced by the press, becoming a testimonial for beauty treatments (Lux soap in particular), a kind of icon of consumerism when China was going to betray Western influences in fashion, style of life and emancipation, her body immortalized on covers of magazines wearing *qipao* or western clothes imposed her as a fashion icon in addition to the film star.

The present essay is going to put in evidence one of the early case of stardom and celebrity in China taking into account Ruan Lingyu’s stardom persona as a performer on the silver screen and in particular Wei Ming’s character in *New Women* (AKA *New Woman*, by Cai Chusheng, 1935) and the scandalous affair where she was involved that digs the dirt on her public reputation and desecrating the celebrity but especially the woman.

### **Being a “new woman” to represent the country**

Miriam Hansen Bratus has defined memorable Chinese female characters of 1930s because they oscillated «among different types and incompatible identities»<sup>5</sup> is evident that Chinese Film Industry during 1930s used female bodies as a narrative text where the necessity of emancipation as the consequence of the process of modernization collides with the tradition and conservative rules imposed by centuries of confucianism. Following the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and its demand for a new culture importing Western knowledge and concepts Chinese cinema introduce a modern surge with the aim to modernize the whole coun-

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<sup>4</sup>Jay Leyda, *Electric Shadow. An Account of Films and the Films Audience in China*, The Mit Press, 1972, p.87.

<sup>5</sup>Miriam Hansen Bratu, ‘Fallen Woman Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism’, *Film Quarterly*, 54 (1), 2000, p.16.

try. But in 1930s after the awareness of having been cheated by Western powers Chinese young directors (in particular those one who took part to the Leftist Wing<sup>6</sup>) found in cinema an important instrument for the Chinese socialist propaganda. As a consequence, female actresses, in particular, started to represent the country that needs to be free from Western and Japanese invaders and creating a new China. If during 1920s they were usually conceived as “huaping” (vases for flowers) symbolizing a beauty subjected to Western tendencies and trends then their female bodies has become the most representing symbol of the country, passing to be object of desire to object of the national cause. As asserted by Laura Mulvey: «Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which men can live out this phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning»<sup>7</sup>, in this sense at the beginning Chinese female stars have been imposed to audience as a beautiful attraction to admire and appreciate for their physical attributes only playing characters who reflected Chinese cultural depletion<sup>8</sup>. If their way to promote modern style of life through their bodies make them free, is important to consider that because of the acquisition of Western clothes and make-up, as the result and influence of Western stardom, their emancipation wasn't effective. In particular it was the expression of a superficial process where Chinese women were apparently liberate by

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<sup>6</sup> At the turning of 1920s many Chinese intellectuals that sympathized with the leftist party and were against the National party (Guomindang led by Chiang Kai-shek) which imposed the censorship on literature and film industry started to organize a movement to support the leftist cause not only through their political engagement but also through their art.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Visual and Other Pleasures*, Macmillan, 1988, p.58.

<sup>8</sup> Western habits were introduced in Chinese metropolis like Shanghai where Chinese traditions were undermined by the modern Western styles. This has created a cultural depletion in addition to the risk of the loss of the cultural identity. For this reason many leftist director has tried to react proposing movies during 1930s that let audience think about the strengthening of the country imposing an own identity and using female characters as the main tool to fight for the national cause.

Chinese ancient rules rather indeed they were used by Chinese society to represent Chinese country as modern as Western countries were.

Since the establishment of Confucian ethic that for many centuries has ruled Chinese society, women had to be virtuous as daughters and then wives and mothers to “procreate virtuous descendants”<sup>9</sup>, and often they have been excluded by public life. As asserted by Chen, Chinese women passes from being daughter to become wife and then mother keeping alive their virtuousness, finding in them the funding nucleus of the society.

Nevertheless film industry didn't represent for them a real emancipation but another cage where being shown, not different from the use that *yuefenpao* made of them, advertising posters that reproduce sensual female Chinese bodies to sell Western products since the end of the Nineteenth Century. With this background Ruan Lingyu became in a short lapse of time a popular icon, alternating sensual roles to that one of the peasant, representing both side of the country with the aim of the modernization inspired by Western influences and the necessity of not twisting cultural and national identity. At the beginning of 1930s in a country where the triangular fights between Communists, Nationalists and Japanese invaders Cinema was a tool of propaganda to preserve the Chinese authenticity and discredit enemies, what did it mean for a woman becoming a star and a celebrity?

Taking into account the fact that Chinese Film Industry has developed in the cosmopolitan Shanghai where Western influences and tendencies were more influent than in other Chinese cities because of the foreign concession (the French, and the International in particular)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Hongmou Chen, *Wuzhong yigui* (Five posthumous regulations), *Jiaonü yigui* (Posthumous regulation for educating woman), Commercial Press, [1742] 1936; Tani E. Barlow, *Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating*, in Angela Zito, Tani E. Barlow (eds.) *Body, Subject & Power in China*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.255.

<sup>10</sup>After the first opium war (1839-1842) as the consequence of the Chinese defeat ratified by the Treaty of Nanking (1842) Shanghai became a foreign concession divided in many foreign settlements: the International settlement (ruled by English and American government), the French and the Japanese concession. Chinese people lived inside the Chinese old city and could join the foreign concessions only to work (often as foreigners' employees) where they couldn't reside. This means also creating

is easy to suppose that some phenomenon like stardom and celebrity were fostered following the Western lesson.

In China a superficial modernity has developed through appearance and consumerism, where the most meaningful cases are the calendar girls shown on *yuefenbao*, where Chinese female and sensual bodies were used to promote goods through, becoming the Chinese board to social and economic wealth. By extension as their “colleagues made of paper” Chinese female celluloid bodies were conceived following the “to be look-at-ness” theorized by Mulvey purpose to satisfy male interests and also to show China as a country where wealth and modernity coexist<sup>11</sup>. Reading female magazines like «Ling Long» the modern question was associate to the female one, as emerges in Miss Li Ying’s reflection about being a contemporary girl where the counterposition between *modern girl* and *new woman* stands for appearance versus substance.<sup>12</sup>

As modern girl beyond the propaganda issue cinema represented an occasion to emerge as actresses of the silver screen, a forbidden profession before the birth of Chinese Film Industry because of an Imperial law of 1772 that forbad to women to play on stage, and that gave them also the occasion to be economically independent. Being actress, it means above all being under the spot light, judged by media as a negative model because this female profession was considered not morally decent for a girl. Moreover, it’s important to say that for the apparent modernism that pervaded metropolitan reality like Shanghai, where

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public building only for foreigners (and also public garden) that were forbidden to Chinese people. The foreign influence and presence is in particular characterized by the eclectic architecture of many building along the Bund and many western trends soaked first in Shanghai to spread all over the country. It’s for the massive presence of foreign people in Shanghai (that returned to be Chinese only in 1946) that in Shanghai has developed an important film industry and first media popular cases (like Ryan Lingyu’s scandal) has catalyzed people’s attention.

<sup>Leo</sup> O. Lee, *Shanghai Modern. The Flourishing of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Visual and Other Pleasure*, Macmillan, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> Ying Li, ‘Being a Contemporary Girl’, *Ling Long Magazine*, 135, 1934, p.583.

the process of modernization was concern to fashion and cinema and promoted through advertising posters and covers of magazines, the process of female emancipation was only apparent. Many cases of suicides were recorded between 1920s and 1930s as asserted by Bryna Goodman who in a suggestive essay<sup>13</sup> pointed out that in this period many women who tried to sustain themselves with an employment were often victims of male power finding in suicide the only way to back out of male imposition. Even if in 1910s May 4th movement and New Culture movement's young intellectual promoted female education and emancipation as the consequence of the modernization of the country, the moral issue wasn't overtaken yet. During the early Republican era (1912-1949) also in Chinese film industry there was the same problem and female morality was put under the observation lens and for this reason female professionals, actresses in particular, were judged because of their modern behavior. In film productions where women symbolized the process of transformation in Chinese society actresses were conceived as model for female audience, as asserted by Marshall: «Celebrities represent subject positions that audiences can adopt or adapt in their formation of social identity»<sup>14</sup> becoming archetype of the modern citizen life, and therefore synonymous of promiscuity and ambiguity, in particular for those peasant girl who found in the silver screen an alternative to their traditional and boring life.

As "new woman" is equivalent of being a working woman whose emancipation, as asserted by Miss Li Ying on «Ling Long» magazine meant to be independent from man, but in the Chinese patriarchal society wasn't assumed to be woman and emancipated.

### **Ruan Lingyu: a star and a celebrity to be emancipated**

Ruan Lingyu oscillates between these two kinds of archetype, the modern girl and the new woman, representing the model of a successful woman that has succeeded to release her social status but at the

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<sup>13</sup>Bryna Goodman, 'The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory, and the New Republic', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64, 1, 2005, p.67-101.

<sup>14</sup>David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 65.

same time has been considered a modern girl because of her westernized lifestyle. Coming from a poor family she debuted in film industry when she was only 16 to help her mother who worked as a servant in a rich Chinese family, the Zhang, with whom the youngest son, Zhang Damin, became Ruan Linyu's fiancée starting a cohabitation even if they weren't married. Her promising career has let her to become one of the most important Chinese female star, alternating action movies (*wuxia pian* in particular) to melodramas where she excelled, considered in 1930s one of the most representative heroine of this genre who embodied the nation in this crucial period for Chinese people and their country, playing a prostitute, like in *The Goddess* (by Wu Yonggang, 1934), who sacrifices herself selling her body for his son's future (a plot that resembles *Stella Dallas* by Henry King 1925) or leader of a small village like in *Small Toys* (by Sun Yu, 1933) where her handcrafts represented a way to contrast foreign invasions and products.

But it's in particular with the movie *New Women* that her performance made a big fuss. Here the private image and the public one collides. The plot is about Wei Ming (Ruan Lingyu) a music teacher who works also as proof reader for a publishing house and whose aim is to publish her book. Even if she succeeds in her purpose because her friend who works in the publishing house obtains the director's agreement for the publication, she also understands very soon that her success depends on her availability to give herself to the publishing house director and other men (a journalist and the director of the school), each one interested only on her beauty rather than on her competence. When she refuses she comes across a public scandal and media persecutions till she decided to take her own life because as asserted by Wei Ming: «We have no power to just change things».

Ruan Lingyu playing Wei Ming's character embodies women's struggle against public opinion, and media in particular, trying to affermate female talent in a male society where women are considered only as an object of desire. As for Ruan Lingyu also Wei Ming is representative of a woman who oscillate between the idea of being modern and attracted by the metropolitan attractions (nightclubs, parties and dance halls) and that one of being a new woman who lives on her own. It's clear that for both, Ruan Lingyu and Wei Ming, the success passes through their image; if in Wei Ming's case the pictures are her pass for a career as a writer (the publisher decides to publish her book only

after seeing her on a picture), Ruan Lingyu uses her image, becoming very popular, to represent women who suffer and fight against patriarchal society, in a way we can say that her star condition had a social function. Because of her prevalent performing in melodramas that for Singer's analysis it's the main genre to promote the "new woman's character"<sup>15</sup> Ruan Lingyu's body become a vehicle to improve emancipation in the country through her character's struggles and sacrifices. Her suffering characters were not only a warning for male Chinese society to fight for the country in order to preserve the cultural identity and integrity, but was a board for the female cause to be independent and fight to gain rights.

As asserted by Singer melodrama is a product of modernity that regulates hyperstimulis produced by the metropolis film stars in particular contributed to create models because of the process of identification with whom audience is involved during movie projection. The realism proper of the plots of many of her movies and also of her performance has encouraged her female audience to identify with her characters who were particularly representative of Chinese women conditions. It is the case of the moving *shennü*'s story forced to become a prostitute to provide for her kid's future (*The Goddess*, by Wu Yonggang, 1934) a situation very common in Shanghai during the Japanese invasion (1931-1938), or the unfair Wei Ming's affair of her success as a writer because of her look and not for her talent reflecting about women decorative role in Chinese society, and the civil and social Ye Dasao's allegiance to contrast enemies and preserve Chinese identity and traditions (*Little Toys*, by Sun Yu, 1933), underling female support to the country.

As Wei Ming's case relief Chinese women struggle to be emancipated was faraway, because even if they contribute to fight for the country they remain an object of desire. In a way that the public image of the star and that one of the heroines who is looking for fame coincide because they represent a female model of that time. In a society ruled by men women can make their way only apparently.

The iconic Ruan Linyu's picture that is reproduced everywhere

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<sup>15</sup> Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Contexts*, Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 294-295.

in the movie has a double meaning to promote and celebrate Wei Ming's career as a female writer and to promote the movie using Ruan Lingyu's image that here works as a *star vehicle*, taking advantage of her stardom statute (because of her overexposure on magazines and as a fashion testimonial) to give fame through the *star persona* to the film industry. The director Cai Chusheng's attack to media came from the chronicle previous scandal occurred to another actress and screenplay writer, Ai Xia, died for suicide and to whom the story of *New Women* is inspired. Like Wei Ming, Ai Xia tried to denounce in her works that in the Chinese patriarchal society ruled by confucianism there was no place for women than being the angel of the hearth. In her book *A Woman of Today* (1933) she describes a woman's awareness of the real meaning of being a modern woman, not related to fashion and superficial necessity but as an activist taking part to the revolution passing from her image of modern girl to that one of the new woman. Because of her rebel position Ai Xia was criticized by the public opinion, her role as writer-actress, a female intellectual who overcomes the model of the *modern girl*, was considered a dangerous precedent for female audience, in particular for her drastic act, taking her own life to affirm her as a new woman and protest against a patriarchal and deceiving society<sup>16</sup>. As asserted by Miriam Hansen: «women function as metonymies, if not allegories of urban modernity, figuring the city in its allure, instability, anonymity, and illegibility, which is often suggested through juxtapositions of women's faces and bodies with the lights of Shanghai, abstracted into hieroglyphics. In more narrative terms, female protagonists serve as the focus of social injustice and oppression; rape, thwarted romantic love, rejection, sacrifice, prostitution function as metaphors of a civilization in crisis.»<sup>17</sup> In this sense Ruan Lingyu playing Wei Ming has become the mouthpiece of the female awkwardness and then with her suicide and her personal story of vio-

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<sup>16</sup> Yiman Wang, *To Write or to Act, That Is the Question. The 1920s to 30s Shanghai Actress-Writers, and the Death of 'New Woman'*, in Lingzhen Wang ed., *Engendering Cinema: Chinese Women Filmmakers Inside and Outside China*, Columbia University Press, 2011, p.244.

<sup>17</sup> Miriam Hansen, *cit*, p.15.

lence and prejudice she has been transformed in an example for female struggle to acquire emancipation. Through Wei Ming's character Ruan Lingyu pays homage to Ai Xia, an intellectual but above all an example of rebel who has sacrificed her own life for female emancipation. Ruan Lingyu's performance talks to woman to become aware of their rights and to start to fight to affirm their independence and emancipation. A kind of medium to next generation, not only young actresses who was starting their career, but to Chinese female audience as a whole. For this reason the movie was conceived dangerous for the consequences it could have produced among women and society.

### **A scandalous affair: desecrating a celebrity**

Indeed, *New Women* was condemned by nationalist government and media because it promoted suicide as an escape from responsibility and could be a dangerous model for Chinese people, female in particular, in a difficult period for the Country (burdened by foreign enemies and destitution because of the civil war and Japanese invasion). As reported on the magazine «Da wanbao» in 1935: “[...] when the movie was projected in Beijing the authority disapproved the incitement to suicide and censored the movie”<sup>18</sup>. For the Nationalist government, indeed, that promoted the New Life Movement renewing confucian ethic and the sense of community was unacceptable the message that came from the movie, even if the real Cai Chusheng's purpose was only to denounce a sexist society, promoting between the new women only the model of the worker, a kind of premonition to the next Communist era. But it's in particular from the press that came a defamatory campaign against the movie, taking into advance once again the star persona to create a scandal. The movie charges media of creating defamatory campaign, in particular against emancipated new women to support nationalist government that described them as dangerous and not a model to imitate.

Ruan Lingyu's private life was put under the spotlight to dig the

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<sup>18</sup> Bushi jian dan de wei zui xun song' (It wasn't a sacrifice because of the fear of being punished), *Da wan bao* (Evening News), Yingxi nianjian, 1935, p.30.

dirt on the movie that has consecrated her as the new Chinese female star. The press has used her personal love affair that for economic reason got in a trial to discredit her as star of the film industry but in particular because she represented an emancipated woman. At the beginning of 1935 her previous lover Zhang Damin delivers to the press, in particular the two newspapers «Shanghai News» and «The Eastern Times»<sup>19</sup>, some details about their love affair accusing Ruan Lingyu to be a bigamist and of having forged documents to marry another man. Starting to this the press (newspapers in particular) began to publish defamatory articles about Ruan Lingyu's life comparing her roles in the movie as a modern woman to her private life to demonstrate the failure of this woman's model. At this purpose the «Shi bao» arguments that modern means "inscrutable and abnormal"<sup>20</sup> discouraging women to pursue this model inspired by Western stars. In the same period when

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<sup>19</sup> *Shen bao* and *Shi bao* were two newspapers, respectively starting publishing from 1872 until 1949 and from 1904 to 1939, which proposed general informations about chronicle, society, traditions, as result of the May 4th Movement both has started to promote the idea of modern China. In particular this was evident in the cosmopolitan Shanghai where the Western influences of the foreign concessions has strengthen the necessity to modernize the country to be in line with other superpowers. For this reason even if in Shanghai there were many specialized magazines for women (like *Funü Shibao*, *Women Easter Times*, or *Funü Zazhi*, *Women Magazine*) also newspapers published articles about movie stars and in particular scandalous affairs. In particular Ruan Lingyu's case drew press attention because of her gender and emancipation. As a modern country China started also to promote a new female image but to accept in the patriarchal society that an emancipated woman like a film star could have love affairs without being married, coexisting with a man and supporting her former lover, was unacceptable. Some months before Ruan Lingyu's scandal also another female colleague was involved in a similar scandalous affair to whom the press dedicated many articles. But for Hu Die even if she underwent to trial, the result was different. Also in her case the previous lover has accused her to be unfaithful to obtain more money after their rupture, and even if they weren't married she was obliged to pay an alimony to him. But after few weeks the press had something more scandalous to tell because of Ruan Lingyu's affair. The actress was not particular strong to face defamations and instead to wait the trial and demonstrate her innocence she chose the suicide.

<sup>20</sup> 'Nü mingxing de lian'ai zhang ye suan bu qing' (Even the stars' love accounts don't add up). *Shi bao*, January, 17, 1935.

the movie *New Women* was distributed, both the star Ruan Lingyu and her character Wei Ming, symbolizing the individual female struggle in a male and patriarchal society, were judged and discredited by the press. Even if Ruan Lingyu wasn't really married with her previous lover, Zhang Damin, for the public opinion she represented an ill reputed woman because she was a public person and an actress, in particular, and because she represented a modern woman, very far from the moral one that confucianism and patriarchal society imposed to virtuous women to be. Combining together the star persona and her roles to the private one the press, that has imposed Ruan Lingyu as the new Chinese star, desecrates her for months contributing to her suicide on 8th March 1935. After her death media promoted a her new image, passing to be an unfaithful *femme fatal*, to an icon creating a myth as the result of the numerous people that poured out and crowded the streets in Shanghai during the mourning (almost 30.000 people), and many suicides that her death provoked (as remembered on the yearly report «Yingxi nianjian»<sup>21</sup> a similar case to that one of Rudolph Valentino occurred 10 years before)<sup>22</sup>. The people march, in particular female,

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<sup>21</sup> 'Ai ce ji' (Posthumous Homage Collection), *Yingxi nianjian*, 1935, p.26-27.

<sup>22</sup> In 1935 after her death on Chinese newspapers Ruan Lingyu passed to be the *femme fatal* who has seduced many men to the victim of the Chinese patriarchal society. Many articles talked about many abuses and episodes of violence she has endured during her love affair with Tang Jishan, her current lover. The case of bigamy was created by the press after Zhang Damin's confession to many journalists. Even if it was clear his purpose to tell private affair about his relationship with the star RuanLingyu discrediting her image to obtain more money after their rupture, he was untouchable for the press. This was because he was an official's son who fight during the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) and considered by the Chinese confucian society an important person who contributed to protect the country. For this reason the press has preferred to create a false case of bigamy accusing Ruan Lingyu to be unfaithful than telling the real story, even if she wasn't married with Zhang Damin neither with Tang Jishan. Here it's evident that the Chinese patriarchal society took Ruan Lingyu's case as an example to promote a virtuous female model because it was unacceptable that an emancipated woman could afford to have a love affair without being married. After her death because of people's reaction and great participation to her mourning and funeral the press started to promote her myth accusing Tang Jishan as the only responsible for Ruan Lingyu's death. *'Each one of the abuses by Tang*

that commemorated her on 14th March 1935, during the funeral, seems to be transformed in a kind of march for rights against a patriarchal and sexist society. Beyond the creation of the myth the press start to publish morbid articles describing details about her in the coffin with titles like “A look inside the funeral home” or “Ruan Lingyu didn’t suicide but she has been murdered”<sup>23</sup> (on «Min bao» 1935) putting her again under the spotlight and describing a weak woman oppressed by her lovers and victim of his star persona, many newspapers, indeed, talk about the bad influence that Wei Ming’s performance has had on her finding in suicide the only way to escape<sup>24</sup> transforming the *star persona* into a case of loss of identity similar to what Rojek defines as “the extinction of the veridical self”<sup>25</sup>.

In Ruan Lingyu’s case the boundary between her and her character is slight, as her death resembles a “mise en abyme” of one of her most meaningful performance, Wei Ming, who kills herself to protest against the unfair male society. Like in the movie *New Women* the press underlines this dichotomy between the actress and her role to discredit a famous woman who couldn’t manage with some of the problems related to fame and her status as a celebrity. As asserted by the literate Lu Xun, the father of the modern Chinese literature, reporting a sentence that Ruan Lingyu left before taking her life: “gossip is a fearful thing” and the clamor that the press creates around this private affair underlines two important aspects in Chinese society during 1930s: being a celebrity (and also a star) it means not only becoming an unattainable model like for Hollywood system but also being a successful person to discredit putting under the observing lens the issue of the fear of losing face and becoming less respectable, something that in Chinese society couldn’t be accepted. This is particularly evident in Lu Xun’s reflection when he talks about the malignant fan who finds comfort in star’s failure and female celebrity in particular. The other

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*Jishan on Ruan Lingyu* (Tang Jishan nüedai Ruan Lingyu zhi zhongzhong), *Yearbook Shadowplay* (Yingxi nianjian), 1935, p.24.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Ruan Lingyu bushi zisha shi bei sha,’ *Min bao*, ed. Yingxi nianjian, 1935, p.30.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Bushi jiandan de weizui xun song,’ *Dawan bao*, ed. Yingxi nianjian, 1935, p. 29- 30.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, Reaktion Books, 2001, p.11.

aspects is about the “woman question” and the issue of new women vs traditional. If the previous May Fourth movement has taken the new woman as symbol of the Chinese modernization cinema and fashion magazines (like *Linglong* or *Liangyou*) readapt the superficial meaning of the term imposing a new image where Chinese women influenced by Western trends represent the esthetic side of modernity. But like Ruan Lingyu’s case demonstrates the deepest meaning of this modernity like to be an emancipated women wasn’t approved in Chinese society because of the ambiguity that means. If modernity was conceived as: “a test of speed, and progression along historical trajectory away from the past”<sup>26</sup>, underling that in China the need of modernity was its answer to Western development to become a real competitor, Chinese women had only the role to show the effect of the process of modernization on their bodies<sup>27</sup>, but not to take part of this change and this is particular evident in film industry where they were employed for decorative roles “huaping”, satisfying the sense of what Mulvey defines as to-be-look-at-ness than to be maker of what does it means to be modern.

As asserted by Stafutti<sup>28</sup> the private question was something not completely defined in China during 1930s, here in particular what has become scandalous for the public opinion, and for this reason judged by media, was the female star’s emancipation and economical independence. A woman like Ruan Lingyu could be under the spotlight because of her profession and at the same time leading an analogous private life where she wasn’t subjugated by male control, but represented a new woman, a model for new female generation. Media and film industry that contribute to create the new star Ruan Lingyu, promoting her career where the architect of her fall and tragic epilogue. Most of all it

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<sup>26</sup> Louise Edwards, ‘The Shanghai Modern Woman’s American Dreams: Imagining America’s Depravity to Produce China’s “Moderate Modernity”’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 81, 4, 2012. p.573.

<sup>27</sup> Leo Oufang Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Stefania Stafutti, ‘The Perception of Privacy: The Case of Ruan Lingyu’, *Kervan International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies*, 2, 2005.

was the patriarchal society ruled by confucianism ethic that anchored China to the traditional manners, the modernism hoped by New Youth movement and May Fourth Movement was only apparent, a superficial attraction like the colored lights of the banners outside nightclubs and dance halls in the cosmopolitan Shanghai. But for a woman, even a star of the film industry, acquiring independence was forbidden yet. Here the balance between modernity without being domesticated to Western culture is the main aspect to consider in a country like China that needs its occasion to progress without losing its own identity and conserving its culture. Women payed the more expensive price, in particular those one exposed to public opinion like actresses who as asserted by Catherine Russell: “[...] in the public sphere gave human faces to many social transformations and urban modernity, and their role in the construction of Asian modernity should not be underestimated”<sup>29</sup>. Ruan Lingyu’s dedication to the Chinese cause was a model through her characters she has contributed to define a woman oriented to struggle for her country and her community supporting and encouraging poor people to resist to foreigner invasion (the Japanese in particular) and offering to women the occasion of a social ransom.

Nevertheless coming back to the question of what does represent for a Chinese woman being a celebrity in 1930s we can affirm that it means to struggle for obtaining a self-identity in a conservative society that looks at modern woman for acquiring the modernity but desecrates the emancipated and public woman that tried to promote this process with her own star persona.

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<sup>29</sup> Catherine Russell, ‘New Women of the Silent Screen: China, Japan, Hollywood’, *Camera Obscura*, 60, 2004, p.2.

## NIJINSKY AND THE PARABLE OF LIFE AS A 'WORK OF ART'

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### **Abstract**

The celebrity of Vaclav Nijinsky has walked a parable representing the evolution of a style. He has felt on himself -in unison- the collapse of both experimentalism and vital spirit. Being a full icon of the World of Art, Nijinsky quickly experienced the sensation of a blazing apogee and a dreadful decline; his life has, indeed, emblemized an allegorical image in many ways: first of all, it appeared as the triumph of an artist from the province to international fame, and later his ruinous end; secondly, it expressed an example of a deep interpenetration between patronage of the arts and personal feelings, twisted up unto a downfall; thirdly, it produced the apex of a mental creativity and its decay, in the folds of mental schizophrenia. As was confirmed by Mikhail Fokine (the Russian dancer and choreographer of Nijinsky ballets' at the Marinsky Theatre), the two agreed as for why the dancer did not perform for the pleasure of the audience, but to interpret the style of the dance. Nijinsky had an electrical connection between the God, to whom he identified himself, and the dieu de la danse, with which the public identified him, from his debut. The idea of being on a permanent condition of transcendence towards a fuller life inspired Nijinsky during all his performances, and was something he anxiously quested for, even after the withdrawal from the scenes. Indeed, his obsession in dance and technique had become, from 1919, a fixation in language. It seems that language has offset for the lack of godlike sensations deriving from the dance. Nijinsky, actually, tried to purge through reasoning in a tormented development with his own ego, in a continuous dialogue with God.

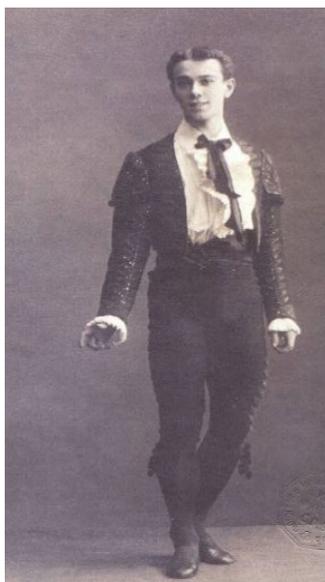


Figure 1 - Vaslav Nijinsky in "Paquita" - Pas de trois 1908.

Source : [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

### **Nijinsky from Ukraine to Russia**

Nijinsky (Kiev, 12 March 1890 - London, 8 April 1950) had Polish-Ukrainian origins. He was a child when his mother got him into the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg<sup>1</sup> ; at that time, Russia lived a sexual trade in ballet dancers. Indeed, some of the dancers accepted grants from interested ballet patrons. In 1907 Nijinsky met the Prince Georgy Lvov<sup>2</sup> , his first patron, protector, and also his first homosexual lover. Nijinsky had been encouraged to patronage by his mother's advice, according to which marriage would have impeded his career. Prince Lvov paid him private lessons with Enrico Cecchetti, the famous mentor of the ballerina Anna Pavlova. Moreover, Lvov introduced Nijinsky to other art-

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<sup>1</sup>The same school that was to produce Michel Fokine, Anna Pavlova, George Balanchine, and, more recently, Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

<sup>2</sup>Prince L'vov was a Russian politician, Prime Minister of Russia and Head of the Russian Provisional Government from 15 March to 21 July 1917.

ists, in 1908 also to Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev<sup>3</sup>. This encounter gave birth of a profitable work and sentimental collaboration for both; the genesis of Russian Ballets. Diaghilev completely changed Nijinsky's life; he was a theatre manager and -what is more- he was mostly to become a pioneer in adapting the new musical styles of the early XXth century to modern ballet<sup>4</sup>. Nijinsky's first great stage achievement had already been conquered within the role of Armida's favorite slave in the baroque fantasy of the *Armida pavilion*. Indeed, Nijinsky performance inspired Sergej Diaghilev<sup>5</sup>; from Nijinsky's trembling in dancing, his strength in motions and the symbiosis with the public, Diaghilev took a great inspiration.

Diaghilev's 1909 first Paris Russian Ballets season<sup>6</sup> was so successful that he soon established a permanent company<sup>7</sup>, a phenomenon that shortly became the most glamorous and influential theatrical ballet business experiment in Europe. Their sentimental and professional relationship was mutual; on one hand Nijinsky, who joined in 1909 the Ballets, contributed largely to its celebrity; nevertheless, the Russian Ballets made Nijinsky popular<sup>8</sup>. Within the company, Nijinsky became an international star, playing in the mostly known ballets of the troupe's house choreographer Mikhail Fokine: among others - *The Sylphids*, *Scheherazade*, *The Specter of the Rose*, *Petrushka*<sup>9</sup>. The public had been appreciating Nijinsky and celebrating him as an extraordinary and eccentric dancer, from his performances made during the years he spent in the Imperial Theatrical School at the Marinsky; especially, those played in 1905 as a faun in a representation of the *Acis and Galatea* choreographed by Fokine<sup>10</sup>. As concerns to Diaghilev, he was a mem-

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, London, Weidenfeld, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>Roland Huesca, '1909-1914, le corps slave sous l'œil de l'Occident : les Ballets russes à Paris', *Cahiers slaves*, 9, 'Le corps dans la culture russe et au-delà', 2008, pp. 245-261.

<sup>5</sup>Buckle, *Diaghilev*, cit. p. 48, ff.

<sup>6</sup>With Nijinsky participant as a dancer too.

<sup>7</sup>Benois, *Reminiscences*, cit.

<sup>8</sup>Buckle, *Diaghilev*, cit. p. 188, ff.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Buckle, *The adventures of a ballet critic*, London, Cresset Press, 1953.

<sup>10</sup>Nijinsky never danced in the corps de ballet. He became a soloist almost

ber of the Russian Avant-garde<sup>11</sup>, working on projects for renewing arts, thinking about changing the panorama of contemporary Russian art. The program for a new *World of Art* represented a new ideology<sup>12</sup>. *Mir iskusstva*, the name of the movement and the Review related to it<sup>13</sup>, aimed at assailing low artistic standards of the obsolescent *Peredvizhniki*<sup>14</sup> school and promoting artistic individualism<sup>15</sup> and other principles of *Art Nouveau*<sup>16</sup>.

From 1909, several of the *miriskusniki* also participated in productions of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes company based in Paris. Diaghilev's aim for the Russian Ballet was to open up the world of art to the *spirit* of the West and, vice versa, to bring the peculiarities of Russia to the West<sup>17</sup>; in a word, a romantic retrospective. Actually, Ballet had been in decline for more than half a century in Europe and classic dancers male were almost on a siding. In this context, the advent of Nijinsky's art was something utterly unforeseen, as well as a miracle of ballet dance technique. Nijinsky become a Russian Ballet dancer in 1909 and, at a later stage, composed four choreographies for the company: *The Afternoon of a Faun*, (1912, music by Claude Debussy); *Games* (1913, music by Claude Debussy); *The Rite of Spring*, (1913 music by Igor Stravinskij); *Till Eulenspiegel* (1916 music by Richard Strauss).

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immediately.

<sup>11</sup>Georgy Kovalenko, *The Russian Avant-Garde of 1910-1920 and Issues of Expressionism*, Moscow, Nauka, 2003.

<sup>12</sup>Benois, *Reminiscences*, cit.

<sup>13</sup>Olga Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte (di Sergej Diaghilev)*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2014. See also Katia Dianina, *When art Makes News. Writing Culture and Identity in Imperial Russia*, DeKalb, Illinois University Press, 2013, pp. 266-281.

<sup>14</sup>Also called 'The Wanderers'. They were a group of Russian realist artists who formed an artists' cooperative reacting against academic restrictions.

<sup>15</sup>Kovalenko, *The Russian Avant-Garde*, cit.

<sup>16</sup>The Russian avant-garde covers many art movements that flourished at the time; namely Suprematism, Constructivism, Russian Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Zaum and Neo-primitivism. It reached its creative and popular height in the period between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and 1932.

<sup>17</sup>Daniel Albright, *Modernism and music: an anthology of sources*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

## **Diaghilev and Russian Ballet**

The birth of the Russian Ballet was made up of the support of many artists; such as Benois<sup>18</sup>, as the ballets designer, Fokine, as a choreographer, Nijinsky, as a dancer and then choreographer<sup>19</sup>. The Diaghilev concept of Russian Ballets was part of a cultural manifesto disrupting the aesthetics of ballet, and fully belonging to the history of the avant-garde<sup>20</sup>. The Russian Ballets were conceived, like the other manifestations of Diaghilev's Review<sup>21</sup>, as a synthesis of all the arts. Diaghilev, together with his colleagues (such as Aleksandr Benois, Lev Bakst, Dmitrij Filosofov, Valentin Serov, Michail Fokine, Claude Debussy, Nicholas Roerich, Igor Stravinsky..) strove both against old artistic rules and the accusations of being forgetful of the past. Indeed, the *Mir-iskusniki* were immediately portrayed as to be absolutely modernists<sup>22</sup>. The *World of Art*<sup>23</sup> manifesto was mostly based on Diaghilev<sup>24</sup> articles, showing the features of a new conceived era; In 'Our alleged decline'<sup>25</sup>, Diaghilev first of all claimed the autonomy and awareness of its aesthetic theories, stating, in response to his detractors who accused him of artistic *decadence*<sup>26</sup>, that there was nothing to fall from; in an eternal struggle<sup>27</sup> he opposed all the proponents of a utilitarian art, particu-

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<sup>18</sup> If Diaghilev managed the idea of reviving arts, it was Benois the real ballet lover in the World of Art group.

<sup>19</sup> Gabriele Brandstetter, Axel Nesme, 'Le saut de Nijinski. La danse en littérature, représentation de l'irreprésentable', *Littérature*, 112, *La littérature et la danse*, 1998, pp. 3-13.

<sup>20</sup> Buckle, *Diaghilev*, cit. p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> Katia Dianina, *When art Makes News*, cit. p. 268.

<sup>23</sup> Diaghilev's articles; 'Difficult Questions', 'Our Imaginary Degradation', 'Permanent Struggle', 'In Search of Beauty', and 'The Fundamentals of Artistic Appreciation' were published in the n.1/2 and n.3/4 of the same journal. Tr. in Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit.

<sup>24</sup> Ilja Zilberštejn, Vladimir Samkov, *Sergej Djagilev i russkoe iskusstvo*, Moskva, vol. II, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit.

<sup>26</sup> Sjeng Scheijen, *Diaghilev: a life*, London, Profile Books, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit.

larly targeting Lev Tolstoy consideration of the art as a *Christian virtue*<sup>28</sup> ; in 'The search for beauty'<sup>29</sup> Diaghilev rejected the aesthetic theories of Ruskin and Baudelaire. Indeed, beauty was not to be sought in nature or in the perception of the artist, but in *human personality* and in an *aesthetic individualism*. In the 'Foundations of artistic evaluation'<sup>30</sup> he ultimately disclosed the parameter of judgment as the personality of the creator, a measure ranging from one era to another. For Diaghilev, beauty in art was a temperament expressed in images. The work of art was definitely important as an expression of its creator. Russian Ballet represented a greedy generation of beauty, to be found both for good and for bad<sup>31</sup> and taking origin in the Russian peasantry<sup>32</sup> . It seems that Russian Ballets were a direct descendant of the 'going to the people' of 1870s<sup>33</sup> . As a part of the World of Art movement, its roots arose at *Abramtsevo*, the artist's colony established by the *Marmontovs* (businessmen interested in art) on their estate near Moscow, became the focus for some Russian art and crafts movements<sup>34</sup>. Together with the textile workshops of *Talashkino*, Russian peasant traditions, gaudy colors and folk designs revived, being interpreted through ethnographic lenses<sup>35</sup>. The co-founders of the *World of Art* saw themselves as cosmopolitans of Petersburg and championed the idea of a universal culture embodied by Russian civilization.

The *Miriskussniki*<sup>36</sup> were the aristocratic depositaries of Russian heritage<sup>37</sup> ; their creative genius would have been expressed in an inte-

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<sup>28</sup> Lev Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, London, Routledge, 1897.

<sup>29</sup> Strada, cit.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Maxim Gorky, *On the Russian peasantry*, in *The Russian peasant 1920 and 1984*, R.E.F. Smith ed., London, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha's dance. A Cultural History of Russia*, London, Penguin Books, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Salmond, *Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia: Reviving the Kustar Art Industries , 1870-1917*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Gorky, *On the Russian peasantry*, cit.

<sup>36</sup> Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit.

<sup>37</sup> Dianina, *When art Makes News*, cit. p. 270.

grated way with art, but with no social or political intents. Though the growing popularity of the neo-nationalists folk-like art was already expressed by the fin de siècle fascination for primitive and exotic, the savage of the East was the tool of a complete spiritual renewal offered from the *Miriskussniki* to the tired bourgeois culture of the West<sup>38</sup>. Russian Ballets were hence conceived as a synthesis of all the arts<sup>39</sup>. The idea of exporting Russian traditions<sup>40</sup> to the West was based on the growing passion of the European public towards the myth of peasant innocence and the primitive youthful energy. Ethnographic terms, such those expressed in *Petrushka* (1911) and ritual and tribal acts retrieving *paganism*<sup>41</sup>, as in *The Rite of Spring* (1913), were all instruments of the Mir Iskusstva's manifesto. A mixture of tradition and avant-gardism moving forward, while keeping Russian traditions<sup>42</sup>. Diaghilev's manifesto addressed to the artistic experiences of the great European capitals marked by art nouveau, symbolism and the cult of beauty.

### **Two models of aesthetics of art: Nietzscheanism and Tolstoism**

The differences between the young and naïve Nijinsky (an artist easily malleable and shaped by his patron) and the educated Diaghilev, were manifold. Nevertheless, the most important seems to be the reflection at the center of the *Mir Iskusstva* Review<sup>43</sup>, based on the antinomy between pagan carnality and Christian spirituality. In the 'Foundations of the artistic evaluation', Diaghilev, quoting Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, strongly affirmed the importance of the artist's freedom and what was more, the beauty as the only justification of art humanity<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Diaghilev was particularly attracted to the paintings of Viktor Vasnetsov. His designs were an inspiration for the neo-nationalists who shifted from Abramtsevo to the World of Art.

<sup>39</sup> Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, cit.

<sup>40</sup> Zilberstein, *Sergej Djagilev*, cit.

<sup>41</sup> Stravinsky and Roerich evocated heathen ancestors to strive for Russian authenticity.

<sup>42</sup> Zilberstein, *Sergej Djagilev*, cit.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Strada, *Il mondo dell'arte*, cit. p. 121.

The rapture of music and dance for Diaghilev should have been similar to the Dionysian<sup>45</sup>. Nijinsky, widely embodied the *Mir Iskustva* idea of the artist freedom and carnal expressions in dancing techniques, until the break with Diaghilev. Nevertheless, his incarnation of the pagan was never devoid of a tormented dialectic with his inner self. Nijinsky Diaries<sup>46</sup> offer indeed a different concept of art. They show a complete adherence to Tolstoism. It is no coincidence that this occurred after the rupture with Diaghilev. There are two Nijinsky: a pagan and an ascetic.

In his *Diaries* reflections he reached obsessive levels of absorption with the Christ<sup>47</sup>. Exactly pursuing the idea of 'art as Christian virtue' that Diaghilev had criticized; 'I will dance when I hear that I have to do it. This is my marriage to God'<sup>48</sup>. For Nijinsky Only God would have been the capacity of converting the world back to feelings. To his Diaries reflections, the misfortune of the world was due to the general failure of feeling, something also related to the causes of the break-up of the First World War.

His asceticism was more and more evident; Nijinsky's choice of becoming vegetarian and approaching different anarchical and pacific tendencies, his recoil from sex and what seems to be his repudiation of his past work, saying; 'those dancers are death'<sup>49</sup>, were connected to his turning to Tolstoism<sup>50</sup> theories, seen as a necessary choice, worshiped together with Ghandism<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> The diary was first published in 1936, in a drastically expurgated English edition. For over sixty years, this has been the only available English-language version.

<sup>47</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, cit. In the first chapter he's sure to act in the name of God; in the second, he act to please him (also sacrificing himself); in the third he's defeatist.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.110.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp.56-65. Tolstoism was a religious-ethical movement in XIXth century which was viewed as both heretic and schismatic by the Russian Orthodox Church and Lev Tolstoi himself was considered a Heresiarch. His "fall from the Church" was pronounced by the Holy Synod since his views were incompatible with the teaching of the Church. Tolstoism seems to be a certain kind of Eastern Protestantism.

<sup>51</sup> Mostly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance. The two pillars of Gandhism are truth and

His unrelenting evolution was, above all, due to the marriage made in 1913 with the rich heiress Romola de Pulszky and the consequent sentimental and working break with his patron and lover Diaghilev. From the rupture with Diaghilev and the *Mir Iskustva* movement, Nijinsky began to feel misunderstood by his wife Romola and grew increasingly isolated. In fact, for him his wife tried to understand him through her intellect, but not through feelings. In the *Diaries*<sup>52</sup> he compares himself to the *Idiot*, the Dostoevsky's hero. However, Nijinsky's regression and obsessions, were both mental and physical<sup>53</sup>. His physical obsessions were based for example on focusing on his bodily processes. Abstention and punishment seemed an experiment, not unlike that conducted throughout all his career. Extreme states of mind are expressed in his Diaries through continuous repetitions and repetitive descriptions. Nijinsky quality of abstraction shifted from the dance to the writing. He transferred his artistic experimentalism in a neurological idiosyncrasy, the same somehow already expressed in his strange way of relating to others<sup>54</sup>. His formulation of a new identity after the break with Diaghilev had likewise revealed his innovative and extreme character and his desire for a personal experimentation of alternative ways of transcending. Indeed, as Nijinsky's ballets demonstrated a depth never been articulated before in classical theatrical dance<sup>55</sup>, his experimentalism never stopped, until he died.

### **Parable of art and parable of life**

From his debut with the Russian Ballets, the Parisians called Nijinsky as *le dieu de la danse*, an idea revived at a later time on his Diaries. The idea of dancing for God and being God, within the tragic destiny of Christ<sup>56</sup>, grew in his choreographies and perhaps represented one of the reasons of his misanthropy and unsociability. 'The audience started

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non-violence.

<sup>52</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*. Especially from the third chapter, pp. 195-283.

<sup>54</sup> Moore, *Nijinsky*, cit.

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln Kirstein, *Nijinsky Dancing*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1975.

<sup>56</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, p.81.

laughing. I started laughing. I laughed in my dance. The audience too laughed in the dance. The audience understood my dances, for they wanted to dance too. I danced badly because I kept falling on the floor when I did not have to. The audience did not care, because I danced beautifully. They understood my tricks and enjoyed themselves. I wanted to dance more, but God said to me, 'Enough.' I stopped'<sup>57</sup>.

Forceful onstage, Nijinsky was instead naive, shy, recessive, off-stage. The mystery about Nijinsky's dance technique so light and charismatic and the wild character of his figure are just some of the aspects that have made him popular. Augmenting his glamour was also the atmosphere of scandal that was always attached to his name. In the early years he lived openly as Diaghilev's lover. What is more, the roles the choreographer Mikhail Fokine created for him were often bisexual, and strongly sexual. The best example is the Golden Slave in *Scheherazade*, where he appeared in brown body paint, grinning and wound with pearls. He certainly embodied all the accoutrements of perversity that the fin de siècle imagination could supply: exoticism, androgyny, enslavement, violence.

Moreover, his figure is also linked to the brevity and drama of his life and career. In ten years, after having become one of the most revered and idolized celebrity in Europe and internationally known also for his choreographies: *The Afternoon of a Faun*, (1912), *Games* (1913), *The Rite of Spring*, (1913), *Till Eulenspiegel* (1916), Nijinsky mentally collapsed.

From his marriage with Romola de Pulszky and the rupture with Diaghilev, Nijinsky completely changed his life. In few years he started being mentally disturbed and diagnosed, in 1919, with schizophrenia.

The parable of art was short and intense; Nijinsky choreographies took Russian ballet into a complete modernism<sup>58</sup>. He had an analytic approach expressing no emotion in the movements, but a strong erotic charge. In particular with his first choreographic composition, *The Afternoon of a Faun* (1912) Nijinsky opened the door to modernity by introducing the concept of exploration of the movement as a privileged

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*. p.29.

<sup>58</sup> Igor Kon, Véronique Patte, 'Le nu masculin dans les arts plastiques russes', *Cahiers slaves*, 9, Le corps dans la culture russe et au-delà, 2008, pp. 263-291.

tool for artistic creation. The paradox of immobility imposed on dance, which by definition is movement, was the real great change and contribution that Nijinsky introduced. To represent the sexual charge of the Faun he decided to make the dancer performing a single jump when he saw the Nymph, starting from stationary with his feet on the ground. Nijinsky had understood that to express certain fleshly excesses he had to adopt the method of restraining the dancers, because the key resided in showing a stillness and to make the desire explode in a single act. Controlling energies best expressed a growing sensuality in dancers and approached pagan primitivism, within the force of the body's instincts<sup>59</sup>.

If the need to emphasize the capacities and impulses of the body was not a prerogative of Nijinsky, he fitted directly into this debate. Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, choreographers and theatre artists investigated the relationship between body and spirit. They question whether the body represented degradation in art, or the elevation of the spirit. Nijinsky, through *The Afternoon of a Faun*, proposed the sharpest solution; to purify the matter from every naturalistic instance. Doing that he sublimated the erotic desire that arising from the body, subtracting its typical carnality and offering instead lightness through thin, slender figures, just like those of an Egyptian bas-relief. It was not a cancellation of matter in favor of the spirit, but an elevation of physicality through lightness; it was a body interpreting the spirit, thus becoming a unique<sup>60</sup>. In Nijinsky's *Diaries*<sup>61</sup>, this artistic choice is retrospectively condemned. As if, the interruption of his career led him to a guilty reflection process concerning also his art and bringing him to a different method for reaching transcendence and purification in life.

Nijinsky's life seems a dialectical movement, first towards sin, then towards expiation. At the beginning an 'erotic autobiography' achieved

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*. Also in the *Cahiers* he analyzed the development of *Mir iskustva* and Russian ballet projects (p.

<sup>61</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, cit. In the second chapter he analyze his relationship with Diaghilev and in the third he regret his actions.

within dance<sup>62</sup>. A sort of graduation<sup>63</sup> through the three stages of sexual development outlined by Freud: adolescent onanism in *Faun*, followed by homosexual experimentation in *Games* and maturing into grownup fertility in *The Rite of Spring*<sup>64</sup>. Then, a retroactive punishment. Nevertheless, if Nijinsky posthumous asceticism was a self-process for guiltiness, it is not easy to understand<sup>65</sup>. After being fired from the Russian Ballets, Nijinsky undertook to mount a ballet season with a company of 17, at a music hall in London. But he soon felt ill from overwork, and suffered his first nervous breakdown. In 1916, Nijinsky returned to his old company to dance at the Metropolitan Opera House. During this period, he had come under the influence of two members of the company, who were followers of the religious philosophy of Tolstoy. He became vegetarian, preached non-violence and tried to practice marital chastity.

However, after this dreadful tour -on which the Metropolitan Opera lost a quarter of a million dollars- Nijinsky danced with the Russian Ballets for a few months more. The following year, on September 30, he performed with Arthur Rubinstein at a Red Cross benefit in Montevideo. It was his last public performance<sup>66</sup>. His descending parable had already begun, leading him to a fall as a choreographer, as a manager and as a dancer. He moved with his family to St Moritz. Then, early in 1919, he began to fall apart. On the 19 January 1919 he wrote his diary. His illness manifested itself dramatically on 19 January 1919 in Saint Moritz. Then, he was shortly sent to the Bellevue Sanatorium in Kreuzlingen, a luxurious and humane establishment directed by Ludwig Binswanger, one of the founders of existential therapy. Within three months, Nijinsky was hallucinating, tearing his hair out, attacking his attendants, and declaring that his limbs belonged to someone else.

Nijinsky had taken a diary with him on the journey to Zurich

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<sup>62</sup>Moore, *Nijinsky*, cit.

<sup>63</sup>Kirstein, *Nijinsky Dancing*, cit.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup>During the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* the uproar in the theatre was so great that the dancers could not hear the music.

<sup>66</sup>Moore, *Nijinsky*, cit.

because -as he said- 'I want to write this book to explain what feeling is'<sup>67</sup>. In many passages of the diary, his tormented relationship with Diaghilev is mentioned. Diaghilev often appears as a demonic<sup>68</sup> being. The look of the innocent, the Idiot<sup>69</sup> who felt betrayed by the malice of the world, oscillates between a self identification with Christ and an atrocious prostration. Ten years after the writing of the Diary and the psychic crisis, Diaghilev wanted to bring Nijinsky back to the Opéra stage. But the great dancer did not recognize anyone, not even Karsavina, who had been his partner in *Petruchka*. Shortly thereafter, Diaghilev would die in Venice<sup>70</sup>. . The most extraordinary adventure of modern dance had closed.

## Conclusion

While Nijinsky's romantic image was being built - him instead- was falling apart. In ten years, from 1909 to 1919, he passed from being a star, to no longer remembering its identity<sup>71</sup>. He was helpless and could not brush his teeth or tie his shoelaces by himself<sup>72</sup>. The figure of Nijinsky combines the falling and tragic parable of the celebrity with the historical evolution of the Russian revolution and the First World War<sup>73</sup>. His figure is crucial because of his artistic and love relationship with Diaghilev. Nijinsky is a celebrity as well and a metaphor of all the contradictions of the World of the Art, upset by the Revolutions. Nijinsky lived on his skin both reactions towards modernity brought by *Mirisk-usniki*<sup>74</sup> and mistrust and crisis generated by the First World War.

As a tormented and dual hero, Nijinsky experienced a dialectical development of his person, going through a physical and mental cathar-

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<sup>67</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, cit. p.46.

<sup>68</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, cit. Diaghilev is represented as feeble, p.69; than completely negative; p.141. Also in the annex letter, pp. 296-300.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161.

<sup>70</sup> Buckle, *Diaghilev*, cit. p. 638.

<sup>71</sup> Moore, *Nijinsky*, cit.

<sup>72</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, cit.

<sup>73</sup> Nijinsky, *Cahiers*, from p. 93 he starts a reflection on the IWW.

<sup>74</sup> Strada, *Diaghilev*, cit.

sis and destroying himself. As the *Miriskusskinki* Nijinsky represented the binary syntheses of an internationalist spirit and an attachment to traditions, an explosion of eroticism and a continuous interdiction. In him, the antinomy between pagan carnality and Christian spirituality, between free art and Christian virtue, remained unbalanced. This is one of the reasons to put him among the modernists; because of his experimental approach to life. His life was lived as a 'work of art', since he set himself as to be the main object of his experimentation: first as a dancer, then as a writer; hence, both as an artist and as a man.

# FAME ROTTING ON THE SLIMY THOROUGHFARE: DAVID BOWIE DESECRATING CELEBRITIZATION IN 'DIAMOND DOGS'

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## Abstract

Between 'celebritization' and 'celebrification' is a gap where fame 'plays' with its own precarious status.<sup>1</sup> With *Diamond Dogs*,<sup>2</sup> David Bowie's fascination with desecration, degradation and putrefaction seems to risk his burgeoning celebrity status by destroying Ziggy Stardust (1973) in favour of his nihilistic character Halloween Jack (1974). However, while skating close to celebrity annihilation, the album skilfully reinvents Bowie with only the outward appearance of desecration. The paper problematises Harold Garfinkel's notion that 'degradation is the opposite to accreditation ceremonies' by exposing Bowie's apparent self-degradation as a form of celebrity aggrandizement.<sup>3</sup> By reference to Chris Rojek's notion of religion and descent,<sup>4</sup> such accreditation is achieved by reference to public degradation celebrated in Bowie's 'rotting' sexualities. However, according to Shelton Waldrep's percep-

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell T. Boykoff and Mike K. Goodman, 'Conspicuous Redemption? Reflections on the Promises and Perils of the 'Celebritization' of Climate Change', in, *Geoforum* 40(2009): 395-406, 2009; Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Graeme Turner, 'The Mass Production of Celebrity. 'Celetoids', Reality Tv and the 'Demotic Turn'', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(2): 153-65, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> David Bowie, *Diamond Dogs*, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Garfinkel, 'Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 61, 5, 420-424, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Redmond and Sue Holmes, eds, Chris Rojek, 'Celebrity and Religion,' *Stardom and Celebrity: a Reader*, C. Rojek. 2007. 171-180.

tions of Bowie's sexual referencing, the album threatens, but does not destroy, the seat of Bowie's fame.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the creation of 'Hunger City' and his character *Halloween Jack* reinvents his public persona and performative selves for fluid re-celebritization. This self-initiated deconstruction process reveals the exigencies of fame by skating close to the edge of desecration. The paper therefore asks how celebrity discourse is inscribed within *Dogs* as a self-conscious act risking the desecration of Bowie's hard-won fame.

## Introduction

Trapped in their own commodification, the 'powerless elite'—with no real ideological agency—might never see their more subversive works published.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, their ongoing celebrification depends on their not challenging the status quo too sharply. David Bowie provides exception to this notion in the seamless masterpiece *Diamond Dogs*,<sup>7</sup> where his fascination with desecration, degradation and putrefaction 'plays' with the precarious status of his burgeoning fame.

The paper asks how celebrity discourse is inscribed within *Dogs* as an act risking the desecration of Bowie's hard-won fame. I therefore read *Dogs* as a ritualistic performance: the potential annihilation of a rock star, building on the sacrificial death, 'nihilism and violent epicureanism' of Ziggy Stardust.<sup>8</sup> I argue that in *Dogs*, a subversive sexuality in tandem with Bowie's disillusionment narrative threatens to undermine Bowie's star image. Indeed, the album risks his audience denouncing him while simultaneously perplexing, disgusting and attracting them with Artaudian and visceral intensity.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, *Dogs* represents a singular moment in his career when Bowie—in the guise of Halloween Jack—generates his sacrilegious act against the notion of celebrity ascent, but it fails to destroy him. Consequently, Bowie's 'celeb-

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<sup>5</sup> Shelton Waldrep, *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie*, Bloomsbury, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars*, BFI Publishing, 1986, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Sontag and Adorno cited Waldrep, *Future*, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> Amedeo D'Adamo, *Empathetic Space on Screen: Constructing Powerful Place and Setting*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

ritization' (rise to notoriety) and subsequent 'celebrification' (maintenance of his star status) offers a pluralist reading of Bowie's work with implications for the fan/star para-social relationship.<sup>10</sup> Applying Harold Garfinkel's theory reveals that the star has not undergone a 'status degradation' ceremony in 1974, as Bowie remains elevated in the eyes of his fans.<sup>11</sup> With *Dogs*, Bowie achieves a pluralist position as the notion of fame is signed and deconstructed, both ascending and descending concurrently, his rising 'celebritization' embedded in its opposite—career suicide.

### ***Diamond Dogs***

*Diamond Dogs* is a meditation on Hunger City, the future dystopia conceived by Bowie as a teenager, where '10,000 peoploids' pander to a messiah-like, Big Brother: the ultimate totalitarian celebrity. *Dogs* inherits William Burroughs' subversive sexual positioning along with his 'cut ups' technique for composition.<sup>12</sup> With imagery borrowed from Burroughs' *The Wild Boys* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Bowie generates a *Future Legend* described by Paul Morley as another, 'jagged, demented vaudeville offshoot[s]' of Ziggy.<sup>13</sup> Criticising the bricolage of *Dogs* by paraphrasing Bowie,<sup>14</sup> Morley opines that the album is constructed:

... from leftovers, scrapped thoughts, chopped up remnants and sundry debris from other projects, aborted concepts, frustrated experiments, images remaindered from a dumped musical version of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as if it featured Fagin's Victorian gang gone apeshit in *A Clockwork Orange* future [and]... Issuing warnings of decay...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Boykoff and Goodman 2009; Gamson 1994; Turner 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation".

<sup>12</sup> Waldrep, *Future*.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Morley, *The Age of Bowie: How David Bowie Made a World of Difference*, Simon & Schuster, 2016, p. 209.

<sup>14</sup> Bowie, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Morley, *Bowie*, p. 278.

Similarly, Chris O'Leary describes the album as a 'sordid, overlong Rolling Stones imitation... [an] unredeemable, honky-tonk celebration of death, decay and violence'.<sup>16</sup> However, these commentators elide the fact that by 1974 Bowie has amassed enough 'celebritization' to codify this eclectic work as a multivalent discourse—highlighting, but also critiquing, his dark depiction of fame. Bowie details the unpopular themes of destruction and polymorphous perversity, yet remains in the zeitgeist despite the risks he takes. By this I mean that since Bowie in 1974 has undergone a 'broad process implementing celebrities into the mechanisms of contemporary culture' (celebritization), his growing celebrity status 'rooted in media (re)presentations' undergoes a precarious reinvention.<sup>17</sup> At this time, as Bowie declares in D. A. Pennebaker's documentary,<sup>18</sup> Bowie is concentrating hard on becoming a star, because it provides him the power to actuate more important artistic ideas. The question remaining, however—as always when analysing Bowie—is whether he is being honest or employing a titivating disingenuousness. In either case, the risk he takes with his precarious fame is intriguing.

## Review of Literature

Concerning the cited theories, Garfinkel's concept of 'status degradation ceremonies' outlines how an individual's total identity is transformed from higher to lower status. Garfinkel highlights that this 'status degradation' within a group's collective outlook, involves an accepted 'denouncer' redefining the 'perpetrator' as an 'outsider' or Other—a social object to be scorned. In his theory, the 'denouncer' must urge the 'witnesses to appreciate the perpetrator and the blameworthy event as instances of an extraordinary uniformity'.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the condemning observer must conflate the perpetrator and the blameworthy event in order for the perpetrator's status descent to

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<sup>16</sup> Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel (Bowiesongs 1)*, John Hunt Publishing, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Mikuláš and Olga Chalányová, 'Celebritization Of Religious Leaders In Contemporary Culture,' *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 13, 6, December 2017, 51.

<sup>18</sup> D.A. Pennebaker, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 420.

occur. The perpetrator must be exposed as an 'outsider' to enact the primary degradation tactics odious to the judgment of conservatism, as if to declare: 'What he is now is what, "after all," he was all along'.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Bowie in 1974, I ask: Who is the denouncer and who is the denounced? What is this denouncer/perpetrator relationship? By way of an answer, I suggest that the star's fluid personas allow him to inhabit a myriad of roles, which bring him to the brink of career suicide, but do not destroy him. Bowie is exonerated as a potential perpetrator by playing the Fagin-esque Halloween Jack, both resisting and celebrating the diegetic perpetrator—Big Brother—the antagonist lifted from Orwell's novel. Big Brother is a god-like totalitarian ruler, another mask-like construct rescued by the mercurial Bowie's ability to role-play and reinvent himself. In this sense, both sides of the denouncer/perpetrator dyad sit side-by-side in Bowie, which approves, rather than destroys, Bowie's star image.

Complimenting Garfinkel's theory is Chris Rojek's analysis, which critiques celebrity worship as a form of sacrilegious idolatry.<sup>21</sup> In a statement reminiscent of Sigmund Freud, Rojek opines that for the fan's 'para-social interaction' with their elected star: 'hatred is never far from the surface of adulation because the fan's desire for consummation is doomed to fail'.<sup>22</sup> Rojek argues that, 'Celebrities are thought to possess God-like qualities' and may stir deep emotions as fans 'recognize the spirit of a shaman'.<sup>23</sup> As such, Rojek highlights the 'de-institutionalization of religion' by which it is contemporaneously 'restructured around nature and culture'.<sup>24</sup> According to Rojek, replacing the divine presence for the rock-star equates to what Neal Gabler calls 'moral equivalence'.<sup>25</sup> Regarding *Diamond Dogs*, the question remains as to whether Bowie appeals to his audience of would-be denouncers as the god-like 'brave Apollo' Big Brother or as a mere moral equiva-

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<sup>20</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Rojek, "Religion".

<sup>22</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 173.

lence of that religious figure, which brings this analysis back to Bowie's polymorphous sexual positioning.

Shelton Waldrep's analysis of the album as text conveying non-normative ideas of sexuality subtextually exploits religious descent diegetically as an ironic act. Bowie's 'destabilizing [of] gender and sexuality', indeed his very 'gender undecidability',<sup>26</sup> creates a pastiche of non-normative sex. Waldrep opines that Bowie's attempt to obscure this discourse on queer sexuality paradoxically exposes his subversion. Ziggy Stardust, argues Waldrep, synchronises Bowie's personal interests with the cultural zeitgeist of the 1970s and *Dogs* is Ziggy's logical conclusion, but with far greater risk to Bowie's career.<sup>27</sup> Scholars debate the nature of Bowie's sexuality thereby sidelining Waldrep's analysis, but Waldrep's research focuses on aesthetic observations of Bowie's figurative literature—not pronouncements of his sexuality. Further, fans projecting *their* sexuality onto Bowie's celebrity vehicle is a celebrated facet of Bowie scholarship.<sup>28</sup> Bowie deliberately maintains open and fluid codes of sexuality in order to achieve this.<sup>29</sup>

Waldrep also critiques the questionable 'story' Bowie biographers collude in telling, exemplifying the star's deliberate artificiality as a performative 'double consciousness': 'playing himself and a character simultaneously'.<sup>30</sup> However, as shall be demonstrated, Bowie's masks become more convoluted than Waldrep's analysis suggests when regarding his denouncer/perpetrator relationship with his audience and the polemical narrative of the Halloween Jack/Big Brother nexus. Could Halloween Jack as Fagin-esque hero play out Ziggy's messianic legacy: a reincarnation of sorts, both killing and resurrecting his star persona (again)?

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<sup>26</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 3-7.

<sup>28</sup> Sean Redmond, Toija Cinque and David Moore, eds, *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Redmond, Cinque and Moore, *Enchanting*.

<sup>30</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 3-6; 26.

## **What He is Not, He Never Was All Along**

Garfinkel, Rojek and Waldrep's theories apply to Bowie's strategies in *Diamond Dogs* and how Bowie fans consume his 1974 star image. In *Dogs*, Bowie flaunts his 'outsider' status as a half-man, half-dog freak, a cocaine addict and performer who is sexually promiscuous and non-heteronormative. According to Wendy Leigh, the public responded paradoxically to Bowie in 1974.<sup>31</sup> Bowie also prefigured the complexity of Judith Butler's gender performativity by a decade.<sup>32</sup> Does this render him an outcast?

On the one hand, conservative forces might declare Bowie 'blameworthy' but, as Garfinkel argues: 'To reconstitute the other as a social object, the denouncer must get the witnesses to appreciate the perpetrator and the blameworthy event as instances of an extraordinary uniformity'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Bowie elects himself potentially blameworthy in 1974, thus risking public condemnation. However, on the other hand, neither Bowie fans nor his detractors share an 'extraordinary uniformity' in condemning him. Indeed, the discursively rebellious institution of rock 'n' roll relishes Bowie's 'outsider' status especially as the album's hit tune *Rebel, Rebel* becomes the anthem of 1970s gender subversion.

With *Dogs*, celebrity privilege affords Bowie the opportunity to flaunt his difference as an act of 'celebritization' and counterintuitive career destruction combined. Further, his changing theatrical masks cannot be construed as an 'alteration of total identities' in Garfinkel's sense. If the condemning observer—in this case the forces of conservatism—must pronounce: 'What he is now is what, "after all," he was all along',<sup>34</sup> then Bowie is already a celebrated fraud: his degradation is self-enacted and therefore impervious to ritualistic abhorrence. Indeed, the fluidity of the Bowie persona—changing with every new mask or music genre while still serving his stardom—reconstitutes him each

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<sup>31</sup> Wendy Leigh, *Bowie: The Biography*, Gallery Books, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Lisa Perrott, 'Bowie the Cultural Alchemist: Performing Gender, Synthesizing Gesture and Liberating Identity,' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 7.

time he shifts as if to declare: *What he is not, he never was all along.*

In response, the complicity of Bowie fandom refuses to declare uniform denunciation. For example, the reviews cited above appear to deprecate Bowie as an artist, to shun him from the fame Ziggy conferred on him. However, his fans ultimately resist the uniformity of this pejorative pronouncement, thereby debunking the power of sanctioned critical commentary as if the Bowie of 1974—as both Halloween Jack and Big Brother concurrently—cannot be dethroned (despite his being lampooned in contemporary reportage by streets ‘full of press men’). Yet Bowie exploits other roles in this denouncer/denounced polemic, which can be seen to congeal with his pseudo-religious positioning in Rojek’s sense.

Indeed, Bowie’s ‘shamanic’ power embodies what Rojek calls, the ‘de-institutionalization of religion’.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the rock concert experience (especially one parodied within the vinyl simulacrum of *Dogs*) converges religion and consumer culture. In *Dogs*, Bowie cherishes such profane replacements, even ironises them in the form of Big Brother’s manufactured fame and his own tongue-in-cheek ‘celebrification’: David Jones playing David Bowie who kills Ziggy to play Halloween Jack elucidating a world controlled by Big Brother.

In the case of *Diamond Dogs*, this is a multifaceted equation involving the audience, the fan and Bowie, his masks and characters. The convolutions deepen when considering: Bowie as Jones; Bowie as Bowie; Bowie as Halloween Jack; and as Big Brother concurrently. Where then is the denouncer/perpetrator relationship? Does Bowie invite his audience to denounce him, but allow Halloween Jack to rescue the attempt? Does this imply the audience of record listening fans or the simulacrum of fans inside the album’s diegetic space? With each new iteration of self and Other-hood, Bowie risks the annihilation of his celebrity. It is the risk of a gambler knowing that his ‘restless drive for re-creation’ wagers losing what he fights so hard to gain.<sup>36</sup> While, according to Waldrep, the Bowie of 1986 is ‘splitting his fan base and creating a

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<sup>35</sup> Rojek, “Religion”, p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> Perrott, “Alchemist”, p. 1.

dissonance that threaten[s] to erode his artistic credibility',<sup>37</sup> in 1974, on his rise toward mega-stardom, the risk pays off. Does the Bowie of 1974 have a god-like faith in himself or is this an aspect of his celebritization like the 'religious leaders in contemporary culture'?<sup>38</sup> Or is this another fan projection via the moral equivalence illustrated by Rojek?<sup>39</sup>

In 1974, through Bowie's complexity of masks; his invitation for fans to condemn him as he reinvents himself; his foray into cocaine addiction; his failing marriage; his ambiguous sexuality and evocation of the dystopic Hunger City, Bowie colludes in his own downfall as mirrored in the unpopular thematic of *Dogs*, but ultimately fails at failure itself. In order to examine this further a deeper analysis of the album is required.

### ***Diamond Dogs Broken Down***

*Dogs* proscribes a narrative arc from the savage streets of post-apocalyptic Hunger City to the idolatry of Big Brother, representing an inscrutable godhead, which Richard Dyer reminds us derives (like Bowie's star image) from the icons of silent cinema.<sup>40</sup> We are introduced to the freakshow captured in Guy Pellaert's gatefold sleeve design, which resembles Burroughs 'Penny Arcade Peep Show'.<sup>41</sup> The illustration includes a liminal, half human/animal Bowie referencing Ferdinand Knopff's 1896 Symbolist painting of a cat-woman in *L'Art ou Des Caresses*.<sup>42</sup> In this visually rendered discourse on celebrity, the floorboards suggest a theatrical presentation before a backdrop depicting the incongruent Hunger City framing the freakish Bowie with iconic Ziggy hairdo. Albeit a sign of the pastiche to come, the subhuman 'pepoids' behind him have already undergone their 'status degradation ceremony' from human to hybrid sub-species,<sup>43</sup> which introduces a discourse on the

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<sup>37</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Mikuláš and Chalányová, "Celebritization".

<sup>39</sup> Rojek, "Religion".

<sup>40</sup> Dyer cites Walker, *Stars*, p. 223.

<sup>41</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 185.

<sup>42</sup> Sean Redmond, Toija Cinque and David Moore, eds, *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*, T. Stark, 2015, p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 1.

'Urchin one[s]' of Victorian slums.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the audience member perusing the cover art is invited into the role of denouncer: to witness and judge Bowie as perpetrator.

Even before the album is played then, Garfinkel's theory reveals the denouncer as our (pluralist) selves: the viewer/listener as an (ironically reconstituted) out-group witnessing freaks afflicted by some unnamed 'blameworthy event'.<sup>45</sup> Pellaert's design also depicts a 'scourging of the body' in Rojek's sense,<sup>46</sup> played out in the cartoon version of Bowie's hybrid dog-body: preternaturally skinny, deformed and endowed with air-brushed genitals like a human sacrifice. In this way, Bowie invites denouncement as an anorexic and liminal freak, but remains suitably seductive in his star image to circumvent any final condemnation.

As the needle hits the vinyl, the first piece *Future Legend* propels the listener through a bleak urban-scape of Burroughs-esque prose to proclaim: 'This ain't rock 'n' roll, This is genocide'. This arouses a pastiche of 'collective effervescence' in Emile Durkheim's sense as Bowie 'borrows' the roaring crowd from one of his earlier concerts.<sup>47</sup> This sacrilegious promise of genocide, presents a contradictory notion of celebrity as the joyful wildness of destruction finds the listening audience, 'Crawling down the alley on [their] hands and knee' like Todd Browning's freaks—creeping toward a world already destroyed with only the appearance of Big Brother's benevolence. With *Dogs*, Bowie offers to take his 'fans higher' as an 'ambassador of the celestial sphere',<sup>48</sup> but does so ironically by narrativising his peoploid's descent.

His desecration is not so much an empty gesture as it is strategic risk—hazarding his fame, but not losing it. The concert frenzy of *Future Legend* is consciously evoked because the crowd's uproar is not live but engineered to deliver the ecstasy artificially, a simulacrum of fandom.<sup>49</sup> As such, the

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<sup>44</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 151.

<sup>45</sup> Garfinkel, "Degradation", p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 178.

<sup>47</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964.

<sup>48</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 177.

<sup>49</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 172.

notion of fame is pluralistically signed and deconstructed in the album's prologue. Yet, it is Bowie's ironist persona of Halloween Jack that informs the work, the 'invented accent' and playful menace in Bowie's tone, as Waldrep describes, speaks: 'as a hustler talking to a prostitute... like a politician, which echoes the novel' *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.<sup>50</sup> Curiously, this characterisation mimics Burroughs' infamous speaking voice.

Further, where *Lady Stardust* from *Ziggy* denotes an aesthetic dandification of denied sexuality, *Sweet Thing* off *Dogs* is visceral: a voice emerging from the sacrilege of anal sex, a Burroughs-esque evocation of 'rectal mucous' and a soundscape 'dirty' with distorted guitars.<sup>51</sup> Here Waldrep provides entry to the subtextual sexuality of *Sweet Thing* through Burroughs' influence, which enacts Rojek's descent phase as Bowie adopts an openly queer narrative position.<sup>52</sup> This constitutes a sexual Otherness and uncommon sacrilege in tandem, inviting a condemnation of Bowie's brazenness. Depending on their sexuality, the fan skates dangerously close to becoming the denouncer here. Indeed, Bowie invites their potential condemnation by straying from heteronormativity. Ultimately, however, such flaunted sexual difference fails to degrade Bowie's status in Garfinkel's sense because his total identity (or teleology of masks) remains in concert with the cultural zeitgeist of 1974. Bowie risks, but avoids descending as the would-be denouncers shift their position to accommodate his artificial worldview in Hunger City.

Some scholars argue that Waldrep's argument betrays more of his own sexuality than of Bowie's. Nevertheless, Bowie's words still hint at a myriad of queer possibilities: 'this trade is a curse' intimates the 'rough trade' relationship of sex-worker/client and complicates the Fagin-esque relationship of Halloween Jack to his Urchin boys. Predatory older suitors grow enamoured to their younger lovers while mirroring the Halloween Jack/Big Brother relationship: 'I'm glad that you're older than me'. Jack's 'butch little number' makes an overtly queer reference as does 'another bed/another floor' hint at non-normative sex

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<sup>50</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 185.

<sup>51</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 152.

<sup>52</sup> Rojek, "Religion".

and 'cruise down one more time' perhaps implies gay cruising.<sup>53</sup>

As compelling as the discourse within such rock 'n' roll ecstasy is, Bowie still offers an irony mirrored in Big Brother's hellish mockery of the Christian church as: 'a glass asylum, With just a hint of mayhem'. However, in *Hunger City*, Big Brother functions as a celebrity himself, a messianic *Saviour Machine*. The concept of fame has set Bowie free and simultaneously threatens to trap him in the powerless elite.<sup>54</sup> That is, as he moves from 'celebritization' to 'celebrification', he gradually risks the entrapment of his wild creativity, which as Dyer argues compels him to perform in set ways.<sup>55</sup> In order to investigate this more fully, I provide a snapshot of this moment in Bowie's career. 1974: 'The year of the Diamond Dogs'.<sup>56</sup>

By 1974, *Melody Maker's* reader's poll votes Bowie number one British Male Singer, leading producer and composer.<sup>57</sup> Bowie's total sales amount to 1,056,400 LPs and 1,024,068 singles.<sup>58</sup> By April 1974, as John Dexter stages the show weighing six tons with 20,000 moving parts (many of them frequently malfunctioning), Bowie hopes to emulate Hitler's podiums designed by Albert Speer and render *Diamond Dogs* the 'most sensational touring stage show in the history of rock 'n' roll'.<sup>59</sup>

Despite Bowie's successes, *Dogs* exposes the flipside of his career: his least-successful single since *Hunky Dory*, reaching number 21 in Britain and bombing in the U.S. By 1974, David Bowie's 'celebrification' is intact, but David Jones sinks into personal destruction. Bowie's personal life, buried within the celebrity narrative, reveals Bowie hanging with the cokeheads and 'living largely in the dark'.<sup>60</sup> According to Tremlett (and notwithstanding Waldrep's objection to the 'official' story of Bowie), Bowie's 1974 cocaine addiction sparks mental clarity shortly followed by bouts of paranoia and schizophrenia and induces 'Bowie's nervous preoccupa-

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<sup>53</sup> Andrew Duffy, personal communication, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Alberoni cited Dyer, *Stars*.

<sup>55</sup> Dyer, *Stars*.

<sup>56</sup> Bowie, *Diamond Dogs*.

<sup>57</sup> George Tremlett, *David Bowie: Living on the Brink*, Carroll and Graf, 1997, p. 220.

<sup>58</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 220.

<sup>59</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 220.

<sup>60</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 216.

tions with isolation and self-diagnosis'.<sup>61</sup> He is thinner than ever at 112 pounds, appears 'gaunt and haggard', 'exhausted by travelling, performing, cocaine and sexual excess... still in control', but gone to the *Dogs*.<sup>62</sup>

Bowie is 'treated as a commodity' by the Mainman business machine, even as Bowie's manager Tony Defries intimates that Bowie has failed him.<sup>63</sup> Defries, as cultural intermediary, remains convinced that Bowie is 'throw[ing] away his career' by mounting the 'dark dystopianism' of Weimar period Berlin: *Diamond Dogs*.<sup>64</sup> Apart from agitating his manager, could Big Brother be a metaphorical allusion to Defries' crippling 50% after expenses contract?

Adding to *Dogs* air of desecration is the 'stench of Elephant shit left on the Madison Square Garden stage' from a resident circus show.<sup>65</sup> The Montreal stage show opens with the machinated bridge crashing and Bowie toppling out onto stage as the sound system malfunctions.<sup>66</sup> This potentially 'blameworthy event' reverses Rojek's notion that, 'Elevation is a perpetual feature of the honorific status of celebrity' with the sudden reduction of mythical star to the human fragility of a freak-show. However, with Bowie's serendipitous acrobatics, he rights himself and the audience admires him all the more. The show closes to 20 minutes of continuous applause, yet: 'Bowie remained aloof, sustaining his own image of stardom...'<sup>67</sup>

### ***Diamond Dogs* as Celebrity Discourse**

In Bowie's celebrity discourse within *Dogs*, religion underscores his personal, yet pluralist plea. As if in response to Defries' antagonism, Bowie's *Future Legend* declares there will be 'no more big wheels', his sharp-tuned, off-key guitars escalating the tension. The mystic bellowing of a hound ushers in the shamanic tones of the oracular Bowie

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<sup>61</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 217.

<sup>62</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 232-233.

<sup>63</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 226/7.

<sup>64</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 238; Waldrep, *Future*, p. 150.

<sup>65</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*.

<sup>66</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 228.

<sup>67</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*, p. 228.

promising a deviant future. The backward ‘tock’ of the woodblock brings about a rhythmic invocation like a religious festival in Rojek’s sense, like ‘drumbeats... in shamanic rites’ where Big Brother invokes a kind of mock ‘immortality’.<sup>68</sup> This secular figure replaces religion as ‘moral equivalence’ when the star (Bowie) announces the tyrant (Big Brother) while borrowing from images of deification and simultaneously ironising the peoploids’ devotion. Indeed, de-institutionalized religion is restructured around nature as bellowing dogs and magical rituals.<sup>69</sup> The electronically altered, disintegrating sound of the refrain ‘Di-a-mond D-ogs’ underscores Bowie’s signature sax-playing; both wailing like sacred invocations. This represents a religious elevation and self-proclaimed ‘honorific status of celebrity’ as Bowie erases all his session musicians with what O’Leary calls Bowie’s ‘primitive and brutal... sledgehammer riffing’.<sup>70</sup> <sup>71</sup> Indeed, the album’s originary conception as a musical version of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—but transformed into a world built narcissistically around Halloween Jack—also testifies to Bowie’s celebrity megalomania in operation. As such, ritual, the solo privilege of fame and its critical dissolutions fairly drip from this album: Love is reduced to the safety of doorways (another reference to gay cruising) as an increasingly remote David Bowie informs us that he’s ‘scared and lonely’ in melodramatic opera-like tones, before switching roles to that pimped-up, Burroughs-esque drawl declaring that: ‘Boys, boys are such sweet things’.<sup>72</sup> It is possible that such interpretations are polysemic, however. For example, Halloween Jack might be addressing the boys in Fagin-like manner rather than referring *to them* as ‘sweet things’.<sup>73</sup> Alternative and contradictory readings of the album abound amongst fans, but nevertheless a curious sexuality underpins the album as Freudian sublimation. In any case, Bowie in the guise of Halloween Jack is in turn disguised as a

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<sup>68</sup> Rojek, “Religion”, p. 177.

<sup>69</sup> Rojek, “Religion”, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Rojek, “Religion”.

<sup>71</sup> Snoball cited O’Leary, *Rebel*.

<sup>72</sup> Bowie, *Dogs*.

<sup>73</sup> Duffy, personal communication, 2018.

futuristic Fagin to assist Bowie in enacting his theatricalised 'real' self as 'fragile existential construct'.<sup>74</sup> Simultaneously, the fake 'real' of the amazing 'set' that 'even smells like a street' helps disintegrate the real/artificial, fan/star distinction.

Tremlett, electing himself spokesman for the 'inner' David Jones, mounts an untenable celebrity narrative by declaring that Bowie feels personally hurt and abandoned at this time. In this way, Tremlett appeals to the 'poor, isolated star' narrative without further reflection upon his para-social assumption.<sup>75</sup> By criticising such Bowie biographers, Waldrep reinforces Garfinkel's premise that 'Moral indignation' as social affect,<sup>76</sup> sees the denouncer collapse 'the crucial distinctions between appearances and reality, truth and falsity, triviality and importance', which causes Tremlett's weepy story to break down. Nevertheless, the album's desolate crying guitars counterpoise the regimentation of military drums as Halloween Jack warns that our 'future's at stake', reminding us in classic 'celebrity meltdown' mode that: 'When it's good, its really good, but when it's bad, I go to pieces'.<sup>77</sup> As Dyer argues: the star, their commodification and the society they represent remains an advertisement for capitalism as symbolised by celebrity.<sup>78</sup> In this interpretation, fan and star are locked in mutual embrace because, as a unit, they serve the same political ends. In the case of *Diamond Dogs*, the Bowie fan is ascending and desecrating mutually, both denouncer and perpetrator, 'dancing where the dogs decay, in 'defecating ecstasy',<sup>79</sup> where Rojek's adoration/hatred paradigm operates—almost successfully.

Finally, the future's 'brave Apollo' in the form of Big Brother enters to save us from desolation, but does so ironically. In his meta-discourse referencing Rojek's star-replacing-religion discourse,<sup>80</sup> Bowie concludes

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<sup>74</sup> Waldrep, *Future*, p. 22.

<sup>75</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*.

<sup>76</sup> Waldrep, *Future*.

<sup>77</sup> Bowie, *Dogs*.

<sup>78</sup> Dyer, *Stars*.

<sup>79</sup> Bowie, *Dogs*.

<sup>80</sup> Rojek, "Religion".

the album with a terrifying half-promise. From within his 'glass asylum', Big Brother's totalitarian stardom represents Bowie's own fame, his reconstructed celebrity at the death of Ziggy. The Big Brother character, borrowed from Orwell, sees Bowie improvising with the star/fan interface in a post-Ziggy iteration.<sup>81</sup> Bowie 'plays' both Big Brother and Halloween Jack, both star and fan adoring their 'brave Apollo' in the lines: 'We want you Big Brother.' The final outro 'Bro, Bro, Bro, Bro, Bro...' resonates with the eternal plea of late capitalism, pleading for and ironising the repeated illusions of Rojek's para-social interaction in which, 'the fan's desire for consummation is doomed to fail'.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

I question whether the inevitability-of-fame narrative is undermined by the putrefaction depicted in *Diamond Dogs*. While Morley declares the album an eclectic bricolage, the genius of *Dogs* is that it plays out the desperation of a star on the rise, facing his own downfall while simultaneously looking backward to 'the treason that [he] knew in '65'; shored up on the celebrity of David Bowie. Bowie toys with Rojek's 'common-sense intuition' that constantly being in the public eye brings about psychological trauma,<sup>83</sup> but does not complete the 'status degradation' ceremony in Garfinkel's sense. In demonstrating the above concepts, *Diamond Dogs* circumscribes an arc from the savagery of Burroughs' queer *Wild Boys* to the 'false idolatry' of Big Brother, becoming in Rojek's sense, the newly 'celebritized' face of religion, albeit as pastiche. Fans craving their face-defying symbol of youth, divine judgement, immortality and fame embrace the Bowie/Big Brother amalgam seeking the emancipation of self-generating fame. Bowie alters this para-social relationship as his 'celebrification' threatens his 'celebritization' and, as Tremlett insists,<sup>84</sup> Bowie's effervescent intellectualism consciously retreats behind another mask of make-up-drenched celebrity—but his fame remains intact.

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<sup>81</sup> Christine Gledhill, *Stardom: The Industry of Desire*, Roberts and Wallis, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> Rojek, "Religion", p. 171.

<sup>83</sup> Rojek, "Religion".

<sup>84</sup> Tremlett, *Brink*.

# BEYONCÉ: THE BLACK GODDESS. HOW HER PREGNANCY REVELATION MIRRORS HER CELEBRIFICATION STRATEGY

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## **Abstract**

Beyoncé Knowles is currently one of the most influential and powerful celebrity in the entertainment industry. However, it's interesting to notice that her *celebrification* strategy seem to differ strongly from other mainstream stars: she is essentially media mute. During the last three years, Beyoncé communication has been mostly visual and yet, in an almost paradoxical way, her level of stardom has never been so high.

Nowadays, her main channel of communication is her Instagram page where she publishes highly glamorous pictures - with scant captions – that doesn't have the aim to perform intimacy and authenticity.

However, the main purpose of this paper is to understand the discourses built around Beyoncé' star text. In order to do so we will analyze the infamous *I have three hearts* Instagram photoset, which was released so as to celebrate the singer's second pregnancy. By comparing some selected paintings with the photoset released, it will be possible to show how Beyoncé is effectively branding herself as some sort of pagan black goodness. In fact, through a re-appropriation of Western Art aesthetical canon of beauty, not only she wants to elevate the female black body, too often neglected, but she also wants to give life to a continuous self-accreditation ceremony.

## **Introduction**

On February 1st 2017 - the first day of Black History Month in America - Beyoncé Giselle Knowles, through an Instagram post, has announced her third pregnancy. As soon as she posted the picture that showed her

growing belly, her name was trending worldwide on social media and people were losing their mind over the news. The image has received roughly 11.1 million-plus likes<sup>1</sup> and has become the most liked Instagram post of the year 2017. However, during the following day, on February 2, Beyoncé released – both on her website and on her Instagram page - an entire photoshoot called *I have three hearts* realized by Awol Erizku, an Ethiopian American young photographer. The pictures, full of art and religious references, depict the singer as some sort of a modern pagan black goddess that oozes holiness and prosaicism at the same time. In addition, Beyoncé has also included some poems from the Somali poet Warsan Shire, who already collaborated on Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016).

As a matter of fact, immediately after her great revelation, the interest for Beyoncé instantly crossed the border of her specific fandom. This wasn't just a conventional gossip news; indeed, those Instagram posts were the culprit of her long journey as a mythological and mysterious star. As expected, after the publication of the photoset, tones of newspapers covered the whole course of events (from Beyoncé public outings to her baby shower) which culminated with the birth of the twins Rumi and Sir Carter on June 13 2017. During the latest five years, Beyoncé has branded herself as a unique type of celebrity: she is powerful and independent, the only one in charge of her narrative. De facto, differently from other female superstars, Beyoncé doesn't try to be relatable: from the way she presents herself and through every of her music performances, she actively gave life to a never-ending process of divinization and sacralisation of her public persona.

Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that even though nowadays *celebrification*<sup>2</sup> and *desecrating*<sup>3</sup> processes act at high

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<sup>1</sup>Stephanie Chan, 'Beyoncé Has the Most-Liked Instagram of 2017', The Hollywood Reporter, 29 November 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/beyonce-has-liked-instagram-2017-1061852>.

<sup>2</sup>Joshua Gamson, *Claims to fame: Celebrity in contemporary America*, Univ of California Press, 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies", *American journal of Sociology*, 61(5), 420-424. DOI: 10.1086/221800, 1956.

speed - thanks to the enhanced visibility of celebrities driven by the spread of social network sites - Beyoncé, instead, seem to have found an effective strategy that have the explicit aim of cementing her stardom and, at the same time, to elevate her community.

In order to validate this assertion, we will proceed by firstly analysing the evolution of Beyoncé star text, focusing on how her performance has changed: from young and sassy r'n'b singer to a political engaged hip-hop super star. This transformation seems to confirm what boyd and Marwick<sup>4</sup> has stated in regard of the idea that celebrities should be considered as *a process*, an extremely organized set of practices and tactics that are publicly represented and appropriated by the audiences «as an expression of both celebrity status and consistency with social norms<sup>5</sup>». Due to the fact that this work is centred on the *I have three hearts* photoset, it will be fundamental to investigate how and if the joyous announcement made by Beyoncé, actually differ from the regular celebrity pregnancy revelations and how her body can represent a medium for cultural identification and the empowerment of others.

These considerations will operate as a segue to the core of this work, which is a comparison between the pictures from the photoset and some selected paintings made by Botticelli, Reni and Jan Brughel The Elder. What we want to demonstrate here is that Beyoncé uses an ideologically charged visual communication to stay connected with her audiences, who can re-negotiate the material supplied by the singer in order to engage in the public discourse about race and womanhood<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, this examination will be useful to validate the conviction that in branding herself as a mundane black saint, Beyoncé is successfully subverting the cyclical degradation processes by creating an endless visual self-accreditation ceremony.

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<sup>4</sup>Danah boyd, Alice Marwick, 'To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter'. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17:2, 2011

<sup>5</sup>Romana Andò, "The revenge of Asia Argento: Desecrating celebrity as a means of celebrity culture.", *Mediascapes journal* 11: 80-94, 2018.

<sup>6</sup>Rebecca Feasey, "Reading Heat: The meanings and pleasures of star fashions and celebrity gossip", *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 22(5): 687-699, 2008.

### A brief analysis of Beyoncé star text

In order to understand in-deep the importance and the disruptiveness of those specific set of pictures we should make a little digression about Beyoncé career. The Texas native singer, in the Nineties, was one of the principal members of *The destiny's child*, a female only R'n'B group. In 2003, she released her first solo album and started her very successful career. Throughout the years, Beyoncé has sold over one-hundred million records worldwide, making her one of the world's best-selling music artists. She has, also, won twenty-two Grammy Awards and is the most nominated woman in the award's history. Nowadays, Beyoncé Knowles is currently one of the most influential and powerful celebrity in the entertainment industry with a net worth of 355 million dollars in 2018<sup>7</sup>.

Though, what's fascinating about her performance as a celebrity is the fact that, except from her highly followed music performances, she is essentially media mute. Public personalities, nowadays, display their friendliness and intimacy with the public by interacting with followers through social media, in order to foster their fandom<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, during the last three years, Beyoncé communication has been mostly visual, she hasn't done any interview or TV show appearances to promote her latest four albums, and yet, in an almost paradoxical way, her level of stardom has never been so high. Every time she publishes something her contents are always analysed in every detail not only by her fans but also by the whole media circuit. Differently, from other celebrities, like the Kardashians or even Taylor Swift, what we know about Beyoncé is exclusively originated from Beyoncé herself. For instance, until she published the album *Lemonade*, we didn't know much about her marital problems and worries. Likewise, until February 1st 2017, nobody expected that she was pregnant.

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<sup>7</sup> Zack O'Malley Greenburg, 'Beyoncé's Net Worth: \$355 Million In 2018', Forbes, 11 July 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2018/07/11/beyonces-net-worth-355-million-in-2018/#2d7464304f7d>.

<sup>8</sup> Romana Andò, "The ordinary celebrity: Italian young vloggers and the definition of girlhood", *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 5 (1), 123-139, 2006.

In the current celebrity microsystem, we can certainly define Beyoncé as a media savvy; she seems the only one able to skip entirely the gate-keeping role<sup>9</sup> of the traditional media by putting in effect a direct type of communication with her audience. Additionally, through her highly-crafted media strategy, she manages to avoid personal overexposure by letting her art speaks on her life. So, in this context, Beyoncé offers a convincing example of how a certain type of A-list celebrity can still effectively manage the unescapable commodification of their own image and private life. As Spencer Kornhaber has underlined on The Atlantic: «as a celebrity, Beyoncé has a personal life that can't be fully personal; whether she consents or not, it is content for the public's consumption. As a particularly brilliant celebrity, Beyoncé has leaned into this fact in a way that bolsters her mystique while maintaining privacy. If biographical tidbits are bound to be as scrutinized as her actual art is, she seems to say, then such tidbits should be as meticulously presented as her art is. In fact, they should actually be art.»<sup>10</sup>

### **A black star is born**

During the first years of her career, according to Ellis Cashmore, Beyoncé - as well as other ethnic minority celebrity - did not explicitly integrate her blackness in her celebrfication strategy. Cashmore claims that: «We observe celebrities operating in a culture that has rendered whiteness plastic, melting, stretching and shaping it in a way that accommodates new meanings. The ethnic minority celebrity may be seen in this light: as part of a new type of whiteness that makes the racial hierarchy invisible or at least opaque.»<sup>11</sup>

Yet, it's undeniable that in the last few years Beyoncé has executed a much more political and controversial type of celebrity performance, a performance that has distinctly included her identity as a black woman. Furthermore, her latest works, which are by far the most suc-

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<sup>9</sup> Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and societies in a changing world*, Sage, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Spencer Kornhaber, 'Beyoncé's High-Art Pregnancy Photo', The Atlantic, 2 February 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/02/beyonce-twins-pregnancy-announcement-image-art-awol-erizku/515400/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture*, Routledge, 2006, p.138.

cessful in terms of critics, seem to be specifically targeted to an exclusive ethnic group: the Afro-American one. Especially since the release of the album *Lemonade*, her ethnicity has become a central aspect in her narrative. Hence, her very specific existence has morphed into a celebration of her ancestry and more in general black womanhood.

«Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kit. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter.» (*Lemonade*, 2016)

It's interesting to notice that, Beyoncé, not only through her lyrics but with all the artistic performances in which she is involved, she continuously reminds to her audience that her talent and all of her accomplishments are the direct fruit of her work ethic and resilience. Ultimately, her success and her body serve as a manifesto. She presents herself as a role model for young women, and more specifically, young black women who, according to her specific view, can, at the same time, reclaim their sexuality and their desire to self-determination through hard work<sup>12</sup>. In this context, Beyoncé's success is presented and articulated not just as a feminist accomplishment but more like a hyper-individual achievement.

Still, this type of intersectional feminism has encountered many detractors who have accused the singer to perform an activism that do not engage effectively with the issues that affect black women<sup>13</sup>. However, as critical as it may sound, this outlook on feminism, it's essential to decipher Beyoncé star text.

With a gradual shift from sexy pop-star to hip-hop star – both in terms of music and proxemics – she is nowadays more inclined to show her unapologetic side. The endless parades of her richness and her power («I took some time to live my life, but don't think I'm just his little wife. Don't get it twisted» *Flawless*, 2014; «I just might be a black

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<sup>12</sup> Annelot Prins, 'Who Run the World? Feminism and Commodification in Beyoncé's Star Text', *Digressions*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2017, pp. 29-44.

<sup>13</sup> Nathalie Weidhase, "'Beyoncé feminism' and the contestation of the black feminist body." *Celebrity Studies* 6.1: 128-131, 2015.

Bill Gates in the making» *Formation*, 2016; «Gimme my check, put some respect on my check or pay me in equity » *Apeshit*, 2018) serves as a revanchist response to a system that not too long ago would have not allowed her presence as a black woman. Beyoncé possesses a recognition that excelling at her art requires overpowering institutions that still have the power to diminish her<sup>14</sup>. Hence, she uses her art in order to create a safe space wherein the experience of Afro-American people can be discussed and re-articulated on its own terms, through her very individualistic point of view.

### **The pregnancy exhibitionism**

With her public announce, Beyoncé hasn't truly differentiated her communication strategy from the average celebrity conduct. If until five years ago celebrities were used to publicise the incipient arrive of a baby(ies) through magazine, nowadays Instagram seem to have replace entirely the role once played by more institutional channels. Diane Negra argues that from the last decade we are witnessing a general fetishization and eroticization of the pregnant celebrity body. Media are overflowed by news about celebrities' pregnancies to the point that in same case we can talk about pregnancy pornography. Nevertheless, we are observing a broad re-classification of the pregnant body as natural, normal, and healthy to a new physical and ideological exhibitionism. Thus, for celebrities as well as normal human being: «the challenge is how best to showcase the pregnant belly rather than hiding it as was once expected. »<sup>15</sup>

However, in the case of Beyoncé, it's important to underline that she was able to convert this special and personal event into an actual artistic performance. The main aim of her announcement was, in fact, to create a powerful visual in order to start a public discourse and to create a mythology around her public persona. Subsequently,

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<sup>14</sup> Doreen St Félix, 'Beyoncé's Triumphant Homecoming at Coachella', *The New Yorker*, 16 April 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/beyonces-triumphant-homecoming-at-coachella>.

<sup>15</sup> Diane Negra, *What a girl wants? Fantasizing the reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*, Routledge, 2009, p.63.

it is possible to assume that Beyoncé, has used her pregnancy, essentially, to confirm the idea that she is a *primus inter pares*. The pictures were just another self-accreditation ceremony which «social function is to increase a person status in certain communities and regularly appear as more or less formal initiation rites into the new of previously forbidden domain.»<sup>16</sup> So, it's not a coincidence that for the pictures released on February 1st she decided to frame herself as some sort of black mother heart, a celestial figure. She has fundamentally elevated herself to godhood status. As already studied by Chris Rojek<sup>17</sup>, it's not uncommon for our society to attribute to celebrities religious or magic qualities. Thus, Beyoncé and Awol Erizku, seem to play with this mystic outlook on stardom and in fact, by using a postmodern approach, they have re-articulated the traditional iconography of the Virgin Mary - the most conventional mother figure in Western art - and Venus, the pagan goddess symbol of ethereal beauty. The pictures are a pastiche of references: they combine effectively traditional art representations by adopting a very kitsch aesthetic. After the pregnancy photoshoot was released, many think-piece had been written about all the art references used by Beyoncé. In the following pages, we are going to explore the most evocative art suggestions<sup>18</sup> that have spread immediately after the publication of the photos.

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<sup>16</sup> Wynn Schwartz, "Degradation, accreditation, and rites of passage", *Psychiatry* 42.2 (1979), p.143.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, Reaktion Books, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Clemence Michallon, 'Beyonce the work of art: Queen Bey's pregnancy photo series echoes famous paintings featuring Venus and the Virgin Mary?', Daily Mail, 2 February 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4186702/Beyonce-pregnancy-photos-mirror-classic-paintings.html>.

## The black Venus



Figure 1 - *Venus has flooded me*

Botticelli's Venus is considered the universal canon of female beauty<sup>19</sup>. The goddess is depicted on a classic pose: she covers her breasts and her lower abdomen. Yet, her nudity represents purity and minimalism. Very often this portrayal had been used even in catholic context and to characterize the idea of love as an invigorating force. On the Beyoncé interpretation of the Venus (Figure 1), as many art expert has noticed, we can observe a total re-adaptation of the original masterpiece. She is presenting herself as some sort of Nubian queen. The singer pose in the same way as the Venus in *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 2) but whereas in the Botticelli's case there are many natural elements, in the Beyoncé re-edition the natural element is represented solely by the plants from which she seems to emerge. But one of the most interesting component of the picture is for sure the Nefertiti statue.

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<sup>19</sup>Diletta Corsini, *Botticelli. La nascita di Venere*, Giunti, 1998.



Figure 2 - *Sandro Botticelli, The Birth of Venus, 1482-1485*

Nefertiti is widely speculated to be ancient Egypt's first female Pharaoh, ruling briefly in the time between the death of her husband Akhenaten and before the accession of Tutankhamun. It's a fitting icon for Beyoncé to include in her portraits because through her pregnant body she exudes power and femininity.

### **The Reclining Venus**



Figure 3 - *Girl turning into woman; woman turning into mother; mother turning into Venus*

In the picture number 3, Beyoncé is represented almost naked with her first child Blue Ivy. Their pose echoes the representation of Guido Reni's *Reclining Venus with cupid* (Figure 4). It's interesting to see that Beyoncé has decided to reference the baroque painter: Guido Reni<sup>20</sup>. Reni, in fact, in contrast to Caravaggio, has a distinct vocation for ideal beauty and harmony of the forms, he almost has a renaissance take on art.



Figure 4 - Guido Reni, *Reclining Venus with Cupid*, 1639

We can summarize his style as a meeting ground between religious sacrality and classicism. Once again, the singer is using her body, as a ground on which to fund a fully re-adaptation of traditional beauty ideals. The natural element is always present: Beyoncé body is laying on a flowerbed rich of orange roses and mimosas. The cornrows braids that Blu Ivy is sporting, instead, can be identified as the recurring African element, symbol of their heritage.

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<sup>20</sup> Giulio Carlo Argan, *Storia dell'arte italiana vol. III*, Sansoni, 1968.

## The veiled Madonna

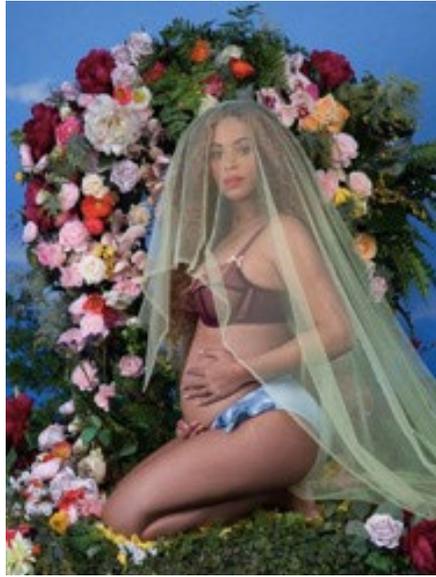


Figure 5 - *Venus falls in love; flowers grow wherever love touches her; this is how she reborn*

The flower garland is one of the main motives of the Flemish art, and more specifically Jan Brughel The Elder art<sup>21</sup>. On the *Garland with the Virgin, The Christ Child and Two Angels* painting (Figure 6) the flower crown is made with rose, tulips, orchids and other rare flowers species, and it adorns the representation of the Virgin Mary with her child, protected by the angels. It's commonly known that flowers, in catholic art, recall Christian values like grace, divinity and purity. Moreover, flowers remind us the caducity of life. However, Beyoncé (Figure 5) seem to evoke this type of iconography, mixing, once again, the pagan and the catholic imaginary. She, in fact, not only seem to resemblance a sexy veiled Madonna, but she is also referring to Venus. Beyoncé is, in fact, surrounded by a luxurious rose garland. It is well known that

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<sup>21</sup> Leopoldine van Hogendorp Prosperetti, *Landscape and Philosophy in the Art of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625)*, Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

in Greek and Roman culture the rose is the incarnation of Venus, who, according to the mythology, blossomed when the goddess born.



Figure 6 - Jan Brughel The Elder, Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *Garland with the Virgin, The Christ Child and Two Angels*, 1609-1616

If, on the one hand, the Madonna conventionally represents ideals of purity and chastity, on the other hand Venus has always been considered the perfect ideal of beauty. So, by following this perspective, we can observe how Beyoncé's choice of imaginary has one designated ambition: she is essentially deconstructing the traditional imaginary associated with motherhood and gorgeousness through her own personal experience as a woman of colour.

## **Conclusion**

Due to the fact that Beyoncé has made her blackness an integral part of her performance, and something that cannot be detached from her identity as a celebrity, consequently it is possible to recognize, on a connotative level of analysis, that the *I have three hearts* photoset has a distinctive political intent. In fact, whereas, traditional art has never conceived the black body as an aspirational model of splendour and

attractiveness, Beyoncé - by appropriating and adapting the same imaginary - is actively subverting the white centric canonical ideals of beauty that has long lived in Western culture. Furthermore, her explicit aim is to celebrate the African American culture, by elevating other black excellences. In retrospect, it's interesting to notice that the photo-set has basically paved the way for the music video of the song *Apeshit* (2018) where the juxtaposition the Louvre's art pieces and black bodies was brought to the maximum terms.

Although, Beyoncé' celebrity performance has become progressively more polarizing – in terms of ideology and audience' target - her fandom, as well as her celebrity power of influence, is not diminished. Additionally, her contractual power has never been so high: in the latest two years, for example, she has stipulated multimillion dollar contract with global brands like Netflix and Adidas.

However, after two years from the release of those images, what it's still significant is not only their so called *aspirational value*, but also, their ability to confirm the uniqueness of Beyoncé star text. If, nowadays, the debate on celebrity culture is focused on the idea that even rituals of desecralization may have beneficial consequences – in terms of popularity and intimate connection with the audiences<sup>22</sup> - what is interesting to notice is that Beyoncé seem to subvert these potential destructive tactics. Beyoncé is always portrayed as a mystical celebrity: a mother, a vestal of the black culture, a saint and goddess of beauty all at once. And even when Beyoncé shares more authentic pictures, like the one that depicts the singer on vacation with her families, everything seems highly staged and coordinated. These types of representations don't perform intimacy and authenticity, they display solely the more formal front-stage behaviour<sup>23</sup>. Though, if on the one hand this strategy – achieved through a capillary control over everything that surrounds her – is effective, still, in the long run it may generate an excessively artificial form of communication. What we are saying here is that,

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<sup>22</sup> Sean Redmond, *Pieces of me: celebrity confessional carnality*. *Social semiotics*, 18(2), 149-161, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, *American Journal of Sociology* 55, 1949.

paradoxically, an extreme sacralisation can obliterate all the positive aspect that the illusion of intimacy<sup>24</sup> can produce.

In conclusion, Beyoncé always showcases the extraordinariness of her condition, without explaining herself and without playing in being relatable. In this sense, we can defy her as an old type celebrity because she is clearly presenting herself, as Edgar Morin<sup>25</sup> would say, like a *beyond all mortal* type of celebrity and part of her success lies on the fact the we are not used anymore to observe this type of performance. Whereas we consider outspokenness the *conditio sine qua non* for the celebrity representation, with Beyoncé everything is subtle, the substance lays always beyond the hyper-glamorous surface. She wants to be examined, and by continuously manufacturing her mysterious aura she, at the same time, cements her brand. Citing Elaine Lui - one of the most sharper blogger in the gossip industry - «Beyoncé has never, ever explained her work, provided us with analysis of the significance, given us any answers [...], Beyoncé does her own work but she is not here to do our work.»<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding celebrity*, Sage, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Morin, *Les Star*, Le Seuil, 1972.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Lui, "The Beyoncé Pregnancy Package", *Lainey Gossip*, 2 February 2017, <https://www.laineygossip.com/The-Beyoncé-Pregnancy-Package-is-so-extra-includes-photos-underwater-and-with-Blue/46146>.



# Power, Politics, and Prestige



# CELEBRITY MANAGEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER: THE CASE OF MARSHAL TITO

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## **Abstract**

During the Cold War, major and minor individuals were elevated to a position of celebrity thanks to their role in the great East-West confrontation that characterised those years. Unsurprisingly, Cold War celebrities that had fallen into political disgrace with their own side typically faced substantial demotion and oblivion, if not the desecration of their public image. By contrast, the most important case of Cold War celebrity that escaped this framework is unquestionably that of Marshal Tito, the founding father of the Non-Aligned Movement that succeeded in aligning with and seceding from both Cold War Blocs, and the only Cold War celebrity who succeeded in overcoming several political shifts and the related desecration processes, even turning them into tools for fostering his notoriety and building a new and stronger public image of himself. The study of the history of Tito's public life, focusing on Tito's management of his celebrity as a tool to foster his political career, is therefore an interesting case of undisputable political success, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the tight interrelation between celebrity and power established during the Cold War that has been a key issue in the political game ever since.

## **Celebrity Management and the Struggle for Power: The Case of Marshal Tito**

During the Cold War, major and minor individuals were elevated to a position of celebrity thanks to their role in the great East-West confrontation that characterised those years. Unsurprisingly, Cold War celebrities that had fallen into political disgrace with their own side

typically faced substantial demotion and oblivion, if not the desecration of their public image. This path may be well exemplified by the renowned cases of some outstanding Cold War celebrities, such as the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov or U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, the most important case of Cold War celebrity that escaped this framework is unquestionably that of Marshall Tito, the founding father of the Non-Aligned Movement that succeeded in aligning with and seceding from both Cold War Blocs, and the only Cold War celebrity who succeeded in overcoming several political shifts and the related desecration processes, even turning them into tools for fostering his notoriety and building a new and stronger public image of himself.

The leader of a country that slightly exceeded twenty million inhabitants, Tito has probably been the subject of more biographical works than most twentieth century U.S. presidents or British prime ministers<sup>2</sup>. Due

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<sup>1</sup> For the most updated biography of Molotov, see Derek Watson, *Molotov: A Biography*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; concerning Joseph McCarthy, for the most updated biography see David Oshinsky, *A conspiracy so immense: the world of Joe McCarthy*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Tito's first biographies followed the 1948 split with Moscow and were mostly oriented to a hagiographical representation of Tito; see Louis Adamic, *The Eagle and the Roots*, Doubleday, 1952; Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito*, Simon & Schuster, 1953. It should be noted that in 1953 Vladimir Dedijer was a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia's Central Committee, and his 1953 work was Tito's official hagiography. Tito-sympathetic biographies have been common for decades, see Phyllis Auty, *Tito: A Biography*, McGraw-Hill, 1970; Fitzroy Maclean, *Josip Broz Tito: A Pictorial Biography*, McGraw Hill, 1980. Meanwhile, the works of some of Tito's former associates who had politically fallen into disgrace had started to provide some disenchanting biographies of the Yugoslav Marshal, see Milovan Djilas, *Tito: The Story from Inside*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980; Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Mladost, 3 vols., 1980-1984. Thereafter, Tito's biographies have been edited by Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Tito: Yugoslavia's Great Dictator. A Reassessment*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992; Jasper Ridley, *Tito: A Biography*, Constable, 1994; Richard West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*, Carroll & Graf, 1995; Geoffrey Swain, *Tito: A Biography*, I. B. Taurus, 2010; Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *Tito*, Profil, 2015. For the most updated biography of Tito to-date, see Jože Pirjevec, *Tito and his Comrades*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.

to the uniqueness of this case, Tito's figure has indeed become by far one of the most studied of the Cold War era, captivating the interest of journalists, historians and political, social, cultural and media scientists<sup>3</sup>. Scientific literature therefore offers many analyses of Tito's life and public image, given by a vast series of perspectives which range from the political role of Tito in the twentieth century to the way he was portrayed by the Western press. The aim of this work is to provide a contribution to this debate by analysing the history of Tito's public life, with a focus on Tito's management of his celebrity as a tool to foster his political career.

An analysis of Tito's celebrity cannot but start from the end of the story, say by the current average perception of Tito. Among the many possible descriptions of the historical figure of Tito perhaps one of the most adequate is given by his entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, recently re-edited by the American-Croatian historian Ivo Banac. Here Tito is described as « [...] the first Communist leader in power to defy Soviet hegemony, a backer of independent roads to socialism (sometimes referred to as "national communism"), and a promoter of the policy of nonalignment between the two hostile blocs in the Cold War »<sup>4</sup>. Tito is therefore remembered mostly for his role during the Cold War, and especially for his 1948 confrontation with Moscow, during which he succeeded in splitting from the Eastern Bloc and imposing himself as the worldwide model for "*independent roads to socialism*". He is remembered as well for having been the promoter of the policy of nonalignment. Interestingly, both these achievements were the outcome of a successful overcoming of Tito's previous brand, namely that of being Stalin's most faithful man before 1948 and that of being the only Communist military ally of the West during the Cold War before the nonalignment policy. Such impressive achievements in terms of public image management are

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive and updated overview of the studies focused on Tito, see Emily Greble, *Foreword* of Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. VII-XII. For a work focused on Tito's stardom during the Cold War see also Nikolina Kurtovic, *Communist Stardom in the Cold War: Josip Broz Tito in Western and Yugoslav Photography, 1943-1980*, University of Toronto, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ivo Banac, *Josip Broz Tito*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15 October 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Josip-Broz-Tito>.

a unique case in the history of the Cold War, justifying the need for an analysis of Tito's public life from a political perspective.

Josip Broz, the future comrade and Marshal Tito, was born in 1892 in the village of Kumrovec, Zagorje, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire<sup>5</sup>. The son of a Croat father and a Slovene mother, his childhood was marked by poverty, starvation and little education. The seventh of fifteen siblings, only seven of whom reached adulthood, he could not even finish the local primary school and had to start work at a very early age. Like many other Habsburg subjects of his social background, Josip Broz started to switch jobs and cities very often from the time he was a teenager. He soon became fascinated with Socialist ideals and joined the Social Democratic Party of Croatia and Slavonia<sup>6</sup>. Despite his Internationalist ideals he would not prove to be a pacifist during his military service in the Austro-Hungarian Army, when he would eventually be recommended for an award for gallantry and initiative in action<sup>7</sup>. Thanks to his engagement in the Austro-Hungarian Army, Broz had the opportunity to face celebrity for the very first time, since at the age of twenty-two he became one of the Empire's youngest non-commissioned officers and he even ranked second in the 1914 Army fencing season<sup>8</sup>. These first tastes of notoriety may have influenced Josip Broz's awareness of the importance of his public image, which in turn may explain why Tito, who on one hand would become used to talking about his fencing successes during those years, on the other hand always tried to hide one embarrassing chapter of this early stage of his life, namely his involvement in fights against the Serbian Army during the first months of the Great War<sup>9</sup>. This was understandably a burning issue for a leader of Yugoslavia, a country where the Serbs were the most important ethnic group. Hiding embarrassing chapters of his life would become a theme in Tito's management of his public image, and the successful ablation of the dark parts of his past would at

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<sup>5</sup>For the most updated reconstruction of the first twenty-two years of Tito's life see Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 6-9.

<sup>6</sup>Ivi, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Richard West, *Tito*, cit., pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup>Jasper Ridley, *Tito*, cit., p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., p. 9.

length be a regular feature of the varied process of “celebrification” that his figure underwent<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to the abovementioned introduction of Josip Broz to celebrity, the Austro-Hungarian military service became a key feature in the young Tito’s life, in part because it gave him the opportunity to be in Russia during the 1917 Revolution. Josip Broz had in fact been taken prisoner by the Russians in early 1915, who confined him near Alatyř, in the central Volga region<sup>11</sup>. This period of confinement gave him the opportunity to learn Russian and blend in with the local population at the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, when he regained his liberty<sup>12</sup>. Interestingly, except for some minor involvement, and despite being a seasoned Social-Democrat, Josip Broz did not play a significant role in the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent Russian Civil War<sup>13</sup>. On occasion, during those years the former Austro-Hungarian prisoner of war even hid in rural areas and mixed with the locals, which proved to be an effective shield from the various anti-Communist and anti-Socialist raids so common in Russia during the years of the Civil War: a behaviour that in 1938 would lead to the accusation of Tito’s having « fled » the October Revolution<sup>14</sup>.

When the Bolsheviks eventually won the war and established the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Josip Broz applied for Soviet citizenship and Soviet Communist Party membership. The Soviet authorities did not accept either of his candidatures but, instead, helped their Croat comrade to return home, thereby giving him the opportunity to contribute to the Communist cause in his own country<sup>15</sup>. So it was that in September 1920 Josip Broz returned to his native

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<sup>10</sup> For the concept of “celebrification”, see Olivier Driessens, ‘The celebritization of society and culture: Understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture’, in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 6, 2012, pp. 641–657.

<sup>11</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, pp. 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, pp. 10-12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*; for the 1938 allegation of Tito’s escape from the October Revolution see Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 74, d. 587, cited in Ivi, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Arhiv Jugoslavije, 837, KPR, IV-5-a, K 38, cited in Ivi, p. 12.

Zagorje, now part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the country that in 1929 would be renamed “Yugoslavia”. Here the old Social-Democrat-cum-Communist activist resumed switching jobs and cities quite often, which gave him the opportunity to get in touch countrywide with the members of the illegal Yugoslav Communist Party, banned by the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in December 1920, only three months after Broz’s repatriation<sup>16</sup>. Gradually the comrade Broz, who began to be called with the cadre name “Georgijević”, began to rise through the ranks of the Party, which frequently caused him to be harassed, fired and jailed<sup>17</sup>. The last of those arrests would prove to be another defining moment of his public life. Arrested in August 1928 for illegal gun possession and Communist propaganda, he made use of his position as political prisoner to write an article, titled *A Cry from the Hell of Yugoslav Prisons*, that would eventually be published by the Communist International (Comintern) magazine *International Press Correspondence*<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, Broz took full advantage of the opportunity his trial gave him to promote his public image by declaring « Long live the Communist Party! Long live the world revolution! » during the trial proceedings, which would also give the comrade Georgijević a certain notoriety both in the local and in the global Comintern press<sup>19</sup>. For the first time since the period of his military service, Josip Broz had reached celebrity status once again, now securing his public image as a Communist activist and leader.

The 1928 trial gave Broz the opportunity to reach notoriety but earned him a five-year sentence too. Georgijević used those years of captivity for strengthening his position within the Communist Party<sup>20</sup>. Soon after his release in 1934 Broz substantially rose through the ranks of the Party, becoming a member of its Politburo and Central Committee<sup>21</sup>. During these months, he sent a report to Moscow, signed with a

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<sup>16</sup> Ivi, pp. 12-14.

<sup>17</sup> Jasper Ridley, *Tito*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, pp. 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Adamic, *The Eagle*, cit., p. 343.

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, vol. 2, 267-268.

new cadre name: "Tito"<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, when he moved to the Soviet capital in 1935, where he would spend most of his time until the outbreak of the Second World War, Comrade Broz became mostly known by the name "Walter Friedrich"<sup>23</sup>. This second Russian chapter of his life became one of the most defining of his entire existence. Those very years were the ones of the Soviet's Great Purge, which would be for Tito both training in the field of power management and an opportunity to accession to power after most of his political opponents within the Yugoslav Communist Party and the Comintern had been wiped out by the repression<sup>24</sup>. Tito had understood early on the importance of avoiding any notoriety within that context. He quickly began dodging his fellow comrades, « especially in rooms with a telephone »<sup>25</sup>. He reportedly moved « along the long corridors like an invisible mouse [...] exchanged a word with hardly anybody [...] went his own way [and] worked behind closed doors »<sup>26</sup>. By that time Tito had therefore perfectly understood the importance of his own public image, and intentionally opted to keep his profile as low as it possibly could be. Historical evidence of the consciousness of his celebrity management is given by the fact that in 1939 Walter had been waiting for a long time for his visa to leave the USSR but nonetheless, when it was suggested that he ask Stalin directly for the authorisation -after all Josip Broz was at that time the Secretary General of the Yugoslav Communist Party!-, he plainly replied to his adviser: « better that Stalin ignore my existence »<sup>27</sup>. Tito's voluntary marked low profile during those years would prove to be useful not only because it allowed him to avoid the net of the Great Purges, but also because it gave him the opportunity to hide another dark and highly embarrassing chapter of his life: namely, his engagement in Spain during the Civil War years, where he likely had

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<sup>22</sup> Iurii Girenko, *Stalin-Tito*, Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> For the issue of the Great Purge see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror. A reassessment*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Tito*, cit., p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth von Mayenburg, *Hotel Lux*, Bertelsmann, 1978, p. 200.

<sup>27</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., p. 47.

been involved in the killing -ordered by Moscow- of fellow Communist and Republican comrades perceived as Stalin's political opponents or adversaries<sup>28</sup>.

Walter's public image and not least his life would therefore survive the Great Purges intact, which was not the case of many of his rivals within the Yugoslav Communist Party, such as his predecessor to the office of Secretary General Josef Čižinský alias Milan Gorkić, executed in 1937<sup>29</sup>. Meanwhile, Walter took advantage of his relatively minor notoriety to visit Yugoslavia several times, which made him one of the few leaders substantially tied with the Party's structures in Yugoslavia, in addition to being a proven achiever in underground and undercover missions<sup>30</sup>. This framework heavily advantaged Tito in his rise to the ranks of the Yugoslav Communist Party, a rise that led him to be appointed as Party's Secretary General on the 5th of January 1939<sup>31</sup>. The appointment to the office of Secretary General occurred at the right time for Tito's political career: the Great Purge was coming to an end, and the attention of Stalin and the Soviet Union was turning to the international situation after the political situation in Europe, where the upcoming Second World War was in the air. Nonetheless, during the years between his 1939 appointment to the highest office of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the 1941 involvement of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the Second World War, Tito maintained a low profile and avoided notoriety. In the meantime, he took advantage of the political momentum to strengthen his position within the Yugoslav Communist Party, getting rid of his last internal rivals, and proving to have perfectly learned and after all accepted Stalin's model of power management<sup>32</sup>.

By the 6th of April 1941, the day Yugoslavia entered the Second

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<sup>28</sup> Pero Simić, *Tito: Skrivnost stoletja*, Orbis, 2009, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ivan Očak, 'O sudbini obitelji jugoslavenskih emigranata «narodnih neprijatelja» u Sovjetskom Savezu', in *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*, Vol. 24, No.1, October 1991, pp. 181-206, particularly pp. 198-200.

<sup>30</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 28-47.

<sup>31</sup> Jasper Ridley, *Tito*, cit., p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 47-50.

World War after the Axis invasion, Walter was the undisputed leader of his Party, the political movement that during the war years would position itself as the major and leading force in the anti-Fascist fight in the Balkan country<sup>33</sup>. Josip Broz, whose cadre name would be from this moment on only Tito, thanks to his role became a true war legend. Despite being constantly hunted by the Axis and the Yugoslav anti-Communist forces, during the war Tito succeeded in creating Europe's largest anti-Fascist partisan movement. Tito, the "Marshal", as he was appointed in 1943 by his fellow comrades, became a true global celebrity: from this moment on his whole life would be in the spotlight<sup>34</sup>. The press started to show the pictures of his 1944 meeting with Churchill in Naples, portraying him as one of the great leaders of the anti-Fascist side, and describing the impressive achievement of his partisan army. Eventually, the media would also celebrate him as the only leader that succeeded in freeing his own country with his own forces without the Allies' on-field intervention, hugely contributing to make him a true icon<sup>35</sup>. Now an experienced celebrity manager, Tito used this fame to secure his position as the head of Yugoslavia, the country of which he was now the undisputed living symbol.

The complete control of Yugoslavia gave Tito the opportunity to achieve his political goals in his homeland, where the non-Communist forces had been gradually ousted, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia declared, and a five-year Soviet-modelled economic plan launched<sup>36</sup>. Tito had become the second most important celebrity in the Communist world and was thereafter generally perceived as the right-hand man of Stalin. His role in the Greek Civil War, where the Communist faction could keep fighting only thanks to Yugoslav sup-

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<sup>33</sup> For an account of the years of the so-called "Yugoslav Revolutionary War" and the role of the Communist-led partisan movement, see Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, cit., Vol. I, pp. 353-356.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of this process see Miranda Jakiša, *Partisans in Yugoslavia. Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, Transcript-Verlag, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> For the first years of Tito's rule on Yugoslavia see Jozo Tomasevich, Wayne Vucinich, *Contemporary Yugoslavia: Twenty Years of Socialist Experiment*, University of California Press, 1969.

port, seemed to prove this frame. Further evidence appeared to be given by the fact that when the Eastern Bloc created the first official post-war forum of the Communist parties in 1947, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), the headquarters of the organisation were established in Belgrade. It must have been hard to believe, therefore, on the 28th of June 1948, that Tito, the second brightest star of the Communist firmament, had been expelled by the Yugoslav-based Cominform.

As mentioned above, the 1948 Tito-Stalin split was the most important and defining moment of Tito's political life. Historiography has widely analysed the set of reasons that contributed to this resounding Cold War divorce<sup>37</sup>. Interestingly, several of the many elements that contributed to the split were related to Tito's public image and celebrity management. One good example is given by the fact that Moscow could hardly appreciate the myth that Tito was the only European leader to have freed his country without relying on foreign help: Belgrade itself had been freed by the Red Army at the cost of tens of thousands of casualties. By contrast, Tito's title of "Marshal" could also be an issue, since the only other man that was given that rank within the Communist world had traditionally been Stalin, the leader of the USSR. In short, Tito was putting his political and public figure beside that of Stalin when, conversely, he would have been expected to position himself below the supreme leader of the Soviet Union. Since Tito's public image played such a key role in the 1948 Moscow-Belgrade confrontation, during those months the Yugoslav leader underwent an impressive process of desecration of his celebrity<sup>38</sup>. All the Eastern Bloc and international Communist movements attacked Tito with unprecedented severity, accusing him of the worse possible charges imaginable for a Communist leader, including those of being a "revisionist", a

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<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Cornell University Press, 1988; Jože Pirjevec, *Il gran rifiuto. Guerra fredda e calda tra Tito, Stalin e l'Occidente*, Editoriale Stampa Triestina, 1990; Jeronim Perović, 'The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence', in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2007, pp: 32-63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

“Marxist illiterate” and an “imperialist spy”<sup>39</sup>. This smear campaign however did not harm Tito’s popularity in Yugoslavia, the country he had already been the undisputed living symbol since the war times. Indeed, the vast majority of the Yugoslavs backed Tito up, persuaded that behind the foreign attacks to their leader there was actually a threat to the independence of their country. The few who aligned with the Cominform were wiped out by a fierce Soviet-modelled repression, by which any opposition to Tito was annihilated and the leader’s control on the country further strengthened.

After this hard confrontation Tito’s and consequentially Yugoslavia’s stay in the Eastern Bloc became manifestly impossible, at least as long as Stalin was alive. In the framework of the Cold War, when the only two possible options seemed to be alignment with either the Eastern or Western Bloc, many wondered what Tito, the Communist celebrity, would do. Tito’s move to the West was so substantial that in 1951 Yugoslavia signed a Military Assistance Agreement with the United States of America<sup>40</sup>. Meanwhile, Yugoslavia had withdrawn its support of Greek Communists, bringing the civil war in that country to an end in 1949. Interestingly, it would be with none other than Greece, in addition to Turkey, that in 1953 Yugoslavia would sign the Balkan Pact, a treaty that would militarily bind Tito’s Socialist Federal Republic with two NATO powers, strengthening its ties with the Western Bloc<sup>41</sup>. Nonetheless, Tito’s internal policies and management of power were still the closest the world had to Stalin’s USSR model<sup>42</sup>. However, since he had jumped to the West, Tito was not portrayed by the Western press as the dictator he was, but as an asset for the West (which he actually was too). The pub-

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<sup>39</sup> Cfr. Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 190-191; Iurii Girenko, *Stalin-Tito*, cit., pp. 385-386.

<sup>40</sup> *Military Assistance Agreement Between the United States and the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia*, signed on the 14th of November 1951, 15 October 2018, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/yugo001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/yugo001.asp).

<sup>41</sup> *Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Between the Turkish Republic, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia* (Balkan Pact), Signed on the 9th of August 1954, 15 October 2018, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/eu002.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/eu002.asp).

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Jozo Tomasevich, Wayne Vucinich, *Contemporary Yugoslavia*, cit.; Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1975*, University of California Press, 1977.

lic confirmation of this new role was his 1953 visit to London, where Tito, the Communist leader of a Socialist country, was received by the British prime minister Winston Churchill<sup>43</sup>.

Although the political and celebrity management of his 1948 split with Moscow was definitely Tito's most important masterwork, it would not be his last. Soon after the death of Stalin, the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev rehabilitated him, marking Tito's final victory against the late Soviet leader within the Communist world. Despite his public rehabilitation Tito had no intention in any case of re-aligning with the Eastern Soviet-led Bloc. By this time, the Yugoslav leader had other plans indeed. In 1956, soon after his rehabilitation by the Soviet bloc and one year after the Bandung Conference, Tito met with Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of India; Sukarno, the president of Indonesia; Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of Egypt; and Kwame Nkrumah, the president of Ghana. The outcome of the meeting was the "Declaration of Brioni" (after the villa of Tito where the meeting was held). The document was signed by Tito, Nehru and Nasser, and started the process that would eventually lead to the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, whose first meeting was held in September 1961 in Belgrade<sup>44</sup>. Tito, after having successfully seceded from the Eastern Bloc, had now left the Western one too, clearly aiming to lead, in plain Cold War, a new, "Non-Aligned" Bloc.

After his involvement in the Non-Alignment Movement, Tito's celebrity reached its peak. The Eastern press had rehabilitated his public image within the Communist world. Despite having left the Western Bloc he had not re-aligned with the USSR, so that the West had no reason to attack him and desecrate his public image. The hero of the antifascist war, the only leader that had freed his own country without foreign help, the only man that had overcome a successful confrontation with Stalin, the only leader welcomed and celebrated by Western, East-

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<sup>43</sup> For a description of the 1953 visit to London see Katarina Spehnjak, 'Josip Broz Tito's Visit To Great Britain In 1953', in *Review of Croatian history*, Vol. I, No. 1, December 2005.

<sup>44</sup> For an updated work on Yugoslavia and the non-alignment movement see Alvin Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, Princeton University Press, 2015.

ern and Non-Aligned countries, Josip Broz Tito was a global superstar. This public image would be strengthened further by Tito's lifestyle and Yugoslav propaganda. Indeed, Yugoslav authorities began sponsoring films on Tito and the Partisan War, the most famous case being *Battle of Sutjeska* (1973), where the role of Tito was played by the Welsh superstar Richard Burton<sup>45</sup>. These movies substantially contributed to the stardom of Tito, who in the meantime had been fostering his celebrity through a superstar-like lifestyle<sup>46</sup>. Tito lived in luxury villas with exotic animals, wore extravagant clothes he himself had designed, and often appeared in public with other global superstars of the time such as Elizabeth Taylor, Orson Welles, Sophia Loren, Yul Brynner, Gina Lollobrigida, or his fictional counterpart Richard Burton<sup>47</sup>.

At the end of his life, Tito was a celebrity, a star, an icon, and the indisputable leader of his country. This would be well exemplified in 1968, when Yugoslav students, as well as their western counterparts, protested the system they lived in with rallies and mass demonstrations. By this time Tito had been the head of the Yugoslav Communist Party, the President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the chief of the Armed Forces for more than twenty years. He was, in other words, the ultimate reliable person for all the issues Yugoslav students were complaining about and demonstrating against. Tito was, however, the living symbol of Yugoslavia. It would therefore happen that in 1968, in the streets and universities of Belgrade, students demonstrating against the Yugoslav system displayed among their symbols... the portrait of Tito<sup>48</sup>. Specifically, not Tito's portrait of the time, of the man that ruled the system they criticised, but the portrait of the Second World War era leader of the partisan war<sup>49</sup>. In any case, his portrait: the 1968 Yugoslav students testified that despite their opposition to the Yugoslav system of the time and to the most updated public image of Tito, the latter was

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<sup>45</sup> *Battle of Sutjeska* (also known as *The Fifth Offensive*) (1973), directed by Stipe Delić.

<sup>46</sup> For Tito's political use of cinematography see also the movie *Battle of Neretva* (1969), directed by Veljko Bulajić.

<sup>47</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit., pp. 144-149.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, pp. 346-347.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

the undisputed living symbol of their homeland. Without him and his leadership, the future of Yugoslavia could not be conceived, not even by the youth. It was the last, definitive victory of Tito's lifelong successful management of his public image.

However, Tito's personal complete success in the management of his celebrity would eventually prove to be even excessive, since after his death Yugoslavia did not overcome his political leader and living symbol more than a decade. The fate of Yugoslavia after Tito's death had been a key question for decades indeed. Understandably, Tito claimed publicly that he was confident he was going to leave behind a solid country, but many wondered what the future held for a unite Yugoslavia without him, including Tito himself<sup>50</sup>. The nineties' breakup of Yugoslavia, in addition to reply this key question, led many Yugoslavs to think that Tito had not been only their unifier, but ultimately also the last and only reason for Yugoslavia to remain united<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, despite Josip Broz's unquestionable complete personal success in the struggle for power, after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the following bloody Yugoslav Wars, the history of Tito's celebrity should give pause for thought, and lead to reflect on that tight interrelation between celebrity and power that was established during the Cold War era and has been a key issue in the political game ever since.

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<sup>50</sup> Jože Smole, *Priповed komunista novinarja 1945–1980*, ČZP Enotnost, 1994, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. the Serb Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Tito*, cit.; the Croats Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *Tito*, cit.; the Slovene Jože Pirjevec, *Tito*, cit.

# POVERTY, STATUS AND CELEBRIFICATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE: QUESTIONING AND CONFIRMING THE MODEL FOR EXISTENCE OF CELEBRITIES ON INSTAGRAM

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## **Abstract**

In a nation of historically hurt citizenship to be *someone* is directly connected to the concept of being *seen*. As Herschmann and Pereira<sup>1</sup> explain, in Brazil the anonymity is interpreted by less privileged population groups as an act of violence, another way to highlight their lack of citizenship. In this article, we study the profiles of three poor people who have achieved visibility on Instagram, especially Carlinhos Maia's (13 million followers), who capitalizes on this new condition leaving behind his past. A question, however, adds complexity to this change: initially posing as "it boy", besides pools and yachts, he could only succeed after showing his poverty in a "good mood", also exhibiting the daily constraints of his neighbors - two of them, Cauã Kardashian and Branca Diva, analyzed here. The presence of this trio, made up of black people of humble origin living in poor areas, challenges the social pattern of the most celebrated celebrities. It also seems to tell us that poverty can only be seen through humor and scorn. In order to analyze the phenomenon, we seek to expand the question of Weberian status and to include questions pertinent to race, class, gender and social origin.

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<sup>1</sup>Herschmann, M. Pereira, Carlos Alberto Messeder (orgs.). *Mídia, Memória & Celebriedades. Estratégias narrativas em contextos de alta visibilidade*, Rio de Janeiro: E-papers, 2003.

## Introduction

Of the possible forms of social ascension, visibility is one of those most sought after in the context of a historically vilified country like Brazil. By the end of 2017, extreme poverty reached almost 15 million people in Brazil, or 7.2% of its population, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE. A country, moreover, in which almost half of the income it generates is appropriated by just 10% of its population. In such an unequal context, being seen on social media is not related only to the willingness of exhibiting oneself. For people experiencing poverty, showing oneself on social media goes beyond mere self-exposure and surpasses a somewhat elitist gaze at performances on that space. For those who lead a life surrounded by the constraints of low income, being seen is also a way to be socially counted, to belong, to be considered a citizen. To be someone who matters.

In spite of the recent decline in the quality of life of the population and the increase in inflation (a few years after a total of 35.7 million Brazilians have entered middle class and 20.5 million others went out of poverty), Brazil is also one of the main users of internet and social networks: Brazilians are ranked third among the most time-consuming online users, spending an average of 9 hours per day connected. Brazilians come second in the use of Instagram, with 57 million users, only behind the United States (110 million users).

This apparent contradiction says a lot about what this research wants to address: it deals with bodies and lifestyles that defies the limited differences between people who usually reach the celebrity stand. This does not happen without fights and, still more, without enormous contradictions. In this article, we look at people who performed richness when they were poor and that now, after occupying more affluent social classes, perform poorness.

My interest in observing the right to be seen began when, between 2007 and 2011, I did a PhD research about women who read celebrity magazines when attending beauty salons in the outskirts of Recife<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> Moraes, Fabiana. 'É tu nada, estrela: revista Caras e o consumo da felicidade em salões de beleza da periferia', UFPE. 14 July 2019, <https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/9599>.

capital city of Pernambuco, in Northeast of Brazil. Several of the interviewees were proud and pleased when I asked them to talk and turned the tape recorder on. It was also by that time that, on a Sunday, I started photographing a large group of persons who were doing a picnic on a beach. And picnicking, it is important to note, is a practice that, in Brazil, is tarnished by classism, being classified in a prejudiced way as “farofa”. I talked to two women at the picnic for a while and asked them to take some pictures of both. When I finished the photos, I thanked them. The older of the two women then replied to me: “Thank you for taking a picture of me.” I then realized how many people who traditionally are not the target of the external and media interest feel contemplated when their existences are perceived not as violent or folk but as simultaneously ordinary and unique. At that moment, Benjamin’s cunning phrase gained a concrete meaning to me: “Every person today can claim the right to be filmed”<sup>3</sup>.

It is in this context that I carried out the analyzes of three profiles on Instagram, all of them residents of the State of Alagoas, in Northeast Brazil, the region of lowest income in the Country (I live in Pernambuco, the neighboring state). I analyze them understanding visibility as a factor of social hierarchization, as discussed by Brighenti<sup>4</sup>. I also rely on the distinction between celebrification and celebritization suggested by Driessens<sup>5</sup> and on the idea of the public self theorized by Sibilia<sup>6</sup>. Finally, I rely on my own researches on the relationship between poverty and celebrity that I’ve been doing since 2007. Instagram was chosen because it is the network specialized in images and for its success in Brazil, as stated above.

The profiles studied are the ones of Cauã Kardashian, Branca Diva and Carlinhos Maia. Understanding the internet as a “place”, we ana-

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin. *Magia e técnica, arte e política: ensaios sobre literatura e história da cultura*. Trad. Sérgio Paulo Rouanet. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994. p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Andrea Brighenti. ‘Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences.’ *Current Sociology*, 55, 323, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Driessens, ‘Status em Sociedades Pós-Modernas: a renovação de um conceito’. *Revista Lua Nova*, São Paulo, v. 77, páginas 41-71, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Paula Sibilia, *O Show do Eu*, Nova Fronteira, 2008.

lyzed the profile postings in three different moments: first, in the three initial months of using Instagram; then, in three months between that initial moment and March 2017 (not in the case of Branca Diva); and, finally, in three months of the last year of the period considered in the research (April 2018 to March 2019). This procedure made us observe evolution (i) in the ways of appearance, (ii) in the different mechanisms to obtain visibility and (iii) in the distinctions made, over time, in the objects and places highlighted and in the ways of being of the owners of the profiles. We are also guided by a perspective constructed by Barthes<sup>7</sup> in the reading of images, understanding Instagram as one of the places par excellence, today, for advertising itself.

The first two became famous on Instagram through the videos and photos of the latter, who acquired notoriety in the same network by showing his day-to-day pauperized life in a good-humored way, besides using local slang. In April 2019, Maia (@carlinhosmaiaof) had 13.9 million followers on Instagram.

It is interesting to note the changes in the strategies he employed to gain visibility. In his first appearances on Instagram, back in 2013, Maia posed with different colored glasses and stylish caps, besides using the #itboy hashtag. He exhibited his athletic body in hotel pools, photographed fancy dishes and showed himself in airports and yachts. From 2016, he starts showing a very different environment on the videos he published: first on Snapchat and then on Stories (Instagram) and even You Tube, where he runs a channel with more than 600 thousands subscribers. On the more recent videos he shows a small village with cobbled streets lined with modest houses made of uncovered bricks, poor and lower-middle class people, goats, horses, clothes put to dry in the open. In sum: diverse elements that refer to a modest, rural environment.

It is only when he “assumes” this poor environment and includes what was left out during his attempts to be an “it boy” that Carlinhos becomes a social media phenomenon, conquering a million followers in just one month. (by the way, there is a great debate on the purchase

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<sup>7</sup> Barthes, Roland. *A retórica da imagem. O óbvio e o obtuso*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1990.

of followers on the social network acquired by Facebook, an important question in the analysis about the search for visibility that I will not to deal here). The turn happened in 2016, when the guy posted a humorous video about wearing a cap covering his hair, a common practice among several women from the working class. He talked about this change in an interview:

*When I started I was very criticized by people from my city ... I remember doing the first videos with a good camera of a friend of mine at her beautiful house. I kind of did not want to show my house, the reality. Those were sort of fake videos, it was not me, I was doing vlogs and trying to be a youtuber just like the others. Then nine months ago I said, 'I want to show my reality as it really is.' So I made the video at my house, without much editing and I posted it, and it was that success that you are following<sup>8</sup>.*

In deciding to “show reality as it is,” he chooses to strategically invest in the theme that has made him more visible: to show poverty as a motto for laughter. The resource is not new in Brazil, where several programs on TV and internet are successful using the same idea. With Maia, however, there are two factors that, at least in theory, would make this representation of the popular classes different: first, it comes from someone who had tried to achieve visibility by erasing their modest surroundings but ended up realizing that it is precisely that context of poverty which would help him to achieve the Olympus on social media; second, with him we have the representation of poverty carried out by a poor person, not an external gaze that generally victimizes or folklorizes impoverished populations.

Therein lies a question: does this self-representation really move away from a reductive gaze on the popular classes? Or, by choosing to show a “funny” poverty after failing as “it boy”, is Maia suggesting

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<sup>8</sup> Beatriz Queiroz, ‘Com mais de 4 milhões de seguidores, Carlinhos Maia quer despertar sorriso’, *Correio Braziliense*, November 15th 2017, online.

[https://www.correio braziliense.com.br/app/noticia/diversao-e-arte/2017/11/15/interna\\_diversao\\_arte,641019/com-mais-de-4-milhoes-de-seguidores-carlinhos-maia-quer-despertar-sor.shtml](https://www.correio braziliense.com.br/app/noticia/diversao-e-arte/2017/11/15/interna_diversao_arte,641019/com-mais-de-4-milhoes-de-seguidores-carlinhos-maia-quer-despertar-sor.shtml).

that this is the easiest way for popular classes to be seen in high-visibility environments? Has poverty, in order to be seen, to fall into the categories of grace and / or disgrace? In which ways do poor people (in Brazil, most of them black) have to appear in high visibility environments to be “accepted”? The strategies that Carlinhos Maia has been developing can help us to think better about these issues.

Maia transformed his neighbors into characters and incorporated them into his videos. His visibility thus ended up reaching Cauã and Branca, in addition to his mother, Maria Maia. Cauã Pablo Kardashian (@cauakardashian), a 13-year-old teenager who borrowed the surname from the American hypermedia family, has 1 million followers and started his profile in 2013. Branca Maia (@brancadivaa, 1,2 million followers), on October 1, 2017. While Cauã performs a lot of selfies, Branca, the teen’s aunt, appears in photo essays making poses that are common among bloggers and models, as well as props considered as fashionable. The “diva” is used both to ensure the character’s presence and to confront the table’s image: leaner than most models, she has large non-symmetrical teeth. She is not part of what the fashion industry she refers to in her pictures would rate as “pretty.” She also has speech difficulties.

In the images Cauã and Diva publish, it is usual the use and / or the mention of luxury products and their appearance in exclusive places. They thus become part of the idea of ostentation, something that also seems to me to be related to a search for respectability. Cauã appears in a photo wearing a bracelet on which one reads Moschino (similar to an original model of the luxury brand), while Branca asks in a video, as a birthday present, “a Chanel purse and a Prada dress”. Maia, in turn, the most famous of them, today is paid to speak and / or to appear next to some products and institutions, such as Banco do Brasil and cell phone companies. If Maia usually shows himself wearing expensive products, he currently refers only to those that celebrates a merchandising contract with him.

I understand that here, in this environment of poverty, there is a valuation of symbols associated with the celebrity culture. More still: there is a wish to conform to hegemonic and stabilized models, usually identified as “successful”. In fact, the more fame the poor character gets, the more he or she is expected to adhere to the codes associated with the most seen celebrities, in a kind of looping that tells us that to

be visible we must look like the most visible. Poverty thus appears as a problem to be corrected or as something that must be shown with a certain frequency so that the success acquired by the characters does not make them seem modest: it is common to read followers, especially Carlinhos (the most successful of them all), praising their simplicity and humility, despite their recently-achieved condition of rich persons. A demand or exigency (to be “simple”) that seems to haunt famous people who came from popular backgrounds, but not those who already had some wealth before becoming well-known. This tension related to the poverty that should or should not be seen, to the poverty that breaks down and does not respect the most common codes of the celebrities world, makes us think about the status groups that Weber<sup>9</sup> observed in order to produce a reading of social inequality that goes beyond classes. For him, evaluations of superiority and inferiority have fundamental consequences for the maintenance and reproduction of these disparities. By defending that status could be based on any criteria that would conveniently separate groups in the sense of legitimizing privileges, he emphasized the arbitrary nature of status claims and their role in the processes of domination. The concept of social closure - when status groups seek power through customary or legal filtering, a practice that prevents the entry of agents located in other groups - also provides insights into how status claims result not only in inequality, but in relationships of domination of diverse orders. That is an important standpoint to analyze the social role of celebrities: it encompasses the subtleties that unite and separate individuals by establishing that they are distinguished not only by belonging to class X or Y but also by their lifestyles, their bodies, their potential for visibility. Says Weber: “In opposition to the ‘class situation’, which is determined by purely economic factors, we understand by ‘status situation’ that typical component of human vital destiny that is conditioned by a specific social evaluation, positive or negative, of honor, linked to a certain quality common to many people”<sup>10</sup>.

This conception is in accordance to the fluid environment inhab-

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<sup>9</sup>Max Weber, *Economia e Sociedade*, Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2004, p. 181.

<sup>10</sup>Max Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

ited by celebrities, a specific elite that reproduces the tensions of the “ordinary” world and whose economic power often contrasts sharply with visibility capital (with the former being almost nil). For this conception, social inequalities are exposed through the understanding that even the most prosaic everyday performance of the agents reveal cracks, often microscopic ones, that determine their “places” in the world. Weber summarizes: “possessors and non-possessors may belong to the same estate, which occurs many times and with very sensitive consequences”<sup>11</sup>. “Estamental honour” thus only requires that those who wish to be part of a given circle should conduct their life (habits, tastes, consumption) in a specific way.

The use of the sociologist’s conception in the study of media charisma has been carried out by some authors, among them Millner<sup>12</sup>, who analyses other status systems comparing them to the celebrity system: he perceives similarities (solidarity among the “common” ones”, the desire to know the intimacy of those who are at the top of the hierarchy) as well as differences (the role of visual media and new visibility, the increasing mobility and instability of the contemporary system of celebrities over traditional ones). When speaking of this place, he begins to point out some of its own characteristics that determine the logics of this organism. Here, the status

It is relatively inalienable: the status attributed to one resides mainly in the mind of the other: they can not simply “steal” it from the celebrity, a more complex operation is necessary so that the reverence of the admirer is removed far from the celebrity. It is relatively non-expandable: primarily, status is a relational good that, like others, needs some rarity to maintain its position. As a non-expandable condition, status, if it grows in relation to one individual, it tends to decrease in relation to the other. It needs to conform to the rules of the group: those who share the specificities of fame, the “charismatically qualified”, have non-institutionalized markers that limit the field of action of those who are not part of such a system. Such markers reas-

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<sup>11</sup>Max Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>Murray Millner, ‘Is Celebrity a New Kind of Status System?’ 10 august 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12115-010-9347-x>.

sure the place of this elite, who shows itself - through clothing, body, accent, daily habits - more "capable" and sophisticated, more deserving of its status.

It is socially shared: the status of something (objects, places) or someone can be relatively transferred to those who associate with these recognition bearers. Kurzman<sup>13</sup>, in turn, observes that such agents are part of a system which confers a more specific, floating and fleeting kind of prestige, where profitability is not always feasible. For him, compared to other types of status, however, "celebrity status is always on the move. He bestows honour in the present, not in generations to come; it decreases over time, rather than accumulating, and requires a constant supply of new recruits, rather than erecting barriers to the entry of others"<sup>14</sup>.

In his article *Celebrity Status*, four privileges are categorized to denote the specificities - in terms of social differentiation - of the famous, a product of the marriage between capitalism and media endowed with a dynamic that reflects the conditions of the modern era. It is this system, this dynamic, that the author will call "celebrity". Kurzman realizes that the famous ones are endowed with an interactional privilege that makes it an event for us, the audience, any encounter with them (especially the unplanned ones); a normative privilege that generates respect to celebrities and their ideas (and consequent adherence, and consequent consumption); an economic privilege that brings wealth to these charismatic people; and, finally, a publicity privilege.

Kurzman's systematization, as well as Millner's analysis, offer us good tools for thinking about celebrities, but there are fundamental issues that are not addressed by any of them, even though they fundamental to study ( and not only in Brazil ) the poor who reaches the post of celebrities, like Carlinhos Maia. The idea of status is also related to some specificities that can be called "primary", structural:

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Kurzman, Chelise Anderson, Clinton Key, Youn Lee, Mairead Moloney, Alexis Silver, Maria W. Van Ryn. *Celebrity Status*. 23 september 2018, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2007.00313.x>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

they are the ones that give more conditions for certain media charismatics to achieve wealth, to secure more contracts in films and publicity; in sum, to have access to visibility. It is not possible, therefore, to speak about the honour of the media charismatics without observing that, within this specific system, a series of factors establishes deep differences between the celebrities. The charisma and status related to celebrities is not evenly distributed among them. Here we can see the importance of specificities like:

1 - the place where the famous one speaks from: there are two more relevant aspects to be singled out here: proximity to the "centres of power" and the social status conferred to certain areas of culture, with an explicit hierarchy between cinema, television, music, comics, networks social, literature, theatre, visual arts, etc.;

2 - the body pattern: it refers to the existence of a specific body capital, which acts within a classificatory social system, bringing privileges to those who are closer to what we can call "body-media", generated by advertising as an ideal to be achieved.

3 - gender: women celebrities play the dual role of receiving more space from the celebrity industry, while also being more constrained to conform their bodies to the rationality of the environment.

4 - the colour of the skin: this is also an element that establishes deep differences between celebrities as to visibility, the roles that are reserved to black and white famous people, and, of course, the payoffs offered depending on one is black or white. In this sense,

5 - the origin and the capital of the celebrated one also matters when the famous demarcate their power.

*Poverty, Status and Celebrification of Everyday Life:  
Questioning and Confirming the Model for Existence of Celebrities on Instagram*



Figure 1 - Carlinhos (left) before fame: poor, posing as rich; (right) after fame: rich, posing as poor



Figure 2 - Branca Diva (left): poverty as a catwalk; Cauã (right): symbols of high media visibility

The markers described above are relevant to understand the performances of celebrities that desacralize high-visibility environments, as is the case of Carlinhos Maia. On the Instagram publications of the characters mentioned here, one can observe a recurring clash between the so-called good life and the actual life lived by the majority of population. And the more contrasting are the codes of the former and the latter, the funnier are the publications. The unpaved streets and the simple houses, the animals and the empty refrigerators make a sharp contrast to yachts, swimming pools and trips. The less prestigious codes are shown with a certain humor, as well as demonstrating the simple, candid character of the residents of the village. At the same

time, it is left implicit that these are codes that must at some point be overcome - and that is where the profusion of images of a comfortable good life appears. It is as if the signs of the “good life” enjoyed by celebrities were somehow misplaced, thus creating a fissure in the system.

Maia deals basically with the opposition between the place he conquered and the situation in which he was born, continuously affirming the contrast between his original poor condition and his entry into the realm of mainstream visibility. Cauã and Branca, in turn, work in the construction of a public self, investing in images in which they gradually (re)make themselves under the light of the hyper-famous. This self-exposure that challenges the place of poverty in which they live is received, to a great extent, with humor and astonishment. That is true especially in the case of Branca, as the question of gender interferes in these interactions, as it is the case that the celebrity woman suffers more than her male counterpart with the need to conform the body to an expected way of social presence. As comments to their photos, it is common to see a large amount of emoticons (emotion + icons) that represents laughs and people tagging others to share the laughter provoked by the photographs. The images posted by Cauã early on on Instagram show typical scenes of him in his modest context, without funny performances or references to luxury goods. As he became more famous, however, Cauã began to show more signs of what would be a good life: he often appears, for example, lying down on sun loungers by pools. These and other performances apparently displaced from his life context are reproved by some of his followers. That is to say, they provoke occasional tensions between these new celebrities and those who follow them. It is when one realizes that “humility” and “simplicity”, as previously said, remain as exchange value in the relationship with fans, as their moving away from the celebrities’ fan circle may generate symbolic and material losses.

Currently, Carlinhos Maia performs in theaters all over Brazil, sometimes accompanied by Branca and Cauã, as well as by Maria Maia, his mother, and by other neighbors and relatives (“it’s the best show in life”, says a fan). The comments that follow his posts are mostly complimentary. On Instagram, he uses Stories to put more emphasis on his “funny” everyday life, while in the published photos one sees the humor coming up from the opposing mix between that down-to-earth everyday life and images that are wealth markers: hotel pools, interna-

tional trips, awards backstages. In 2017, he even partnered with a company to install cameras all over the street where he lives, the images being displayed in a small control room at his own home, a kind of private Big Brother.

It is also necessary to say that the presence of these characters of humble social origin in the social media – people that are filmed in environments of poverty and end up attracting thousands of followers – confronts and eventually dismantles the set of specific characteristics that dominate the environment of the most famous ones. It is when adherence also transmutes into opposition. Observing the comments of the followers of the three profiles, we find that most bring praise to them: some express the beauty, “humility” and “simplicity” of instagramers; others single out the beauty of their clothing and accessories; and still others express a “will to win” such as Carlinhos, Branca and Cauã did, who are thus transformed into life models. Success is generally understood as the result of both a personal effort (“struggling”, “humble”) and a divine consequence, bringing the characters closer to the magical properties observed by Weber in his famous analysis of charismatic leaders.

Here, we can infer that their followers, thousands of them from the poorer population, feel represented by those inhabitants of Brazilian Northeast inland. They begin to consume images generated not only in advertising, soap operas and other hegemonic means of producing representations, but also from people who historically were only spectators. The derision that erupts at various moments is overcome by the positive reception of these self-narratives. Their presence is extremely political, fissuring and coloring with black skin the representations of people that serve as reference for diverse communities; making these representations, therefore, more heterogeneous and open to be constantly recreated. In one of Branca’s selfie, a follower comments: “Watching you videos completes our day, it’s like being part of our families, you have no idea the good they do us on this side of the screen.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Beatriz Queiroz, ‘Com mais de 4 milhões de seguidores, Carlinhos Maia quer despertar sorriso’, *Correio Braziliense*, November 15th 2017, online.

<https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/diversao-e-arte/2017/11/15/>

When navigating the images of these three profiles, it is worth thinking: what would be the chance of people from a popular community in the interior of Alagoas to gain Internet notoriety showing their everyday life? People who have low social, economic and geographic capital, as the centers of power are usually located in metropolises. In an industry that has established itself based on a vertical model of people and lifestyles, the production of visibility that emerges from the agents themselves – that is, from people distant from the canonical centers of production – is an important sociological phenomenon. From these images and videos, we can also observe new forms of appearance that are related to the power associated with what is conventionally called “sealing”, a performative and political act. These are images that give more dignity to those who portray themselves, as opposed to much of the visual production in which one sees peripheral communities of Brazil portrayed in a prejudiced way by those who live elsewhere. They claim the right to be seen, but not as passive agents.

But there is a tension there: while these agents are the producers of new images of poverty, they also end up adhering to conservative codes related to high visibility media environments: the mansion, the resort, the pool, the party, the yacht, the convertible car. The body also leaves behind markers that identify their origin through designer clothes, beauty treatments and surgical procedures. By creating their own space in the midst of high visibility media, several of these agents of a poor origin also reproduce codes common to celebrities, showing that poverty is accepted in the high visibility environment under two distinct but overlapped keys: to serve as a springboard for fame or as an exotic space from which we can smile, even if covertly.

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[interna\\_diversao\\_arte,641019/com-mais-de-4-milhoes-de-seguidores-carlinhos-maia-quer-despertar-sor.shtml](http://interna_diversao_arte,641019/com-mais-de-4-milhoes-de-seguidores-carlinhos-maia-quer-despertar-sor.shtml).

FAMOUS LAST WORDS. A COMPARATIVE FOCUS  
ON RESIGNATION SPEECHES TO TRACE CONTEMPORARY  
EUROPEAN INSTABILITY: THE CASES OF DAVID CAMERON  
AND MATTEO RENZI

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**Abstract**

In 2016, the governing coalitions of two European countries each held a public referendum which resulted in the resignation of their celebrity leader. The British Prime Minister David Cameron quit after the “Leave” campaign won the Brexit vote in June. A few months later, in December, the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi resigned as well, following the negative outcome of the Italian Constitutional referendum. Several media platforms broadcast their speeches in real time, marking the political fall of both leaders, precipitating a transition in power in their respective democracies and threatening the stability of the European Union.

In the light of the growing interest about the rise and impact of celebrity politicians, [see e.g. Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013], this article provides a comparative insight into both Cameron and Renzi’s resignation ceremonies as key moments of tracing their downfall under the media spotlight - from high office to civilian life once more. Combining speech-writing and screenwriting tools in conjunction with celebrity studies, this paper investigates the ways in which a resignation ceremony marks the exact fall of an institutional representative; what words and communication strategy are used to preserve political stability and, finally, what celebrity politicians’ resignation speeches can tell us about the future of European leadership.

## Introduction

In 2016, the governing coalitions of two European countries each held a public referendum which ended with a surprising result and the subsequent resignation of their celebrity leader. The British Prime Minister David Cameron quit after the Leave campaign won the Brexit vote in June.<sup>1</sup> A few months later, in December, the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi resigned as well, following the negative outcome of the Italian Constitutional referendum.<sup>2</sup> Only a few hours after the results were made public, several TV and media platforms broadcast their resignation speeches in real time. There are three reasons these moments were crucial: (i) they marked the fall of both celebrity political leaders, (ii) they decreed a transition in power in their respective democracies and, finally, (iii) they contributed to threatening the stability of the European Union.

This article provides a comparative insight into both Cameron and Renzi's resignation ceremonies as key moments of tracing their downfall under media spotlight, from high office to civilian life once more.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom European Union Referendum, also known as the "Brexit referendum" was held on June 23rd 2016 in the United Kingdom and the British Oversea Territory of Gibraltar. The citizens were required to choose whether the UK would confirm or withdraw its membership of the European Union. The "Leave" won with the 51.89% of preferences against the 48.11% of the "Remain". For further reference see Philip B. Whyman and Alina I. Petrescu, *The Economics of Brexit - A Cost Benefit Analysis of the UK's Economic Relationship with the EU*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2017 and Anthony Ridge-Neuman, Fernando León-Solis and High O'Donnell, *Reporting the Road To Brexit - International Media and the EU Referendum 2016*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The Italian Constitutional Referendum (2016) was held on December 4th, 2016. Citizens were required to approve or reject a constitutional law aiming to amend part of the Italian Constitution in order to (i) reform the composition and powers of the Parliament; (ii) the division of powers between the State, the regions and other administrative entities. The "approve" side received 40.89% of preferences against the 59.11% of preferences for rejecting the new law. For extended readings see Costanzo Pasquale, *Referendum Costituzionale: Uno sguardo d'insieme sulla riforma Renzi-Boschi* [tr. Constitutional Referendum - A comprehensive view on the Renzi-Boschi Reform], Utet Giuridica, 2016.

Combining speech-writing and screenwriting tools in conjunction with celebrity studies, the following key questions are investigated:

- RQ1: In which ways does a resignation speech mark the exact moment of the fall of an institutional representative?
- RQ2: What is the significance of speechwriting in the contemporary mediascape to preserve political stability?
- RQ3: What can resignation speeches tell us about the future of European leadership?

In order to answer these questions, this article is structured as follows: in the first section I introduce and discuss the contemporary relevance of celebrity politics and demonstrate why this discourse applies specifically to Matteo Renzi and David Cameron. The second section is dedicated to an evaluation of both leaders' resignation speeches and ceremonies in order to trace the fall of these two celebrity politicians. Finally, the third section explores the impact of their resignation ceremony and draws a comprehensive evaluation of their resignation within the wider European landscape.

### **Theoretical Framework**

When it comes to identifying how contemporary Western democracies function (or dysfunction), several scholars agree with a progressive celebritisation of the public sphere. Among others, Olivier Driessens has recently advanced a multi-dimensional model defining "celebritization" as "the group of societal and cultural changes implied by celebrity"<sup>3</sup>. In simpler terms, this means that many contemporary societies are predominantly structured around the dynamics of celebrity culture, making pervasive use of mass and social media platforms to communicate and therefore turning these technologies into the privileged space where public discourse is exercised.

This preliminary consideration is connected to the political sphere.

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<sup>3</sup> Olivier Driessens, 'The Celebritization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(6), 2013, 641–657, p.643.

In 1994, Joshua Gamson was one of the first scholars to discuss the impact of the American star system on 20th Century national politics, concluding that:

*Celebrity is a world in which organizational and professional conflicts resolve in simulation, performance, mimicry, blurring: a world in which authenticity is deferred and superficial fragments circulate. Therein lie its dangers, but also its promise: to keep alive the conflict-ridden questions of power, role playing, equality and authority, to dwell in a cultural conversation that is elsewhere distorted or given up, indeed to protect it through its superficiality and triviality .<sup>4</sup>*

Since then, more and more publications have evaluated the consistency and impact of celebrity politics on Western societies by recognising that “the boundaries between celebrity and politics are becoming increasingly blurred”<sup>5</sup>, especially in the 21st Century. John Street investigated the core characteristics underpinning the essence of contemporary celebrity politicians, and identified at least two transformational groups. He defined the first type of celebrity politician, or “CP1”, as a “traditional politician [...] who engages with the world of popular culture in order to enhance or advance their pre-established political functions and goals”<sup>6</sup>. A CP1 is a candidate elected due to their political skills and who has progressively gained their popularity by engaging with their electorate on a large scale. The second type of celebrity politician, or “CP2”, is on the other hand, an “entertainer who pronounces on politics and claims the right to represent peoples and causes”<sup>7</sup>. In simpler terms, CP2s were already famous in business or showbusiness long before they took office. They successfully convert their fans into voters. While this second kind of profile might well apply to contemporary and past leaders such as

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<sup>4</sup>Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame - Celebrity in Contemporary America*, University of California Press, 1994, p.196.

<sup>5</sup>Sharon Coen, ‘The Age of Celebrity Politics’, in *The Psychologist*, 28(5), 2014 pp.372-375, p.372.

<sup>6</sup>John Street. ‘Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation.’ In *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6(4), 435–452, 2004, p.437

<sup>7</sup>Ibidem, p.438.

Donald Trump or Ronald Reagan, both the former Prime Ministers who are the very centre of this investigation - David Cameron and Matteo Renzi - firmly belong in the first category.

### **David Cameron and Matteo Renzi: The Making of Celebrity Politicians**

Both David Cameron and Matteo Renzi have been involved in politics since a young age. Cameron collaborated with the Conservative Research Department from 1988, whilst Renzi became junior secretary of the Italian Popular Party in 1995. They were both 22 at the time. Since then - and despite holding different political views - both leaders share a few similarities in their rise and consolidation as celebrity politicians.<sup>8</sup>

Firstly, *age*. In the years immediately preceding their election, Cameron and Renzi were much younger than their political opponents. As Leader of the Opposition, between late 2005 and mid-2010, Cameron (b.1966) was respectively fifteen and seventeen years younger than the Prime Ministers in office: Tony Blair (b.1953) and Gordon Brown (b.1951). Therefore, he was confronting two mature and solid leaders in their fifties for half a decade. He was 43 when he was first elected in 2010, making him the youngest prime minister in almost 200 years<sup>9</sup>. The same is true of Renzi, who consolidated his political growth in his early thirties by being president of the Province of Florence, then mayor of Florence and then Secretary of the Democratic Party. At 39 years old when he was elected in 2013, he was the youngest Prime Minister in Italian history and of the European Union at that time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>For extended reading on both Cameron and Renzi's early career see Michael Ashcroft, and Isabel Oakeshott, I. *Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron*, Biteback Publishing, 2015 and Matteo Renzi's official website available at: [www.matteorenzi.it](http://www.matteorenzi.it) [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>9</sup>Andrew Hough, 'David Cameron becomes youngest Prime Minister in almost 200 years' in *The Telegraph*, 11 May 2010. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/7712545/David-Cameron-becomes-youngest-Prime-Minister-in-almost-200-years.html> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>10</sup>Josephine McKenna, 'Matteo Renzi appointed as Italy's youngest ever prime minister', in *The Telegraph*, 17th February 2014. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

Secondly, *social media influence*. One of the indicators to measure popularity in the contemporary political landscape is the leader's ability to make use of major social media platforms.<sup>11</sup> Mark Wheeler has demonstrated that celebrity politicians not only communicate with vast audiences using these technologies, but they also use mass and social media to orchestrate their 'affective capacity' within the public sphere.<sup>12</sup> If we consider the use of social media, for instance, David Cameron quickly understood the importance of these platforms in his political life. With a range of 1.2-1.87 million followers in late 2018, his most successful profiles available are, respectively, Facebook and Twitter - the latter joined in January 2010 and with an average of over 300 tweets per year: almost one per day. Meanwhile, Renzi has 1.1 million followers on Facebook, and three times as much on Twitter, joined one year earlier than Cameron and boasting over 3.36 million followers.<sup>13</sup> With more than 6500 tweets, his tweet rate hits 1.9 per day, with Italian as the language used in the overwhelmingly majority of his posts. If these numbers look relatively small compared to other international leaders such as Donald Trump in the USA (counting 23 million followers on FB and 55.6 million on Twitter by November 2018), let us compare them with Cameron's successor and current British Prime Minister, Theresa May. Despite the fact that she has been negotiating the terms of Brexit for over two years, at November 2018, her accounts are almost half as followed as Cameron's ones, with 669,000 followers on Twitter and less than 491,000 on Facebook.<sup>14</sup> In Italy, the new Secretary

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[news/worldnews/europe/italy/10643606/Matteo-Renzi-appointed-as-Italys-youngest-ever-prime-minister.html](https://www.bbc.com/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10643606/Matteo-Renzi-appointed-as-Italys-youngest-ever-prime-minister.html) [Last Access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Mattias Ekman and Andreas Widholm. 'Twitter and the Celebritisation of Politics'. In *Celebrity Studies*, 5(4), 2014 or Eli Skogerbø and Arne H. Krumsvik 'Newspapers, Facebook and Twitter', in *Journalism Practice*, 9(3), pp.350-366, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, Polity Press, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See David Cameron's official social media profile. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DavidCameronOfficial/> [Last Access: 11/11/2018], Twitter: [https://twitter.com/david\\_cameron](https://twitter.com/david_cameron) and Matteo Renzi's official social media profile. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/matteorenziufficiale/> [Last Access: 11/11/2018], Twitter: <https://twitter.com/matteorenzi>.

<sup>14</sup> See Donald' Trump official social media profiles. Facebook: <https://www.face->

of the Democratic Party and leader of the opposition, Maurizio Martina - who resigned on October 30th 2018, only a few days before this article was finalised, is even less influential: his accounts show 219,000 followers on Twitter, and only slightly over 85,880 on Facebook.<sup>15</sup>

Thirdly, *famous friends and TV appearances*. Another key component of Cameron's celebrification is his familiarity with celebrities. Receiving public support from a recognised member of the star system appears to have a certain cachet in the UK political scene. The Financial Times has defined this phenomenon as the "battle of the celebrity endorsement"<sup>16</sup>. Among the plethora of stars who have endorsed Cameron in public or attended his glamorous celebrity parties hosted in the Foreign Office, are Take That singer Gary Barlow<sup>17</sup>, former American President Barack Obama<sup>18</sup> and even now-disgraced American producer Harvey Weinstein<sup>19</sup>. Another important step of celebrification is to reduce the distance between the formality of institutional patronage and the more relatable features of everyday life. In this sense, mainstream TV programmes are the perfect place where politicians can look

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book.com/DonaldTrump/ [Last access 11/11/2018] and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump> [Last access 11/11/2018]. See also Theresa May's official social media profiles. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheresaMayOfficial/> [Last access 11/11/2018] and Twitter: [https://twitter.com/theresa\\_may](https://twitter.com/theresa_may) [Last access 11/11/2018].

<sup>15</sup> More information available at Maurizio Martina's official social media pages. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/maumartina/> [Last access 11/11/2018] and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/maumartina> [Last access 11/11/2018].

<sup>16</sup> Aliya Ram, 'The Battle of Celebrity Endorsement', in *The Financial Times*, 31 March 2015. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/1201e35d-17ba-364e-821c-fd19ee134923> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Holehouse, 'Labour Slams Obama after endorsing David Cameron', in *The Telegraph*, 19 January 2015. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/harriet-harman/11356230/Labour-slams-Obama-after-endorsing-David-Cameron.html> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>19</sup> Rowena Mason, 'David Cameron revisits Cool Britannia (with Michael McIntyre and Cilla Black)', in *The Guardian*, 30th June 2014. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jun/30/david-cameron-a-listers-cool-britannia-party> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

“just like us” and build consensus<sup>20</sup>. Matteo Renzi has often appeared on national talk and talent shows as a special guest since a young age. Beyond competing in the popular quiz show “La Ruota Della Fortuna” back in 1994<sup>21</sup>, in recent years, he has made a marked effort to reach younger audiences. We see him dismissing his formal attitude in the 2011 interview for the MTV docu-series “Il Testimone” and then in his 2014 appearance in the popular teenage talent show, “Amici”, where he wears a 1950’s Fonzie-style leather jacket<sup>22</sup>. In Britain, Cameron’s IMDB page lists over 90 credits in TV appearances and over 60 in archive footage since he was first elected in 2010.<sup>23</sup>

### **Falling (Political) Stars: Dissecting Cameron and Renzi’s Resignation Speeches**

After evaluating the reasons why David Cameron and Matteo Renzi relate to the phenomenon of celebrity politicians, let us now focus on the moment of their fall: their resignation speeches. Cameron’s was on June 24th, 2016, immediately after the outcome of the Brexit vote. Renzi’s was given on December 5th, 2016, following the result of the Italian constitutional referendum. Some might consider these moments as simply a duty of protocol, but resignation speeches are actually complex events which follow multimodal communication strategies, “guided partly by visually salient and partly by semantically relevant aspects”<sup>24</sup>. This is why, in order to better outline the relevance of this

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Matthew Wood, Jack Corbett, and Matthew Flinders. ‘Just Like Us: everyday celebrity politicians and the pursuit of popularity in the age of anti-politics,’ in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18(3), pp.581-598, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> itafilmsubs, ‘Matteo Renzi Italy Prime Minister on ‘Ruota della Fortuna’\_Wheel of Fortune\_English subs’ [online video], 2014, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WENbhyXSxlo> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>22</sup> Amabile Stifano. ‘Matteo Renzi da Amici di maria de Filippi alla fiducia in Parlamento (tv talk)’, 2014 [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1qsSxLP87g> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

<sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive list of David’s Cameron’s TV appearances see his IMDB page available at: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2090098/> [Last access 11/11/2018].

<sup>24</sup> Jana Holšánová, ‘New Methods for Studying Visual Communication and Multimodal Integration’ in *Visual Communication* 11(3) pp. 251-257, 2012, p.252.

moment in the field of contemporary celebrity studies, I am going to apply a comparative approach by concomitantly focusing on the following aspects: the visual portrayal of the broadcast event in order to investigate the mass media behaviour; and the rhetoric of the speech itself in order to identify the precise moment marking the fall of the celebrity politician.

In terms of methodology, I mainly refer to rhetoric studies and particularly to what James Martin suggests in *Situating Speech: A Rhetorical Approach to Political Strategy* (2015) by focusing on (i) the rhetorical context, (ii) the rhetorical argument and (iii) the rhetorical effects. This approach allows us to understand what kind of strategy the falling leader is employing through his resignation speech in order to “orient audiences”<sup>25</sup> and therefore possibly preserve their celebrity status beyond their institutional role. In addition to this, I am employing visual analysis of the event in order to investigate if national TV broadcasters portray the falling leader as “likeable, funny or ridiculous”. These options align with the approach suggested by Katharina Lobinger and Cornelia Brantner in *Likable, funny or ridiculous? A Q-sort study on audience perceptions of visual portrayals of politicians*.<sup>26</sup> As case studies, I chose to analyse the type of videos produced by the two main national broadcasters: BBC and RAI. The reasoning behind this choice is two-fold: on the one hand, they are useful to understand what kind of media image national broadcasters decide to employ for institutional communications, and especially in such a critical moment for political stability. Additionally, both videos are also available on their official Youtube channel, providing us with a deeper insight into the online circulation of these videos beyond traditional television broadcast.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> James Martin, ‘Situating Speech. A Rhetorical Approach to Political Strategy’, in *Political Studies*, Vol.63, pp. 25-42, 2015, p.34.

<sup>26</sup> Katharina Lobinger and Cornelia Brantner, ‘Likable, funny or ridiculous? A Q-sort study on audience perceptions of visual portrayals of politicians’, In *Visual Communication*, 14(1), 15–40, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Matteo Renzi’s resignation speech video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qT9C5ALe6Q> [Last access: 11/11/2018]. Cameron’s resignation speech video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXNV3Ad0qQ0> [Last access: 11/11/2018].

## The Rhetorical Context

Let us now go deeper into considering the *rhetorical context* of Cameron and Renzi's resignation speeches. The event is an official statement from the Prime Minister in charge, acknowledging the defeat of the party they are representing. It is, therefore, an institutional occasion, a solo performance decreeing a ritual passage for national democracy: if the Prime Minister resigns, the entire country will experience a void in stability. As both leaders were responsible for proposing the referendum and campaigning for the opposite result (or at least this was what Cameron was doing in the final stage of the referendum campaign) great expectation was put on potential snap general elections after this announcement.<sup>28</sup>

David Cameron announced his resignation with a 7-minute speech compared to Matteo Renzi's 10-minute statement. Cameron's setting is outdoors, directly outside the Cabinet's office in 10 Downing Street, London. In contrast, Matteo Renzi's setting is indoors, in the conference room of Palazzo Chigi, Rome. They are both institutional places, often employed by the Prime Minister for delivering institutional communications. Both leaders are dressed formally in a dark-blue suit and tie, with Cameron opting for an azure shirt compared to the white one that Renzi wears. Both BBC and RAI tend to maintain an apparent neutral tone. Both speeches are delivered from official spaces and the broadcast features minimal camera movement.

It has been proven that the "depicted nonverbal behavior of a politician [such as] the activity, posture, gesture, facial expression and dress of the depicted person are of particular interest"<sup>29</sup> to preserve or build consensus. In particular, studies have shown that audiences tend to "dislike" big gestures and "uncontrolled facial expressions" and "lack of dominance", such as when the politician is not put at the centre of

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<sup>28</sup> On David Cameron campaigning to remain see Heather Stewart, Rajeev Syal and Rowena Mason, 'David Cameron makes final plea for Britain to vote to remain in the EU', in *The Guardian*, 22nd June 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/22/david-cameron-makes-final-plea-for-britain-to-vote-to-remain-in-the-eu> [Last access 19/11/2018].

<sup>29</sup> Lobinger and Brantner, 2015, p.18.

the image and their face is “hidden or partly hidden”<sup>30</sup>. As evidence of this, both leaders are shown in an ideal space, where light is well distributed on both their bodies and perfectly shaved faces and the camera movements are reduced to a minimum. The two maintain a generally calm and steady appearance while being filmed with predominantly medium-frontal-shots for most of the time. This means that both leaders are kept at the centre of the image, with Cameron being shown in the long distance only on a couple of occasions to include the image of the first lady standing next to him, and the plethora of journalists who he faces. By shifting the attention from Cameron’s words to visual elements for a few seconds, the broadcast enhances his likeability with a slightly “below-eye-level camera angle” of the Prime Minister<sup>31</sup>. This is predominantly maintained throughout the whole speech. Finally, both broadcasters choose to show their speeches as if the leaders are talking to the camera, directly orienting them “towards interaction” with the audience<sup>32</sup>. This reinforces once more the idea that national TV channels were not entirely neutral during this institutional fall. Instead, they tended to depict the leaders as empathetic and respectable instead of dislikable. Given these considerations as the main visual elements of the rhetorical context, let us now focus on the rhetorical strategy of the resignation.

### **The Rhetorical Strategy**

In terms of structure, both Cameron and Renzi’s speeches are tripartite, which means in simpler terms that they are composed of an introduction, the main body and a conclusion. The choice of using a tripartite structure is not new to the art of storytelling: it is familiar to novels, theatre, screenwriting and even classical music with its sonata form.<sup>33</sup> When it comes to effective speech writing in official events, Thomas

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p.24.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p.20.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p.18.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Syd Field, *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting*, Ebury Press, 2003 or James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Neale has outlined how “an arresting introduction should lead to an empathetic statement of the main theme or themes. The argument that follows seeks to elaborate and develop the theme convincingly and effectively - that is without too much detail. The central theme is restated in the closing proportion”.<sup>34</sup> This official guideline well reflects the strategy adopted by both Prime Ministers who begin their speech with an introduction of the purpose of the referendum and its outcomes, proceed by outlining the list of effective norms passed and adopted by their government, and finally conclude with their resignation and an indication of the need for further talks with other institutional representatives in order to make this passage official in the following days.

A functional structure is not, however, the only key element of effective communication. This is why it is important to focus on the ways that empathy and clarity are delivered through the choice of words and figures of speech. I will thus focus on three main aspects: (i) the number of collective terms used to show how the Prime Minister interacts with the whole nation, (ii) the way the resignation is announced in order to trace the exact moment of the leaders’ fall, and finally, (iii) the number of times Cameron and Renzi refer to themselves in the first person, in order to understand the dichotomy between the institutional role and their celebrity personality.

### **Collective Terms and Nationalism**

Several scholars have explored the effect of using collective terms in order to engage with the audience they represent.<sup>35</sup> In particular, Michael Billing has outlined the effectiveness of collective terms to reinforce a sense of “banal nationalism” in the audience, intended as the set of “ideological habits which enable the established nations of

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Neale et al. *Speechwriting in Perspective - A Brief Guide to Effective and Persuasive Communication*, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007, p.16.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Jim Gray, *How Leaders Speak: Essential Rules for Engaging and Inspiring Others*, Durndun, 2010 and Katarzyna Proctor and Lily I-wen Su, ‘The 1st Person Plural in Political Discourses - American Politicians in Interviews and in a debate’, in *Journal of Pragmatics* n.43, pp.3251-3266, 2011.

the West to be reproduced".<sup>36</sup> This technique is of great importance during the resignations, as it intends to prevent the electorate from distrusting the institutions, in particular the party which is governing the country and whose leader is officially resigning. The following table summarises how many times Cameron and Renzi have explicitly mentioned the name of their country or their nationality during their speech and for what purposes.

	Country (UK-Britain/Italy)	Nationality (British/Italian)	Europe (EU/European)	Tot
Renzi	11	5	2	17
Cameron	6	4	9	19

Table 1 - *Number of times the Prime Ministers refer to the country they represent and its people.*

Overall, Matteo Renzi refers to Italy and Italians 16 times. In a quarter of these, the name Italy is used to celebrate the country and draws cheers from the audience. For instance, he says "Viva l'Italia!". All other times, the word "Italy" is used to indicate Italian politics/politicians and democracy (see e.g. "politica italiana"; "democrazia italiana"; "politici che abbiamo in Italia"; "guida dell'Italia" eng. "Italian politics", "Italian democracy", "Italian politicians", "Italian guide") or the interaction with Renzi's government and the outcome on the population (e.g. "lasciamo l'Italia" eng. "We leave Italy"). By contrast, references to the European Union are generally used in a positive way, mentioning current politics (e.g. "in questa stagione politica europea" eng. "in this European political season") and the upcoming 60th anniversary from the Rome Treaty, of which Italy was one of the co-founders: "In Europa a marzo con l'appuntamento per i sessant'anni dell'Unione" eng. "we will celebrate the Union's 60th anniversary in March".

On the other hand, David Cameron employs national and collective terms on ten occasions. Two of them are used for economic reassurance, with expressions such as "Britain's economy is fundamentally strong..."

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<sup>36</sup>Michael Billing, *Banal Nationalism - Theory, Culture and Society*, SAGE, 1995, p.6.

or “Britain’s economic strength”. Other references to the country and its people show their direct relationship with the European Union. Cameron highlights the upcoming challenge of Brexit nine times in his speech, specifically referring to its broad impact on the social, political and economic life of the next years. He uses sentences like: “The British people have voted to leave the European Union”; “Britons living in European countries and European citizens living here” along with “we must prepare for a negotiation with the European Union”; “Britain’s position in the European Union” and “Britain is stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union” etc. In both speeches, the majority of collective terms is predominantly used in the first half of the ceremony, before officially announcing their resignations.

### **Resignation: Type of metaphor used to communicate they are quitting**

Once more, both leaders use the same rhetorical strategy to pre-announce their resignation, particularly in relation to the use of metaphors and metonymies. Scholars such as Beard (2000) and Cox (2012) have shown the correlation between the mastering of these figures of speech and the ability of the leader to engage with the audience to increase their popularity, especially in moments of crisis.<sup>37</sup> In particular, metaphors serve not only to create “an effect of surprise”<sup>38</sup> to reinforce the leader’s rhetoric but most importantly to explain complex events through popular imagery. In relation to this, Cameron and Renzi are not exceptions.

Cameron introduces the topic of his resignation by talking about “fresh leadership”, an adjective which has multiple layers of meaning. The Oxford dictionary lists the word “fresh” to indicate a context which is “not previously known or used; new or different”, a person “full of energy and vigour”, a weather which “rather cold and windy”

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<sup>37</sup> Adrian Beard, *The Language of Politics*. Routledge, 2000 and L. J. Cox., ‘Politics in Motion: Barack Obama’s use of movement’s metaphors’ in *American Communication Journal*, 14(2), pp. 1-13, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> William Franke, ‘Metaphor and the Making of Sense: The contemporary metaphor renaissance’. In *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 33(2), 137-153, 2000, p.145.

and a type of water which is “not salty”.<sup>39</sup>Cameron corroborates his resignation using maritime terms and metaphors, which suits well the insular conformation of the country. He extends this metaphor across five self-references and mentions the British people and its territory three times.

*But the British people have made a very clear decision to take a different path and as such I think the country requires **fresh leadership** to take it in this direction. I will do everything I can as Prime Minister to steady the **ship** over the coming weeks and months but I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the **captain** that steers our country to its next destination.<sup>40</sup>*

On the other hand, Renzi uses the metaphor of the “exploding chair” to refer to his own resignation:

*Volevo cancellare le troppe poltrone della politica: il Senato, le Province, il Cnel. Non ce l’ho fatta e **allora la poltrona che salta è la mia**. Domani pomeriggio riunirò il Consiglio dei ministri, ringrazierò i miei colleghi per la straordinaria avventura, una squadra **coesa, forte e compatta**, e salirò al Quirinale dove al presidente della Repubblica consegnerò le mie dimissioni. Tutto il Paese sa di poter contare su una guida **autorevole e salda** quale quella del Presidente Mattarella.<sup>41</sup>  
I wanted to eliminate the excessive chairs of our politics: the Senate, the Provinces and the Cnel. I could not make it and therefore **the chair that will explode is my own**. Tomorrow afternoon I will call for a meeting with all the ministers of this government, I will thank my colleagues for this extraordinary adventure: they are a **strong, solid***

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<sup>39</sup> See definition of “fresh” in Oxford Dictionary, available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fresh> [Last access 19/11/18].

<sup>40</sup> See Cameron’s full resignation speech transcript here: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/david-cameron-announces-his-resignation---full-statement/> [Last access 19/11/18].

<sup>41</sup> Renzi’s resignation speech transcript available here: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/testo-integrale-discorso-dimissioni-matteo-renzi-1339010.html> [Last access 19/11/18].

*and cohesive team. Then, I will resign in front of the President of the Republic, at the Quirinale. All the nation knows they can count on the steady and authoritative guidance of President Mattarella.*

Despite using terms that call for institutional destruction, this key passage also serves as reassurance for the institutional strength of the democracy and his party. The use of terms such as “cohesive”, “strong”, “solid”, “authoritative” and “steady” for the role of the President of the Republic support this point. As well as Renzi, Cameron seems to show a faith in the democratic process too, concluding his speech with a direct reference to the Cabinet, the Governor of the Bank of England and the Queen.

*The Cabinet will meet on Monday, the Governor of the Bank of England is making a statement about the steps that the Bank and the Treasury are taking to reassure financial markets. We will also continue taking forward the important legislation that we set before Parliament in the Queen’s Speech. And I have spoken to Her Majesty the Queen this morning to advise her of the steps that I am taking.*

### **Self-reference: number of times politicians are talking about themselves**

Beyond the reassurances to their nations that their resignations would not impact on institutional stability, these two speeches feature a key aspect of celebrity politics: the insistent use of first person and self-references. James Martin suggests that effective rhetoric happens with the use of “expressive conceptions of ideas” which allow celebrity politicians to take a “strategic re-appropriation of a situation”, putting “a greater focus on actors than institutions”.<sup>42</sup> Despite using collective terms 13 (Renzi) and ten times (Cameron), both resignation speeches show evidence of celebrity traits, reflecting the the spotlight which is upon them, much more so than on any broader institution. To give an example, the focus of Renzi’s speech is on a very *personal defeat*, rather

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<sup>42</sup>James Martin, 2015, p.26.

than a party defeat. This is remarked four times: “I have lost” (3) and “I didn’t make it”. He never says “The Democratic Party has lost” or “The government has lost the referendum”. Also, Renzi uses the pronoun “I” 25 times: 5 explicitly and 20 implicitly, as well as the adjective “my” 7 times, including “my government”; “my successor”. This indicates a total of 32 self-references - three a minute - compared to the 17 uses of collective terms. On the other hand, Cameron uses “I” 26 times and possessive adjectives such as “my” and “myself” 6 times (totaling 32 occasions - one every 14 seconds), compared to the 19 occasions when he uses collective terms.

### **The Rhetorical Effects**

The previous sections have discussed how the resignation speeches affected the institutional role of both Renzi and Cameron - or at least their immediate futures. At a personal level, a resignation speech is where the institutional role of the leader ends. Paraphrasing Kantorowicz’ *The King’s Two Bodies*, a resignation speech is an ending ceremony for a democratic cycle; it is the moment when the *body politic* of the Prime Minister ends their leadership and gets separated from their *body natural* and the politicians goes back to their normal life.<sup>43</sup>

But what happens when the politician is a celebrity? The resignation speeches of both leaders marked their (temporary) fall from the olympus of celebrity. Not only did both leaders lose their positions of government leadership, but their entire parties have since suffered a reduction of power, showing how celebrity politicians might be the talismen of their parties. After Cameron’s resignation, Theresa May was called to lead the Conservative Party in the UK, but lost 13 seats in the 2017 snap elections. This forced the new government to form a coalition with the Irish Democratic Union Party (DUP) in the midst of the ongoing Brexit negotiations.<sup>44</sup> It was a similar story for the Democratic Party in Italy. Despite losing the referendum, Renzi had been able to

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<sup>43</sup> See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies - A study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, 2016, First published in 1957.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Cowley and Dennis Cavanagh, *The British General Elections of 2017*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

convince around 40% of the electorate support the government led by his Democratic Party. After his resignation, the results of the 2018 elections showed that only 19% of the electorate voted for the Democratic party, a net loss of over half of their previous supporters.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, although both Cameron and Renzi attempted to reassure their public that the economy would be stable, both countries appeared to foresee adverse consequences in the near future. A recent leak of information has suggested an apocalyptic scenario in the case of a no-deal outcome between the UK and the EU in which “the port of Dover will collapse on day one. The supermarkets of Cornwall and Scotland will run out of food within a couple of days, and hospitals will run out of medicines within two weeks”.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, Italy may soon face disciplinary action from the EU as the 2019 Budget Act drafted by the new governing and eurosceptic coalition - Lega North and Five Star Movement - could increase public debt.<sup>47</sup>

The resignations of Cameron and Renzi not only impacted their personal careers, but also destabilised the future of their party and their countries' economy. Their resignations also had a profound impact on the European Union. The EU is the main institution suffering from the resignation of these two celebrity politicians: the British withdrawal marks a historic defeat in the history of the Union, directly impacting the lives of EU nationals living in the UK and British nationals residing in EU members states - over 4.5 million people in total - and indirectly affecting both present and future generations in terms of free movement and trades. At the same time, the new Italian government is actively challenging the values of the Union by criminalising boat

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<sup>45</sup> The Guardian, *Italian Elections 2018 - Full Results*, 5th March 2018, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/mar/05/italian-elections-2018-full-results-renzi-berlusconi> [Last access 19/11/18].

<sup>46</sup> Heather Stewart, Rajeev Syal and Rowena Mason, 'David Cameron makes final plea for Britain to vote to remain in the EU', in *The Guardian*, 22nd June 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/22/david-cameron-makes-final-plea-for-britain-to-vote-to-remain-in-the-eu> [Last access 19/11/2018].

<sup>47</sup> See BBC News, 'Italy budget: Rome set to back down in EU row', 26th November 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46343033> [Last access: 26/22/2018].

migration and threatening to leave the monetary zone and to deport Roma communities, leading to an unexpected domino effect in other member states.<sup>48</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored the correlation between celebrity politicians and resignation speeches. In relation to RQ1, through the key examples of David Cameron and Matteo Renzi, this study has shown how national broadcasters have actively supported the respectability of their leaders and has kept the visual representation of the ceremony the most institutional as possible. In relation to RQ2, this study has shown that the words chosen by both leaders have highlighted the predominant use of self-reference over the choice of collective terms which is in contrast to their formal support for other governing institutions. In relation to RQ3, the findings of this study have shown that, whilst both leaders made reassuring comments about the political and economic stability of their countries, the consequences of their resignations did not play out so smoothly, as shown by the ongoing Brexit negotiations and the volatile politics of the new Italian government. A final consideration is that November 2019 will see the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though it is not possible to draw a clear conclusion from the fallout of Cameron and Renzi's resignations, this act of remembrance will cast light upon the significance of the European identity: firstly, as the EU will celebrate 30 years as a Union without walls dividing its citizens; secondly, as for the first time 2019 Brexit Britain will redesign the EU's geopolitical shape.

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<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Stephanie Kirchgaessner, 'Far-right Italy minister vows 'action' to expel thousands of Roma'. In *The Guardian*, 19th June 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/19/italy-coalition-rift-roma-register-matteo-salvini> [Last access: 11/11/2018].



# Celebrity Strategies for the Market and Beyond



PUBLISHING STRATEGIES AND CELEBRITY  
IN THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NETHERLANDS.  
THE CASE OF GERBRAND BREDERO

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**Abstract**

In the Dutch Golden Age every literary publication of major importance was packed with preliminary laudatory poems. These paratextual poems provide indications about the content of the work and contain praises to the author and his work, sometimes in rather excessive terms. As publishers used to arrange these contributions, there is certainly also a strategic aim involved: they manipulate the image of the author involved. Moreover, they not only strengthen the fame of the author but also steer the interpretation of the author's work and personality in a particular direction and exclude alternative ways of giving meaning to the data. In this article, I discuss these means of manipulative practices. As an example I consider the literary career of the Dutch playwright Gerbrand Bredero (1585-1618). His regular publisher Cornelis vander Plasse supported Bredero's publications never neglecting his commercial instinct. Some of the strategies of this publisher are discussed, one of them being the publication of almost 30 elegies immediately after the death of Bredero.

**Introduction**

In the 17th century the Dutch Republic became a world power. It was a period of economic growth, a strongly growing population, rising wealth, and a boost in demand for books. From 1590 onwards, the book production industry increased swiftly as did the quality of the produced books. Since the conditions were favourable, the number of booksellers and publishers showed a strong growth.

An important factor that contributed to the success of printing and bookselling in the Netherlands was the lack of political authority, thus of control, the result of the country's political structure and absence of a state religion.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Republic of the 17th century was a loose confederation of seven provinces of which Holland (the west side of the country) was the most powerful. Moreover, due to the long-established tradition of tolerance, the book trade benefitted largely from the continuous arrival of newcomers, not only potential customers on the market in books but also numerous printers and booksellers from the Southern Netherlands (which is Belgium nowadays).<sup>2</sup> Religious and economic immigrants provided the necessary manpower, skills and creativity. The notable success of the publishing, printing and book-selling business in the Northern Netherlands (the Netherlands nowadays) also affected the quantity of book sales.<sup>3</sup> Presumably more books were printed in the Netherlands than in all other European countries put together during the 17th century.<sup>4</sup>

Publishing houses in the Dutch Republic were concentrated in cities and towns. Leiden, Amsterdam, and The Hague developed as centres of book production: around 1619 there were more than 30 publishers in Amsterdam, 12 in Leiden, and 10 in Rotterdam.<sup>5</sup> Due to publishing

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<sup>1</sup> A good introductory overview of Dutch book history is provided by Paul G. Hoftijzer, 'The Dutch Republic, Centre of the European Book Trade in the 17th Century', in: European History Online (EGO), published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2015-11-23. URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/hoftijzerp-2015-en> [2018-03-25].

<sup>2</sup> Paul G. Hoftijzer, 'The History of the Book in the Low Countries', in: Michael F. Suarez & H.R. Woudhuysen (eds.), *Oxford Companion to the Book*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 212-221.

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive history of the Dutch book production in the early modern period is offered by Andrew Petegree and Arthur der Weduwe, *The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age*, New York, Yale University Press, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See Herman De la Fontaine Verwey, 'Het Hollandse Wonder', in: idem, *Uit de Wereld van het Boek*, vol. IV: Boeken, Banden en Bibliofielen, Houten, 1979, p. 46-64.

<sup>5</sup> Claartje Rasterhoff, *Painting and Publishing as Cultural Industries. The Fabric of Creativity in the Dutch Republic, 1580-1800*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2017, p. 40.

houses like the Blaeu firm cultural production reached high levels in terms of scale and quality in this period.<sup>6</sup> But to become famous as a literary writer in a booming city like Amsterdam must not have been an easy task, as early as the first decades of the 17th century.<sup>7</sup> There were no newspapers or magazines, no real theatre or centralized cultural meeting place, and literary criticism did not really exist.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, advertisements for books in Dutch newspapers did not exist yet.<sup>9</sup>

In this paper I will discuss some publishing strategies in the Early Modern Period. I will describe some different ways in which a publisher could attribute to the fame of an individual author in this period. The availability of a huge amount of books for domestic consumption points to a substantial reading public in the Dutch Republic.<sup>10</sup> Although the printing firms were often separated from the publishing houses - books were printed all over the Netherlands - , most of them were produced in Amsterdam, the country's main book trade centre. This was a cultural centre as well, the place to be for writers who wanted to profit from the economical and cultural hub.

As an example of celebrification and the effect of a publisher's acting on the celebrity of a single Amsterdam writer, my focus is on the poet and playwright Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (1585-1618) and his childhood friend Cornelis Lodewijcksz. vander Plasse (1585-1641), an Amsterdam bookbinder, bookseller and publisher. To get a clear pic-

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<sup>6</sup> See Djoeke van Netten, *Koopman in kennis. De uitgever Willem Jansz. Blaeu in de geleerde wereld (1571-1638)*, Zutphen, Walburg Pers, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> An overview of the celebrity culture in the Early Modern Low Countries is provided by Arnoud Visser, *In de gloria. Literaire roem in de Renaissance*, The Hague, ANV, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, there was a large number of auction catalogues in this period. See Bert van Selm, *'Een menighte treffelijcke Boecken'. Nederlandse boekhandelscatalogi in het begin van de zeventiende eeuw*, Utrecht, 1987; Bert van Selm and J. Gruys (eds.), *Book sales catalogues of the Dutch Republic, 1599-1800 on microfiche*, Leiden, 1990 vlgg.

<sup>9</sup> The earliest book advertisements in the Dutch Republic date from 1624. Bert van Selm, "'Het komt altemael aen op het distribuweeren". De boekdistributie in de Republiek als object van onderzoek', in: Joost Kloek en Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.), *De productie, distributie en consumptie van cultuur*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1991, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Hoftijzer, 'The Dutch Republic', p. 27.

ture of how their relationship has come into being, and how it continued even stronger after the author died, I will consider some of the main events during the ten-year literary career of Bredero and the following twenty years, in which his publisher Vander Plasse did his utmost to publish all writings of his beloved friend after the latter had suddenly died. In what way did this publisher try to exploit reader engagement? And what was the impact of all his efforts on the publication of Bredero's oeuvre? Some of the publisher's decisions, as I will show, enhanced Bredero to become not only an Amsterdam celebrity during the first half of the century, but also a national one in the 19th- and 20th- century Netherlands. Today, Bredero is considered one of the 'big five', or even 'big three', the most important writers of the Dutch Golden Age.<sup>11</sup>

### Selective matching

Bredero died in 1618, at the early age of 33, unmarried, without children. At that moment Amsterdam counted almost 50 booksellers. But it is evident that Vander Plasse, Bredero's regular publisher since the very beginning, should take care of the literary legacy. He collected all he could find of Bredero's work scattered across the city, even the smallest fragments. Twenty years later, in 1638, he finally had the opportunity to publish Bredero's collected works (*Alle de wercken*), the first time as well that Bredero's complete drama was brought out. This compilation of 1638 marked the very end of a publishing relationship that took a life time. In his introduction to this volume, Vander Plasse elaborates on three aspects of Bredero's mastery: his talent, the quality of his poems and drama, and the unprecedented popularity of this Amsterdam author during his life.<sup>12</sup> Some laudatory poems in the preliminary pages point at the tireless efforts of his publisher. During 20 years after Bredero's death he took the initiative to make his readers familiar with everything Bredero had written or had started, as some

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. René van Stipriaan, *De hartenjager. Leven, werk en roem van Gerbrandt Adriensz Bredero*, Amsterdam, Querido, 2018, p. 153; Freddy de Schutter, *Het verhaal van de Nederlandse literatuur: Middeleeuwen Renaissance - Barok*, Kapellen, DNB, 1992, p. 285.

<sup>12</sup> G.A. Bredero, *Alle de wercken*, Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1638, fol. A4r.

of his plays remained unfinished. As we will see, he also gave Bredero a lasting identity, by revealing his portrait and personal notes. According to Vander Plasse, there was no need to honour foreign writers, if one compared Dutch authors to the worldfamous ones from Antiquity:

*Heinsius and Hooft are our Homer, Vondel our Pindar, Coster our Vergil, and the (ah!) deceased Bredero our Terence.*<sup>13</sup>

The equation of all these Dutch authors one-to-one with the top-classics is an ultimate form of praise. By comparing Bredero to Terence and by mentioning him between other well-known Dutch poets like Hooft and Vondel, Bredero is wrapped in a laudatory cloak from the first stroke of the pen. The strategy to disseminate 'names that represent quality' has been described by Sébastien Dubois, in his article about the structure of the literary market.<sup>14</sup> This strategy, 'selective matching', consists of the selection and association of high-status authors. In his view the incorporation of a specific writer into a series of authoritative and high-quality authors is an extremely efficient mechanism for building reputation and the establishment of poets. In this way, it becomes evident that editors and publishers are core actors in the poetry world,<sup>15</sup> in the early 17th century as well, as the relationship between Bredero and Vander Plasse clearly shows.

In any case, these laudatory remarks from publisher Vander Plasse regarding Bredero (who died twenty years earlier) don't arrive unexpectedly here. They were close friends, for many years, from their youth, at school.<sup>16</sup> They lived in the same Amsterdam district, not far apart. Different prefaces by Vander Plasse to Bredero's oeuvre under-

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<sup>13</sup>C.L. vander Plasse, 'Voor-reden aen den lief-hebbende Leser', in: Bredero, *Alle de Wercken*, Amsterdam, fol. C2v: 'Heynsius ende Hooft, sijn onse Homerus, Vondel onsen Pindarus, Koster onsen Virgilius, ende den (och!) afgheleefde Bredero onsen Terentius'.

<sup>14</sup>Sébastien Dubois, 'Recognition and Renown. The Structure of Cultural Markets: Evidence from French Poetry', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 36, 2012, p. 27-48, 29; cf. Visser, *In de Gloria*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Dubois, 'Recognition and Renown', p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>E.K. Grootes, in: G.A. Bredero, *Schyn-heylich*, ed. E.K. Grootes, The Hague, Tjeenk Willink, 1979, p. 13.

line their personal relationship, their being friends, rather than a pure commercial connection.<sup>17</sup> During almost thirty years, Vander Plasse was committed to publishing Bredero's writings and he supported the author's reputation building by quite a number of strategic decisions.

One of them becomes evident immediately after Bredero died in 1618. Vander Plasse arranged a considerable collection of funeral poems. In the next years, as we will discuss below, the efforts of this Amsterdam publisher brought us about half of Bredero's total oeuvre, including the famous farces and the complete songbook. He safeguarded the literary legacy of his friend, his personal archive, correspondence and yet unfinished plays. Not only did he publish yet unknown work, letters and orations by Bredero but he increased the reputation of the poet by honourable mentions and citations in the introduction of posthumous editions and reprints of Bredero's oeuvre. As a gatekeeper, Vander Plasse established Bredero's name so solidly during the first half of the 17th century, that all foundations to become a canonical Dutch author in a later period have been laid: in almost everything we know about and from Bredero nowadays, Vander Plasse has been an intermediary.<sup>18</sup> He is the one who collected, published and distributed not only the plays by Bredero, his songs and lyrics, but also personal writings like letters and orations; he ensured that a lot of contemporary judgements on the author and his work were published, in laudatory poems.

### **Vander Plasse's reputation**

Canonization of Dutch literature in the 19th and 20th centuries is often anticipated by, and draws on, the literary practice in the period before 1800, which tended to take place in the social framework of city cultures.<sup>19</sup> Amsterdam was in the centre of the Low Countries' book culture: writers, booksellers, and publishers were everywhere in the

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<sup>17</sup> Idem, p. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> See J.P. Naeff, *De waardering van Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero*, Gorinchem, Noorduijn, 1960.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Joep Leerssen, 'Vondel 1867. Amsterdam-Netherlands, Protestant-Catholic', in: Joep Leerssen & Ann Rigney (eds.), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe. Nation-Building and Centenary Fever*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2014, p. 174.

city. The Netherlands consisted of several urban areas, the cities in close proximity to each other, facilitating specialization, differentiation, exchange of know-how and information. Urban networks stimulated collaboration, but they also led to cost reduction, innovation and quality improvement.<sup>20</sup> Relationships between publishers, printers and engravers, local and inter-local, were important assets for market expansion through product differentiation, which was according to Rasterhoff one of the characteristics of the Golden Age book production in the early years of the 17th century.<sup>21</sup> Bredero was an Amsterdam icon in his time before he became a national one in the modern period.<sup>22</sup> His originality, creativity and the literary quality of the innovative songs and plays were no more than passing phenomena to the extent that the songs have been written only to be sung around the Amsterdam canals and the plays to be performed in the local Chamber of rhetoric, a society of art lovers. The fixed and timeless success of this author has been established through the printing process. From the time his works have been printed, from around 1616, everybody in the Netherlands could read and enjoy his texts.<sup>23</sup>

Bredero and Vander Plasse belonged together: their social and geographical connection made their cooperation to a successful enterprise. Bredero's living house was located a stone's throw from the bookshop of Vander Plasse in the Amsterdam centre (fig. 1).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rasterhoff, *Painting and Publishing as Cultural Industries*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. idem, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> See Leerssen, 'Vondel 1867', p. 175.

<sup>23</sup> Some elegies (1619) point to this aspect. An anonymous funeral poem reads: 'His [Bredero's] name and writings live forever, which are available for everybody across the Netherlands' (Garnt Stuiveling, *Memoriaal van Bredero*, Culemborg, Tjeenk Willink, 1970, p. 179: 'zijn naam en schriften eeuwich leven, / Die't gansche Neerlandt door zijn yeder voor de hant').

<sup>24</sup> Henk Borst, Cor van der Kogel, Paul Koopman & Piet Verkruijsse, 'Analytische bibliografie en literatuurgeschiedenis Wonen in het Woord - Leven in de letter', *Literatuur*, 5, 1988, p. 332.



Figure 1 – Many bookshops and publishing houses were located around the Amsterdam Bourse in the centre of the city. On the corner Cornelis vander Plasse started his bookshop in 1611 and somewhat later his publishing house. Engraving of P.H. Schut, in: Filips von Zesen, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam [...]*, Amsterdam, Joachim Nosche, 1664, opposite p. 232. (<http://www.bibliopolis.nl/beeldbank>)

In his publishing house Vander Plasse maintained intensive contact with writers, engravers, other booksellers, printers, elsewhere in the city.<sup>25</sup> He consistently established himself as the careful publisher of Bredero, who worked on the basis of autograph manuscripts that he collected from everywhere in the city after Bredero's death.

*Since I know, my dear art-loving and lust-loving Reader, that you are very devoted to the lessons and poems of the honourable, very famous and deceased Poet, Gerbrant Adriaensz. Bredero, all the personally written works of whom I have collected, not without great pain and high costs, I have pulled his writings from the hands of everyone amongst whom I found his writings, in order to dedicate them as gracefully as possible, according to their value, to you, kind-hearted Reader.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Paul Dijkstra & Piet Verkruisje, 'Een schitterend moeras. Boek en wereld in de zeventiende eeuw', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis*, 17, 2010, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup>C.L. vander Plasse, 'Den drucker tot den leser', in: Bredero, *Kluchten* (1619),

The reputation of Vander Plasse as a caretaking, committed publisher was repeatedly advocated by his preliminary remarks, in which he stated that he had made agreements with the author and that the published text was connected as closely as possible to the intention of his deceased friend. In one preface he emphasizes that his version of the text did justice to the original idea and spirit of the author's language, since he used Bredero's autographs.<sup>27</sup>

### **Five decisive moments**

Vander Plasse proved to be not only a commercial but also a dedicated editor. When we have a closer look at some crucial moments in their interrelation we can distinguish the following five stages in a chronological line:

1. The recognition and admittance of Bredero's success at an early stage. Already in 1612, when scarcely any of Bredero's verses has been printed, Vander Plasse qualifies Bredero as: 'my very good friend and excellent Poet'.<sup>28</sup> The same year Vander Plasse started his publishing house and bookshop close to the Amsterdam Stock Exchange near the Dam Square. At the same moment, he began to publish Bredero.<sup>29</sup>

2. In 1617 Vander Plasse published a compilation of all plays by Bredero performed until that moment (*De Spelen*). This was a very unusual step in this early period, as this collection was published during

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fol. E2recto: 'Vermidts ick U.E. konst-gierighe ende lust-lievende Leser, weet seer gheneghen te wesen tot de lessen ende ghedichtselen des E. seer vermaerden Rymer, *Gerbrant Adriaensz. Brederode*, salig. diens wercken ick alle, met ziin eyghen handt gheschreven, niet sonder groote moeyten ende diere kosten, hebbe by een versamelt, lae een yegelijk by wien ick ziin schriften vondt, de selve als uyt de handen ghebrouwen, arbedyende omme die nae hunne weerde op het cierliickste U.E, goetwillighe Leser op te dragen'.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, fol. E2recto.

<sup>28</sup> C.L. vander Plasse, 'Voor-reden' (preface), *Het vierde deel van de Tragische of claechlijcke Historien*, Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1612: 'mijnen seer goeden vrient, excellent Poet en Rijmer'. <http://cf.hum.uva.nl/bookmaster/Bredero&Starter/index.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> See Jeroen Jansen, 'Hoe Bredero's carrière begon', in *VakTaal* 31, 2018, 3, p. 7-9.

Bredero's lifetime. The most striking, however, is that the publisher asked the famous Amsterdam playwright Samuel Coster to write a lofty dedication to this volume. In this dedication, directed to the Amsterdam burgomasters and magistrates, Coster announces the establishment of a new Amsterdam theater. It was opened a few months later, a wonderful building on a beautiful spot at the Keizersgracht among the huge canal-side houses of rich merchants and entrepreneurs.<sup>30</sup> The dedication is carefully structured. First Coster discusses the excellence of poetry in Antiquity, and the valuation of it by rulers, emperors, princes and kings. Then he underlines the stunning succes of Bredero's play's at the Amsterdam Chamber of rhetoric, followed by the wish that the magistrate will appreciate poetry in these 'happy and fruitful time of poets'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the plays by Bredero are worthy of a new theater.

3. After Bredero had suddenly died in August 1618, Vander Plasse must have asked for elegies in the circle of Amsterdam poets and colleagues. He has gathered a huge amount of funeral poems and published almost thirty of them a few months later (fig. 2).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> G.A. Bredero, *De Spelen*. Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1617, fol. (†)3 recto (dedication); see about this new theatre: M.B. Smits-Veldt: 'De "Nederduytsche Academie" van Samuel Coster: de eerste Nederlandse volksuniversiteit (1617-1622)', in: *Literatuur*, 1, 1984, p. 58-64.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Coster, Dedication to the burgomasters of Amsterdam, in: Bredero, *De Spelen*.

<sup>32</sup> *Lijck-dichten, Over't afsterven des aardighen ende vermaarden Poets, Garbrant Adriaensz. Brederode*, Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1619. See Jeroen Jansen, 'Een volkomen bloementuin'. *De Lijck-dichten (1619) voor Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero*, in: *Jaarboek Zeventiende Eeuw* (2019) (to be published).

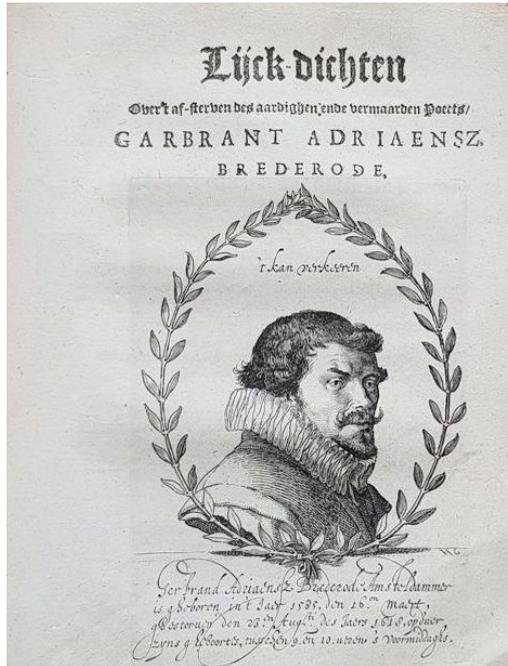


Figure 2 – Titlepage of the Elegies (*Lijck-dichten*) for the death of Gerbrand Bredero. The elegies were published by Cornelis vander Plasse in the first edition of Bredero’s play *Stommen ridder* (1619), after this separate titlepage. Here the portrait of Bredero is shown for the first time; above his head his life motto: ‘t kan verkeeren’ (‘All is changeable’). Under the portrait a text in which the date of his birth and death are indicated.

This edition of Elegies (*Lijck-dichten*) shows clearly the status of Bredero as a local celebrity at that very moment. Such a publication was unprecedented, and it demonstrates how popular the poet was among his fellow citizens. They all strongly and intensely experienced the loss. The elegies were written by different poets, including famous Dutch authors like Samuel Coster, Petrus Scriverius and Joost van den Vondel. It marks Bredero’s decease as a moment at which Amsterdam authors sing the praises of their popular and much-loved former colleague.

The poems predominantly breathe the usual funeral topics of praise, grief and consolation. But the very first of all these poems, a lengthy ‘Epitaph, or elegy on the death of the significant poet G.A. Bredero’ (‘Epitaphium. Oft Graf-dicht Op ’t overlyden vanden sinrijcken Poet G.A. Brederood’), tells its readers how Bredero died:

*We are told that Atropos has cut the thread of Bredero's life,  
And the inanimate trunk has crashed to earth.  
The bitter Death, who doesn't want to spare anybody,  
Has hit him as well, with regard to veins, nerves and muscles.<sup>33</sup>*

It seems to have been a sudden death. Bredero has dropped down death on the spot. The remark gives us an indication of the cause of death, probably heart failure.<sup>34</sup> It is not unlikely that this epitaph was recited at the occasion of the funeral ceremony.

Both, the separate edition of funeral poems and the posthumous portrait of Bredero on its title page, are notable phenomena in this period.<sup>35</sup> The portrait, an engraving by Hessel Gerritsz., is also included in subsequent editions of Bredero, like that of the cheap small-format (9,5 x 7 cm) songbook of 1621. It repeatedly shows the poet in a laurel wreath and his personal motto 'All is changeable' ('t kan verkeren). A few years later, in the expensive edition of Bredero's songbook (1622) the portrait of Bredero has been flanked by a few of these elegies, written by the most famous of them: Joost van den Vondel, Petrus Scriverius, and Samuel Coster (fig. 3). The book is characterized by balanced pages, different fonts, ornate and decorative letters, and many book illustrations (engravings) by Pieter Serwouters and Jan van de Velde (after David Vinckboons), especially made for this edition.

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<sup>33</sup> *Lijck-dichten*, fol. A1recto: 'Men zeyt dat *Atrop*' heeft *Breed'roo* zijn draat ghekort, / En de zielloose romp ter aarden is ghestort./ De felle Doodt, die doch niemanden niet wil vieren, / Deez' heeft hem oock ghetreft, voor ad'ren, ze'en en spieren'. See also Stuiveling, *Memoriaal*, p. 176-178. The author of this 'Epitaphium' is unknown, as he shields himself behind a motto ('Roemt u leven alijnd'). Probably, he was a member of the Amsterdam Chamber of rhetoric. See Jeroen Jansen, 'Het raadsel van Bredero's dood', *VakTaal*, 31, 2018, 3, p. 10-13.

<sup>34</sup> Other scholars have concluded, on the basis of different textual evidence, that it might have been suicide. Fons Gommers, 'De romantische Bredero, fabulieren of interpreteren', in *VakTaal*, 24, 2011, 4, p. 15; Van Stipriaan, *De hartenjager*, p. 128.

<sup>35</sup> According to Jan Te Winkel, 'Den Nederduytschen Helicon van 1610', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde*, 18, 1899, p. 255, in the preceding period only two literary writers, Matthijs de Castelein en Karel van Mander, were honoured with one or more elegies.

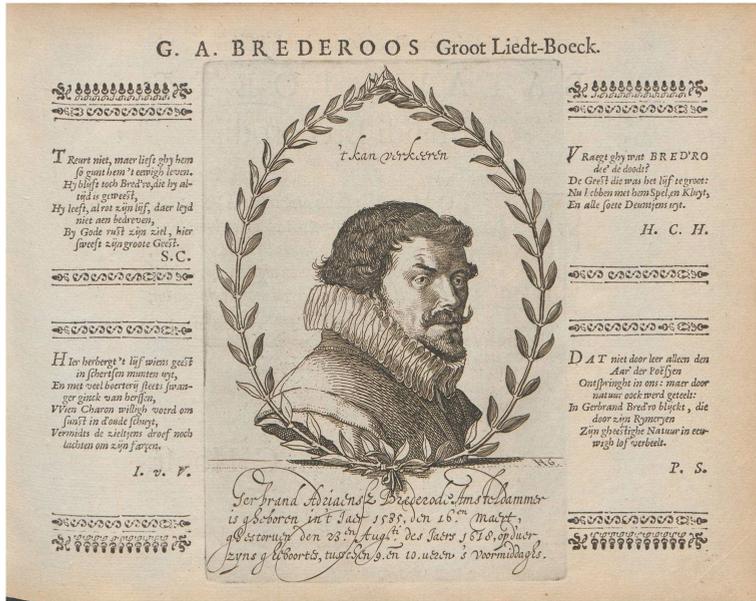


Figure 3 – The portrait of Bredero in G.A. Brederoos Groot Liedt-Boeck, the expensive edition of Bredero’s Large Song Book (1622), flanked by a few of the elegies, written by the most famous authors of this period. This was arranged in this way by Vander Plasse. On the left elegies by S.C. (Samuel Coster) and I.v.V. (Joost van den Vondel), on the right: H.C.H. (Hendrick Cornelisz. Hoofft) and P.S. (Petrus Scriverius).

4. After the death of Bredero, the role and value of paratextual material became still more important. Like other publishers, Vander Plasse used them as a personalized promotional marketing program. Apart from the front matter: title page, cover, frontispiece, dedicatory letters, etc., especially the prefaces point out the commercial, artistic, and informative value of the publication. The publisher recognizes his duty to manage Bredero’s literary inheritance, establishing the completion and publication of yet unpublished and incomplete work and of Bredero’s personal archive (1618-1638), and a lot of reprints.

The publisher knew that performances of Bredero’s farces were extremely successful and he must have expected a favorable reception of the publication. The same goes for 200 songs in the *Large Song Book*

(1622), which he gathered, so he says, 'with unbelievable great efforts'.<sup>36</sup>

5. Bredero's large popularity among Amsterdam citizens will have been a reason for Vander Plasse to secure his publishing rights. The first edition of Bredero's songbook (1616), for example, was so popular that the author himself didn't get a copy of it. Some of Vander Plasse's Bredero-editions were reprinted by rival publishers.<sup>37</sup> In April 1622 Vander Plasse obtained a patent 'to print, publish and sell the works by Bredero (plays, poems, emblems and other poetry) in the United Provinces of the Netherlands during six years'.<sup>38</sup> Finally, he made an effort to further disseminate Bredero's name as an Amsterdam author of high quality, talent and originality. He included laudatory remarks and recommendations in prefaces, during more than 20 years, in this way securing the memory of Bredero for a complete new generation readers.<sup>39</sup> In almost every edition in which Vander Plasse addresses his readers in an introduction, we hear the same story. He praises Bredero's work for its quality and for bringing learning and pleasure to its readers, then he lashes out at other publishers about the quality of their editions, underlining the importance of the edition at issue, and finally he emphasizes the trouble and expanses of collecting the material: wherever he could find something written by Bredero, it had to be published however small it was.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> G.A. Bredero, *Groot lied-boeck*, 3 vols, editie G. Stuiveling e.a., vol. 1, Culemborg 1975, p. 15: 'naer ongelooftelicke moeyte te hebbe weten te bekomen'.

<sup>37</sup> E.K. Grootes, '9 april 1622: Cornelis Lodowijcksz. Van der Plasse ontvangt een privilege van de Staten-Generaal voor het drukken van alle werken van Bredero', in: M.A. Schenkeveld-Van der Dussen (eds), *Nederlandse literatuur: een geschiedenis*, Groningen, Noordhoff, 1993, p. 202-206.

<sup>38</sup> Bredero, *Groot lied-boeck*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. G.A. Bredero, *Proza*, eds. Jeroen Jansen, Hilversum, Verloren, 2011, nr 27.

<sup>40</sup> C.L. vander Plasse, in: G.A. Bredero, *Nederduytsche Rijmen*, Amsterdam, C.L. vander Plasse, 1620, fol. A2r-v ('versamelende alle de stucxkens van zyne soete Rijmpjes, hoe cleen sy oock zijn').

## **Bredero as a public individual**

Authorship in the 17th century diverges from modern authorship. Still there seem to be enough indications to describe the image that Vander Plasse has created of Bredero as a public individual, in the way Gaston Franssen has discussed modern authorship in his article about 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship' (2010).<sup>41</sup> The relationship between Bredero and Vander Plasse shows how literary writing has been regarded as a form of commercial production, in which the literary work was promoted by the publisher, adapted to the needs of the market.<sup>42</sup> Vander Plasse proved not only to have a great flair for regularly bombarding his readers with advertising announcements (about published or to be published books), but he also had a talent for recognizing various publics, i.e. readers with different financial strength. Thus, he brought out the cheap small-format songbook next to a luxury edition.<sup>43</sup> He published personal letters and the portrait time and again, blurring the boundaries between Bredero's personal identity and his fictional persona in his songs and drama.<sup>44</sup> The portrait of Bredero in the song book shows his face, while the letters and orations Vander Plasse published in Bredero's collected works give a personal picture of the author, in which his personal identity and his fictional persona overlap.<sup>45</sup> As a consequence, the poetry was interpreted as a testimony about his real live for centuries.<sup>46</sup>

In one of his prefaces, Bredero admits that he had only knowledge of 'just a little school-kid French', but of no Latin.<sup>47</sup> By characterizing the spe-

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<sup>41</sup> Gaston Franssen, 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature', *Journal of Dutch Literature*, 1, 2010, p. 91-113.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Rasterhoff, *Painting and Publishing*, p. 69-72.

<sup>44</sup> Franssen, 'Literary celebrity', p. 94: 'the discourse on literary authorship consists of anti-economic logic, scepticism about the figure of the individual author, and the pursuit of innovation. Components of the discourse on celebrity, on the other hand, include the logic of profitability, the foregrounding of personal and private issues, and the necessity of repetition.'

<sup>45</sup> Idem, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> See Van Stipriaan, *De hartenjager*, p. 144-166.

<sup>47</sup> Bredero, *Proza*, p. 200.

cial talent of Bredero as something given by nature, Vander Plasse changes a possible weakness into strength, diverting the reader's attention from *ars* to *natura*, from art and scholarship to talent, which causes the image to deviate from a high early modern conception of authorship and the requirement of art and literary giftedness both. The same idea we come across in a laudatory sonnet by Joachim Scheepmaker, in 1619: 'There are many ways to become famous (immortal)', he argues, 'but Bredero has achieved it by what he has got from nature, by the nature of his poetry'.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

According to Dubois, reputation structures the cultural marketplace by differentiating the two ideal type moments, recognition and renown.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen, the relationship between the Amsterdam publisher and bookseller Cornelis vander Plasse and Gerbrand Bredero offered both of them, the recognition of an extraordinary literary talent at a young age, renown as a consequence of thirty years promotion. The publisher supported the literary career of his friend in different ways. Not only did he publish yet unknown work, letters and orations by Bredero, but through laudatory and funeral poems he increased the latter's literary reputation by honourable mentions and citations, in the introduction of posthumous editions and reissues of Bredero's oeuvre. Vander Plasse was an intermediary in almost all publications. Therefore, he is involved in almost all we know about Gerbrand Bredero nowadays. His efforts emphasize the popularity of Bredero, his uniqueness and qualities. Both Bredero's creative talent and the way in which Vander Plasse made it possible that Bredero reached the hearts and minds of his audience, are a perfect example of the impact on the celebrification of a living and deceased author in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. As subsequent editions of Bredero's work are based on the editions by Vander Plasse, this Amsterdam publisher has laid the foundation on which Bredero's celebrity is based, in his own time and up to the present.

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<sup>48</sup>I.I. Scheepmaker, 'Sonnet', in: Bredero, *Stommen ridder*, ed. C. Kruyskamp, Culmborg, Tjeenk Willink, 1973, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup>Dubois, 'Recognition and Renown', p. 44.

SELLING OUT AND SAILING ONWARD:  
HOW MICRO-CELEBRITIES MANAGE  
THEIR SELF-PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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**Abstract**

Diffused audiences sometimes, through their engagement with social media, connect with micro-celebrities in order to make sense of their world. While celebrities may have a paid staff of public relations experts at their beck and call, micro-celebrities have to manage their presence on social media with little or no assistance, which may subject them to the vagaries of their audiences. One of the ways in which audiences demonstrate this sense making process is through their responses to micro-celebrities that break with some social expectation, like micro-celebrities that “sell-out” to commercial interests. There is an expectation that micro-celebrities will present themselves in an authentic and sincere manner, which raises the bar for them and potentially makes their fall from grace steeper, potentially turning fans into haters. This critical analysis is based on case studies of micro-celebrity travelers who rely on social media channels to share their experiences sailing around the world. The study concludes that if the micro-celebrity “sells-out” disparagement may be contained within clusters of the micro-celebrity’s social network. As a micro-celebrity labors to maintain their authenticity and sincerity, there is greater likelihood for understanding and perhaps forgiveness when the micro-celebrity crosses the proverbial line.

**Introduction**

There is a recurring theme in popular culture regarding the depiction of paradise, often in the form of a tropical island. Television programs

like *Gilligan's Island*, *Fantasy Island*, *Lost* and the movie *Castaway* provide fodder for viewers to internalize these media depictions into their own fantasies. Reality television presents a similar theme but creates tension between the ordinary people depicted on a long-running reality television program like *Survivor* and the storybook characters with which fans have become familiar in the fictional programs. This tension is extended to digital media in the form of travel bloggers and vloggers, referred to as micro-celebrities, who are real people doing real things, presenting opportunities for fans and followers to engage vicariously in the adventures.

Over the course of a lifetime, especially if one lives in Western culture, an individual is likely to be exposed to thousands of unmet media figures. In some if not many instances, "People characterize unmet media figures as if they were intimately involved with them, and in a sense, they are -- they engage in pseudo-social interactions with them"<sup>1</sup>. Caughey refers to these as imaginary social relationships that include parasocial interactions<sup>2</sup>, but he extends the relationship beyond the site of media consumption to consider how the media figure enters into other aspects of the fan or follower's everyday life. With legacy media—network TV, commercial radio and print publications—imaginary social relationships might take place inside an individual's mind, manifesting as thoughts and related self-talk, fantasies, daydreams, and sometimes, nocturnal dreams. Individuals use media figures to make sense of their world, sometimes to reinforce their existing beliefs, contrast their own beliefs with those of a media figure, or to adjust their beliefs to be more consistent with those of a media figure. Such interaction is based on the illusion of intimacy, as the relationship is imaginary. Such imaginary relationships still exist in the era of digital media; however, the imaginary has been extended to consider the "possibility of interaction," as individuals use social media platforms to sometimes make actual social connections with media figures—

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Horton, & R. Richard Wohl, 'Mass communication and parasocial interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance'. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215–229, 1956.

what I refer to as mediated social connections. Interaction may begin in one's imaginary social world in the form of fantasy, thought and self-talk, and may take the simplistic form of likes or dislikes (thumbs up or down), tweets or re-tweets, but may extend to comments, direct messaging and replies from or to the celebrity or micro-celebrity or others who participate in the social network.

Such interactions further fuel the imaginary social world. Somewhat similar conceptualizations have been postulated as mediated online interaction and multisocial interaction<sup>3</sup>. Thompson takes a transmission approach to consider online interactions and his focus is on political power in a democratized online media environment. Hills extends the idea of parasocial interaction from a dyadic into the digital world in which interaction becomes multisocial, making the relationship between the two—parasocial and multisocial—problematic. In other words, if the interaction involves fantasy, then the relationship cannot be straightforward. The present study supports Hill's contention that the social nature of media consumption in the digital age must consider that fantasy and imagination are an extension of the parasocial. The concern of the present study regards micro-celebrity and the ways in which fans negotiate their relationship to ordinary individuals who are elevated to celebrity status through extraordinary events.

### *Micro-Celebrity*

A celebrity might be described as being a part of a commodity system, based merely on their ability to attract and mobilize attention, which would fit squarely within the referent system offered by appearances on reality TV<sup>4</sup>. In the end, Marwick states: "As a result, celebrities and

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<sup>3</sup>Cfr. John B. Thompson, *Mediated Interaction in the Digital Age. Theory, Culture & Society*, 2018. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418808592>; M. Hills, 'From Para-social to Multisocial Interaction: Theorizing Material/Digital Fandom and Celebrity', in, *The Celebrity Reader*, Eds., Marshall, P.D. and Redmond, S., New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Joshua Gamson, 'The unwatched life is not worth living: The elevation of the ordinary in celebrity culture. *PMLA*, 126(4), 1061-1069, 2011, p.10562. Available from: [doi:10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.1061](https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.1061).

micro-celebrities alike use social media to create persistent streams of content, competing for the largest number of listeners. These techniques are part and parcel of an online attention economy in which page views and clicks are synonymous with success<sup>5</sup>. While Rojek distinguishes between “achieved” and “attributed celebrity,” Marwick distinguishes micro-celebrity as being something one does, rather than something one is. Rojek extends the idea that a short cut to intimacy is manufactured as a kind of masquerade<sup>6</sup>. Social media platforms are replete with individuals who may be seeking to expose their talent, build an audience and create a successful career to include those who perhaps do nothing more than post videos of their performance of something as mundane as video game playing. Albidin describes how micro-celebrity has evolved in a brief number of years to consider different demographics and Internet users ranging from brand influencers and artists, among other types developing both in Western and Asian societies<sup>7</sup>.

Terri Senft, who coined the term, defined micro-celebrity as “a new style of online performance in which people employ webcams, video, audio, blogs, and social networking sites to ‘amp up’ their popularity among readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online”<sup>8</sup>. Fitting in with the process of celebrification, micro-celebrity can be understood as a set of practices. It is the relationship between the diffuse audience as fans or followers and the micro-celebrity that is always in process; the relationship is something to be negotiated, as there is a dynamic quality to the self-presentation of the micro-celebrity and the ways in which audiences construct meaning and perhaps find significance through their interactions—vicarious and direct—

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<sup>5</sup> Alice E. Marwick, ‘You May Know Me from YouTube: (Micro-)Celebrity in Social Media’, in, *A Companion to Celebrity*, Eds. Marshall, P.D. and Redmond, S., 2015, p. 339. Available from: doi:10.1002/9781118475089.ch18.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Rojek, *Presumed Intimacy: Parasocial Interaction in Media, Society and Celebrity Culture*, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Crystal Albidin, *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online*, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2008, p.25.

with the micro-celebrity and the micro-celebrity's social network. Marwick and Boyd<sup>9</sup>, Marwick (2013)<sup>10</sup>, and Senft (2013)<sup>11</sup> have written about how micro-celebrities manage their fan base through the careful construction of self-presentation. Khamis, et al. who studied micro-celebrity and self-branding, contend it is a phenomenon that is closely associated with the rise of digital technology<sup>12</sup>.

### *Micro-Celebrity and Authenticity*

Establishing a feeling of authenticity and sincerity are hallmarks of self-presentation and self-branding based on the mediated social connection that is likely to ensue between the micro-celebrity and fan. Marwick states: "Micro-celebrity extends this to networked webs of actual interaction, such as instant messenger, @replies, comments, and face-to-face meetings. This interaction is crucial to maintaining the micro-celebrity practitioner's popularity and becomes part of their personal brand"<sup>13</sup>. She adds that there is a higher level of accountability for micro-celebrities than there is for celebrities. Micro-celebrities have to walk a fine line between projecting their authentic selves in a sincere manner and being "fake."

Fans expect micro-celebrities to be authentic—a merger of their private and public selves—so when they are caught in some shape, manner or form doing something deemed inappropriate, the dynamic

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<sup>9</sup> Alice E. Marwick, & Dana Boyd, 'To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter', in, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17, 2011, pp. 139–158.

<sup>10</sup> Alice E. Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Theresa M. Senft, 'Microcelebrity and the branded self', In J. Hartley, J. Burgess, and A. Bruns, eds. *A companion to new media dynamics*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 346–354.

<sup>12</sup> Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang, & Raymond Welling, 'Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers', *Celebrity Studies*, 2016. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>.

<sup>13</sup> Alice E. Marwick, 'You May Know Me from YouTube: (Micro-) Celebrity in Social Media', in, *A Companion to Celebrity*, Eds. Marshall, P.D. and Redmond, S., 2015, p. 16. Available from: doi:10.1002/9781118475089.ch18.

nature of the connection may lead to disappointment and perhaps abandonment of the micro-celebrity. The Netflix series *Haters Back Off* is a meta-version of Miranda Sings, a YouTube character, as she attempts to become a star. The negative comments she receives from viewers, which are part of the streaming program, like “you suck,” are suggestive of the show’s title<sup>14</sup>. Gray states: “Often with increasing organization, and contributing to campaigns or groundswells that sometimes dwarf or rival their fan counterparts, antifans—those who hate or dislike a given text, personality, or genre—are as much a presence in contemporary society as are fans...Textual hatred and dislike have been understudied and underestimated, as has their intricate and nuanced relationship to textual love”<sup>15</sup>. Even if a fan does not abandon a micro-celebrity for some social infraction, the difference between authenticity and fake creates tension where culture can do its work: fans and followers can use such tensions to measure their own beliefs against those of the micro-celebrity and they can conclude perhaps to abandon the micro-celebrity, to adjust their own beliefs to accept this newfound understanding or reinforce an existing belief.

### *Selling Out and the Degradation of Micro-Celebrity*

One situation where a fan or follower might either choose to abandon a micro-celebrity or adjust their own beliefs would be when the micro-celebrity “sells out.” Selling out is a pejorative expression that relates to compromising of a person’s “integrity, morality, authenticity, or principles in exchange for personal gain, such as money”<sup>16</sup>. Although, Pollak maintains that Millennials, those who grew up in

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<sup>14</sup> James Poniewozik, Review: In ‘Haters Back Off!’ a Cringe-Worthy Star Is Born. *The New York Times*, 2016, October 13. Available from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/arts/television/review-in-haters-back-off-a-tinge-worthy-star-is-born.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/arts/television/review-in-haters-back-off-a-tinge-worthy-star-is-born.html?_r=0).

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Gray, ‘Antifandom and the Moral Text: Television Without Pity and Textual Dislike’, in *American Behavioral Scientist*. 48, pp. 840-857, 2005, (pp.840-1). Available from: DOI: 10.1177/0002764204273171.

<sup>16</sup> Dictionary.com., n.d. Selling out. Available from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sellout>.

an era that embraces the materialism of hip hop, are less concerned with the idea of selling out than previous generations<sup>17</sup>. In their varied ways, fans may denigrate or disparage a celebrity or micro-celebrity for crossing a moral or ethical line, degrading the micro-celebrity's status and perhaps altering or ending their mediated social connection with the micro-celebrity.

While many fans and followers would prefer to have their mediated social connections stable, consistent, authentic and sincere, they also enjoy variable, unexpected and sometimes tawdry behavior that takes place both on the front stage of digital media and in the individual's imaginary world -- there is pleasure in the failure of others. In fact, it is the space between the everyday or mundane and the unexpected where people go through a process of adjusting their own beliefs not only regarding the celebrity or micro-celebrity, but also extrapolating from a specific action, a better understanding of the system (political, social or ideological) in which they live. For example, to be selfish is a neo-liberal value that is associated with capitalist economic philosophy. Therefore, on the one hand, it is okay to "cash in" on one's success. However, as celebrification is a dynamic process, no matter how well-managed the persona, the nature of multiple encounters through multiple media is beyond anyone's control.

The ability of ordinary people to leave their everyday lives and seek adventures around the world alone, the subject of this research, has become somewhat of a phenomenon that illustrates how micro-celebrity as a presentation technique lives within a narrative that is self-created. Going beyond mere entertainment, micro-celebrities create social connection through the process of living their ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances and sharing their lives on various social media platforms, collapsing what Goffman describes as the front and backstage, which is essential to micro-celebrity success<sup>18</sup>. On the other

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<sup>17</sup> Seen in N. Schoenberg, 'Movie stars in TV ads: Are they worried about 'selling out'?', in, *The Chicago Tribune*, 2016, February 24. Available from: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-movie-star-sellouts-0224-20160224-story.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Publishing, 1956.

side of the equation are the diffused audiences that consume such content. Abercrombie and Longhurst differentiate between simple, mass and diffused audiences, but emphasize that there is crossover between all three. Qualities associated with diffused audiences coupled with the extension of simple and mass to diffused audiences opens up the possibility for both praise and the greater possibility of desecration within fan and follower engagement in social networks. Longhurst posits about the diffused audience: "The essential feature of this audience experience is that, in contemporary society, everyone becomes an audience all the time"<sup>19</sup>. Based on an understanding that the extended mind operates within fan/micro-celebrity interactions on newer social media, the following questions have been formulated in order to guide the research:

- RQ1: How do micro-celebrities negotiate the presentation of self and develop their personas within the complexity of their social network?
- RQ2: How do audiences use micro-celebrity appearances in social media as a sense making mechanism?
- RQ3: How does fan participation in the mediated social connection lead to the formation of clusters and niches within the social network, either directly through denigration of the micro-celebrity or vicariously through expressions of wish fulfillment?

## Methodology

Through the following three case studies this research examines micro-celebrity and interaction of diffused audiences. This research uses a systematic "academic lurker" methodology<sup>20</sup> that Gray maintains holds the potential for some ethical issues; however, by being unobtrusive and not violating trust one can avoid such issues<sup>21</sup>. Ferguson

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<sup>19</sup>Brian Longhurst, *Popular Music and Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, p.261.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah McCrae, "Get Off My Internets: How Deconstruct Lifestyle Bloggers' Authenticity Work". *Persona Studies*. 3:1, 2017, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> J. Gray, 'Antifandom and the Moral Text: Television Without Pity and Textual Dislike', in, *American Behavioral Scientist*. 48, pp. 840-857, 2005, (pp.847). Available

developed a similar digital ethnography approach to study the dark web<sup>22</sup>. Through this approach the research seeks to better understand the dynamic between micro-celebrities and their audiences based on the tensions that are created in specific instances when micro-celebrities are deemed to have sold out. This researcher reviewed 722 YouTube videos of three vloggers that are sailing around the world. These vloggers were selected, as Table 1 indicates, because of the number of subscribers to their YouTube channels, meaning each reaches an audience in the hundreds of thousands. The table also details followers of their other social media properties: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Instagram as well as Patreon.com. The use of these platforms is in addition to maintaining dedicated websites.

	YouTube	Patreon	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	Google+	Pinterest
Delos	231,928	1,777	71,057	64,900	0	1,538	0
GWTW	154,282	7,620	37,894	26,500	8,419	1,756	61
La Vaga	340,289	1,645	85,063	123,000	13,300	478	0

Table 1 - Social Media Followers/subscribers (as of November 1, 2017)

The primary focus is on select instances where the comments that participants in the social networks make in response to issues that called into question the authenticity of the travel vloggers. In order to conduct a sentiment analysis of specific instances where video comments related to issues regarding “selling out,” the research relied on Netlytic software (Netlytic.org) to collect, process and analyze the data from the YouTube.com channels. The Netlytic importer uses the YouTube Data video comments API v3.0, and comments may be top-level, or a reply to another comment. The analysis provided a list of the most frequently used words. based on “positive,” “neutral,” and “negative” terminology utilized in YouTube comments.

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from: DOI: 10.1177/0002764204273171.

<sup>22</sup> R.H. Ferguson, ‘Offline ‘stranger’ and online lurker: methods for an ethnography of illicit transactions on the darknet’, in, *Qualitative Research*, 17(6), 683–698, 2017. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117718894>.

### *Case Studies in Self-Presentation*

The storylines of each of the following case studies follows a similar route: ordinary people with a desire for adventure, having little or no skill or money, leave the comfort and security of their everyday lives to follow a dream - sailing around the world. What makes this extraordinary is that these individuals, couples and families have little or no experience at what they are doing, which is important fuel for furthering the mediated social connections to their fans and followers. In other words: "if they can do it, I can do it too" is the philosophy being espoused. What follows is a critical examination of the ways in which these micro-celebrities negotiate the presentation of self and develop their personae, and it is interested in the ways in which audiences use micro-celebrity appearances in social media as a sense making mechanism demonstrated through the fan or followers' active participation in the process either directly through commenting or vicariously through expressions of wish fulfillment. *Gone with the Wynns* is the title of a vlog maintained by a couple that sails their catamaran *Curiosity* in the Caribbean and beyond. *La Vagabonde* is the name of an Australian couple's boat that has crossed the Atlantic Ocean for a second time, and *Delos* is the name of the boat operated by two American sailors who are beginning their eighth-year voyaging around the world.

### *Working to Achieve Authenticity*

How can one be extraordinary, achieving celebrity status, and maintain one's ordinariness at the same time? McCrea refers to this ability as "aspirational extra/ordinariness"<sup>23</sup> In shaping the narrative, the micro-celebrity must present their self as an individual who once led an ordinary life but has chosen to give up their normal routine to do something extraordinary. In the case of these micro-celebrities, they have decided to sail around the world. For example, Riley from *La Vagabonde* worked on an oil rig in order to acquire the funds to purchase his boat. And, Elayna, his partner was singing in Greece during the

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<sup>23</sup> S. McCrae, S. "Get Off My Internets: How Deconstruct Lifestyle Bloggers' Authenticity Work". *Persona Studies*. 3:1, 2017, p. 22.

summer when they met. Jason and Nikki from *Curiosity* were photographer and make-up artist respectively. And, Brian from *Delos* was a computer geek. Each takes pains to make sure that fans and followers know of their “humble” origins through their videos, in-person lectures or other posts on social media. Their back stories are offered up on Facebook, YouTube, webpages and Patreon pages as testimonials of their ordinariness.

Merely disclosing one’s ordinary past is not enough, as once established and confirmed by the audience, micro-celebrities have to work to maintain their authenticity and sincerity; it is an act of labor. As indicated in Table 2, in each case the micro-celebrities maintain a YouTube.com channel where they regularly (weekly) post video content of varying lengths. The channel is one of the key ways in which the micro-celebrities monetize their content, as YouTube requires that in order to become a “partner,” one must have at least 10,000 views on their channel before they can be compensated through advertising that is posted on their channels<sup>24</sup>. As can be seen in Table 2, the earnings from their YouTube channel alone may amount to more than \$100 thousand dollars.<sup>25</sup>

	Video Uploads	Total Views	Daily Average	Est. Yearly Earnings	Channel Created
Delos	223	68,088,785	78,935	7.1-113.7K	2007
GWTW	345	26,361,040	20,149	1.8-29K	2010
La Vaga	154	50,622,790	60,104	5.4-86.5K	2014

Table 2 - Video Uploads and Income Generated (November 2017)

Disruptions, however, can emerge when there are inconsistencies in the storyline, as fans and followers sometimes express their irritation through their comments or dislikes. The micro-celebrities have to

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<sup>24</sup> Google.com., n.d. How to earn money from your videos. Available from: <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72857#apply>.

<sup>25</sup> Socialblade.com., n.d. b. YouTube Video Uploads and Statistics. Available from: <https://socialblade.com/youtube/channel/UCZdQjaSoLjzFnWsDQOv4ww>.

emphasize they are not “trust fund babies,” for example, but people who saved their money or get along on meager savings in order to continue their adventure. For example, after posting a video promoting their relationship with 23andme.com a service that analyzes one’s DNA, the Wynns posted the following defense on their website:

*When you become successful, people naturally want to hate, or assume that by the grace of some higher being your life is easier than theirs and you never had to work for anything. (note to self, someday share the backstory about how I was raised by my working class grandmother in a small farming community). We read every comment and the little negative jabs and blatant trolls eventually add up. We don’t talk about it, we don’t typically engage them and try to forget them as quickly as possible. Some days it’s easier than others. On the hard days, here is what we say to ourselves<sup>26</sup>.*

Their video yielded 511 comments where the balance of positive to negative words was 42 to 5. This is a very favorable ratio, particularly given the emotionally charged incident in which the couple was charged by some fans as “selling out.” The negative words included the following: bad, scary, worried, awful, jealous, nasty, evil and upset. An example of the use of the term “bad” can be seen in the following comments:

*I need to shut notification off. I am not watching channels like this for infomercials. They are wasting my time especially considering this DNA bull shit is no where near accurate when it comes to ancestry or haven’t you seen the vids that compared the 2 or three companies that do this crap all having different results of the same people??? Reviewing a hard product that is used is one thing, reviewing this crap is a waist [sic] of time. If they need money so bad they can do what Delos did in the early days and get a real job. It isn’t as though they don’t make money of patreon, google ads, etc. They can stop making videos as well if it takes too much time. As I said, I unsubscribed. Now I will turn notifications off.*

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<sup>26</sup>Gonewiththewynns.com, 2017, September 17 c. Nomads & Settlers - Diving into our Backstory. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LLJBMmpouc&t=5s>.

Or as another commenter simply put it: *Great ! 23 and Me commercial ! sell outs !*

In addition to disclosing details about one's life and background, the micro-celebrity needs to directly address fans, being true to their mission, involving fans directly in the journey, and most important, encouraging the fantasy. With regard to directly addressing fans, the micro-celebrities' direct reply to comments or they may field questions and respond to comments on Facebook Live or YouTube Live sessions. Comments can be categorized as the following: affirmations, technical comments about sailing or camera equipment, lewd and socially inappropriate comments, snarky comments, comments that defend the micro-celebrity and comparisons to inauthentic others. With regard to the latter, there is what might be referred to as cross-channel chatter, as fans that follow one of these adventurers will likely be following the others. A *La Vagabonde* video regarding their acquisition of new boat, caused some fans to accuse them of "selling out" to material interests. The video yielded 412 comments: the balance between the positive and negative words was 27 to 4, which is a very favorable ratio. On the *Delos* video that related to their potential acquisition of a new sailing vessel, which drew comparisons to the upgraded vessel *La Vagabonde*, 864 comments were present, like the following example: " am i the only one here who wonders how they would be able to afford this boat??? it cost around 1.5 million dollars. or is everyone else a multimillionaire here?"

Here the ratio of positive to negative words ran 19 to 1, which is very favorable. Commenters often demonstrated their willingness to defend the vloggers, even making comparison--cross-channel chatter--to the other sailing vessel, as exemplified in the following:

*I really don't see this channel changing as much as Vaga did if they got a new boat. Especially if they went with a Amel 55. It's basically just an updated version of Delos. I definitely don't see the Delos crew changing at all... They are 100% real and don't seem like they put on a show for the camera and i think that is the biggest reason we all love them. I doubt getting a new boat would change that.*

In each of these instances, within the social network clusters of commenters form that are comprised of "haters" as well as defenders. In this way the networks are not monolithic but rather represent diverse

points of view. The comments often times—positive and negative—are not directed at the vloggers themselves, but represent mini-conversations within the clusters of fans. It is as if a group has broken off and continued a side conversation; sometimes the commenters denigrate each other. In most cases the clusters are comprised of small groups of people. While the word sentiment analysis points to a largely positive outcome, negative comments had minimal traction and took place within isolated clusters of commenters, but within in the larger social network of fans and followers.

### *Monetization may lead to suspicion of motives*

Micro-celebrities whose audiences reach is 100 thousand or more may also be considered a micro-influencer. Consistent with the idea of being authentic and sincere, operating within the extraordinary/ordinary binary, the micro-celebrity may have more credibility and therefore influence than other types of social influences. According to research conducted by Berger, micro-influencers have a very significant impact on purchase decisions; reasoning they are more credible and believable<sup>27</sup>. For example, these adventurers review equipment for manufacturers, sometimes in exchange for the products, other times receiving discounts. In the case of *Delos*, they received a 50% discount on a new generator for their yacht. They posted a video of the installation, as the crew donned shirts with the company's logo emblem on the chest. *Gone with the Wynns* tested onboard freezers for the manufacturer and maintain a link on their website where others can purchase the product through Amazon<sup>28</sup>. The Wynns maintain a webpage featuring gear they utilize, some of which is linked to their Amazon Associates account whereby they receive compensation when someone makes a purchase through their link. Additionally, all of these adventurers sell

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<sup>27</sup> Experticity., n.d. Research Shows Micro-Influencers Have More Impact Than Average Consumers. Available from: [http://go2.experticity.com/rs/288-azs-731/images/experticity-kellerfaysurveysummary\\_.pdf](http://go2.experticity.com/rs/288-azs-731/images/experticity-kellerfaysurveysummary_.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Gonewiththewynns.com., n.d.a. Dometic Portable Electric Fridge/Freezer - Gone With The Wynns. Available from: <http://www.gonewiththewynns.com/product/dometic-portable-electric-fridgefreezer>.

merchandise emblazoned with their name and logos, ranging from tee shirts and hats, coffee mugs to in one case a music album.

In addition to selling merchandise, other ways these travel vloggers are accused of selling out include co-branding opportunities with 23andme and audible.com. Selling out also can take the form of eBegging, often referred to as the “tip jar” or asking fans and followers to “buy us a beer.” Ebeggar is a pejorative term to describe a scam artist who utilizes the Internet to solicit funds, perhaps to allay the production costs of a movie or some other cause or issue supported by the eBeggar. eBegging brings out the haters and anti-fans. For example, Riley from *La Vagabonde* wrote a post on their website, “Yesterday Someone Called Me an Ebegger,” in which he is “vexed” by the comment. In his blog post, he defended his use of Patreon.com as a legitimate way to support the work Elayna and he are doing to produce videos. Their supporters, like the following one reject on their behalf the negative reference:

*You guys aren't e-beggars at all! You guys are an inspiration. We have watched every episode and look forward to new ones with anticipation and excitement when we see one is posted...However, not to lie, sometimes we are jealous, sometimes we are envious...but for the most part you are entertaining and we learn from you. You guys do a great job at what you do, keep it up, haters will always hate!<sup>29</sup>*

These micro-celebrities offer patrons—those who contribute to their Patreon.com page—the opportunity to support the adventure and in that the production of the videos as well as a chance to sail with them. For a time, the opportunity to sail with these adventurers elevates these patrons to micro-celebrity status.

## **Discussion**

Three themes emerge from this analysis. The first refers to the expression of disparagement directed toward the sponsoring company or product. In such cases the expression refers to the product not work-

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<sup>29</sup>Sailing La Vagabond.com., 2015. Blog post. Available from: <http://sailing-lavagabonde.com/yesterday-someone-called-me-an-e-begger/>.

ing or not working as advertised. In this way a negative connection is drawn between the product and the micro-celebrity; in some cases, the disparagement is deflected away from the micro-celebrity. Second, disparagement is sometimes directed not toward the micro-celebrity, but rather toward other vloggers in which cases a commenter is making comparisons. Sometimes hatred is expressed toward other commenters for attempting to degrade the micro-celebrity. Third, there may be statements of general understanding toward the system, like the need to sell things in order to keep the enterprise going/growing. As a result of these interactions social media open emotive opportunities. As such degradation is a form of excessive emotional expression, and because emotion may be powerful, it can be contagious. Excessive emoting, which can be positive or negative, may take the form of disinhibition, and in the context of comments, the expression may be offered with anonymity; again, perhaps leading to further excessive emoting. The result may be an emotional convergence in which fans and followers mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person; hence the formation of clusters or niches—both positive and negative—within the social network. All of this takes place not only in a dyadic manner as expressions on social media, but may also be experienced psychologically as thoughts, fantasies and self-talk.

The major goal of this research was to delineate some of the ways in which social connections are mediated through audiences' interactions with micro-celebrities via their social networks with particular regard to the ways in which commenters may degrade or disparage the micro-celebrity. The social media exchanges—comments and replies—are not only between the micro-celebrity and the fan, but also among fans themselves as they participate in a social network that may extend beyond one micro-celebrity to include references to others that fans follow on social media. Micro-celebrities have little in the way to protect themselves from degradation. All they can do is offer a *mea culpa*, although in the end, their vulnerability is the price paid for attempting to present their authentic selves.

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to what sociologist Joshua Gamson refers to the 21st Century turn that celebrity has taken toward the direction of the ordi-

nary<sup>30</sup>, these individuals might describe themselves as ordinary, but they are doing extraordinary things, adventuring far beyond the work-a-day world of most people. In fact, they serve as inspiration for some fans and fantasy for other “armchair” sailors who dream of doing what these individuals have accomplished, which is shared in weekly YouTube videos that have been posted regularly for longer than most episodic television programs. The aspirational nature of their wandering around the globe fits squarely within “extreme admiration,” a category within Caughey’s theory of imaginary social relationships<sup>31</sup> and within the context of newer social media, expressions of mediated social connection in an age of digital media.

The aim of this research is to critically examine micro-celebrities and their diffused audiences, and in that the tensions that exist as the micro-celebrity labors at maintaining their authenticity. The requirements are not only cultural—playing by the rules of the game—but labor intensive, as micro-celebrities have to digitally film, photograph and write about their experiences. While the idea of vlogging about their adventures afloat perhaps began with the idea of keeping friends and family informed of the whereabouts, as the audience builds something else begins to take hold. However, commercialism over time may creep in degrading the micro-celebrity for selling out.

As the audience for this category of video adventurers is based on a rather narrow interest, it is incumbent upon these micro-celebrities to create and maintain a sense of closeness, perhaps intimacy with their fans, whether that means directly replying to their comments on social media or inviting fans to join the adventure for short periods of time. Building a world in which fans and followers can vicariously experience in their thoughts and fantasies the adventure, is a form of form of labor, however, unlike some other forms of Internet labor this particular breed of micro-celebrity uses their regular appearance on

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<sup>30</sup> Joshua Gamson, “The unwatched life is not worth living: The elevation of the ordinary in celebrity culture.” *PMLA*, 126(4), 1061-1069, 2011, p.10562. Available from: doi:10.1632/pmla.2011.126.4.1061.

<sup>31</sup> John L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, p. 33.

YouTube, blog posts, Instagram photos, Tweets, among others to help support the continuation of their adventure. In this way fans are not only contributing to the micro-celebrity's production of content; they are engaged in keeping this world metaphorically afloat.

## INFLUENCER MARKETING AND REDEFINING FAME IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS

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### **Abstract**

Celebrities have never been as reachable as in social media; a comprehensive, global platform, not bounded with time and space. The rise of social media with web 2.0 was a natural consequence of the evolving technologies that enabled the users to 'write back into the text' and become an active producer of content for the web. Today, literally anyone can become famous in an instant with one well designed viral. This technical potentiality of the web also embraces the risk of unexpected profanity, desecration and public humiliation for both the prosumer who also has an 'influencer' potential in the onlineworld and the celebrity as the influencer. Since the beginning of mass media, famous people faced societal demands which mostly lasted in loss of their privacy, and 'tolerated' immorality. However today, with the advances in technology and the internet, they share these attributes with their 'infamous' followers; who also have the chance to become celebrities overnight as a return of their prosumer identities. At these cyber times, as the 'authority' aspect of Cialdini's persuasion techniques is re-shaping, the challenges which will be brought along with it may constitute a significant shift in advertising. Jhally and Livant<sup>1</sup>, State that in times of New Media, consumers work by watching advertisements and are compensated for this work with content and services. This analysis inevitably challenges the common perception of

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<sup>1</sup> Jhally, S., Livant, B. (1986). Watching as Working: The Valorization of Audience-Consciousness, *Journal of Communication*, Volume 36, Issue 3, pp 124-143.

social media platforms to be regarded as 'freebies'. Andrejevic<sup>2</sup>, adds another dimension to the previously mentioned statement and argues that new media technologies profit by encouraging consumers to perform the work of being watched. At this point, some questions come to mind: Which challenges will advertisers face in regards to using celebrities for selling products when the 'watcher' and 'the watched one' are the same? How will the shift in 'authority' (from know-how to experience) change the celebrity influence in advertising? These questions will be analysed by using content and discourse analysis in this study.

### **Influencer Marketing in Social Media as a Concept**

Social media is based on user-generated content<sup>3</sup>, and the rules of advertising are surely changing as a consequence of such web 2.0 technologies that enable interactivity and prosumerism. One of the promising techniques used by advertisers in social media is influencer marketing. Influencer marketing can be considered as a combination of old and new media marketing tools; taking the idea of traditional celebrity endorsement and placing it into some modern day, content-driven, social media marketing campaign. The main differences of successful social media campaigns can be analysed with The SPIN Framework which suggests four critical success factors for viral campaigns: Spreadability, propagativity, integration and nexus<sup>4</sup>.

**Spreadability:** The viewer is needed to be motivated to share the content, and 'likeability' becomes very important at this stage; The more one likes a content, the more tendency he/she will have to share it.

**Propagativity:** Sharing must be secure, comfortable, and fast. For example: Sharing on social media is much easier than sharing content in an e-mail. The content of the message and the objective of the mes-

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<sup>2</sup> Andrejevic, M. (2002). The Work of Being Watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-disclosure, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:2, pp 230-248

<sup>3</sup> Berthon, P.R., Pitt, L.F., Plangger, K., Shapiro, D. (2012). Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy. *Business Horizons*, 55(3). pp 261-271.

<sup>4</sup> Mills, A.J. (2012). Virality in social media: the SPIN Framework, *Journal of Public Affairs*, Volume 12, Number 2, pp 162 -169.

sage should also be considered before deciding on the propagativity. Sometimes 'less' is more.

**Integration:** Sharing on multiple social media platforms will increase the likelihood of a successful viral campaign. Thus, many social platforms are becoming integrated amongst each other.

**Nexus:** Getting the consumers fully engaged and eager for more would be the priority of a successful viral campaign online.

Successful campaigns are usually natural looking, cleverly disguised collaborations between brands and influencers. Social media influencers (SMIs) seem to act as independent third party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through their public blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media platforms<sup>5</sup>. The marketing focus is placed on these influencers, rather than the target market as a whole. Social media statistics are used to identify such individuals that have influence over potential buyers, and orients marketing activities around these influencers who seem to be situated at the centre of the marketing universe, even though it is still the customer who gives the actual purchasing decision<sup>6</sup>.

One of the reasons why brands choose to work with an influencer on social media is his/her capability to connect with the customers on an emotional level since they regard him/her as 'one of the gang'. This advantage can result in both longevity for business and ongoing loyalty for the brand since most of the time words of an influencer is perceived as more trustworthy and independent than the slogans of brand officials, even though both are in a professional collaboration. Also, the salience of an issue is a critical concept in the influencer's success in agenda setting. Since social media influencers come from the same grounds with their followers, they do not have difficulty in guessing saliency of an issue, and thus become pioneers. Their 'famil-

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<sup>5</sup> Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., Freberg, L.A.(2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality, *Public Relations Review*, Volume 37, Issue 1, pp 90-92.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, D. & Fiorella, S. (2013). *Influence Marketing: How to Create, Manage, and Measure Brand Influencers in Social Media Marketing*.USA: Que Publishing.

arity' helps them build trust amongst their followers and gives them the advantage to manage the audience demand.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, the idea of using influencers worked from the very beginning. In the B2B world, experts or pioneers in different fields were used as influencers for a long time. In B2C, the companies were relying on celebrities to lend glamour to the products they were representing. However, the digital transformation of media and marketing poured on the speed by launching a new breed of 'upstart' influencers who did not know the audience as fans, and the online platform very well. So, an "authority" shift from the traditional celebrity to 'the influencer next door' type celebrity emerged.

### **Impact of Fame on Being an Influencer**

At the heart of celebrity studies in general, lies a desire to find new conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of human relations<sup>7</sup>. Throughout history, humans tended to search for higher, unreachable deities in the hope of reaching 'happiness' in a perfect way. However on this quest to happiness, connecting with an embodied, living consciousness that many people would consider to be a "superior" creation, could also be a well-disguised way of legitimising the personal 'lack' and 'victimhood'. So this double-edged sword called "fame" and the concept of 'celebrity' perfectly matched the expansion oriented, survival based, self-doubting, ego steered human condition throughout the creation.

Indeed the word "fan" has religious roots; it comes from the Latin *fanaticus*, meaning "of the temple"<sup>8</sup>. Roland Barthes's essay on the face of Greta Garbo in *Mythologies* speaks of the image as divinization as: "A name aimed to convey a high state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, descended from heaven here things are formed and perfected in the brightest light."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Braun, R. & Spiers, E. (2016). Introduction: Re-viewing Literary Celebrity. *Celebrity Studies*, Vol. 7, N. 4, 449–456.

<sup>8</sup> Ward, P. (2017). Celebrity Worship as Parareligion: Bieber and the Beliebers. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (editors: Forbes, B.D. & Mahan, J.H). USA: University of California Press, 405-406.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (St. Albans, England: Paladin, 1973), 57.

In an ironic sense, the fastest way to reach such 'divinity' was to become famous, and at the beginning, appearing on TV was the way to achieve it since audio-visual stimuli guaranteed to capture the attention of the audience. Reality TV programmes such as Allen Funt's *Candid Camera*, showing funny pranks from ordinary people in the late 1940s, became an instant hit with the audience. The distant stance of fame started to shift once ordinary people had the chance to appear on TV and taste the flavour of being popular among huge crowds even if it was for a few seconds.

After some years, *Big Brother* became popular globally and attracted a large audience very quickly. It was a television reality game show based on an originally Dutch TV series of the same name created by producer John de Mol in 1997. It was one of the least popular examples of documentary as diversion<sup>10</sup>. At this stage, reality became a marketing and advertising tool in exchange for a little bit of fame and popularity. Here, it should be stated that being 'popular' cannot be regarded as the same thing as being influential. In today's easily obtained popularity based social media culture, gaining large numbers of followers, impressions or visitors does not necessarily translate into greater influence. A smaller, more targeted following may generate higher engagement. Influence cannot be built on one-time visitors; people become engaged with the content in time. Influence is derived from credibility which stems from authority<sup>11</sup>.

Authority (together with reciprocity, scarcity, consistency, liking, and consensus) is one of the six persuasion strategies Dr Robert Cialdini mentions in his famous book *'Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion'*. Cialdini explains the role of authority as follows<sup>12</sup>: "People defer to experts. Therefore, individuals are more likely to comply with a request when it is made by a person or people they perceive as possessing high

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<sup>10</sup> Hill, A. (2002). *Big Brother: The Real Audience*. *Journal of Television & New Media (TVNM)*. Volume: 3 issue: 3,323-340.

<sup>11</sup> Guthrie, S.2016. The 'reach myth' of influencer marketing: <https://sabguthrie.info/the-reach-myth-of-influencer-marketing/> (10.06.2018).

<sup>12</sup> Cialdini, R. (1993). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (revised edition). USA: Quill Publishing. p:167.

levels of knowledge, wisdom, or power". However, in the age of social media, the authority has shifted from experts with theoretical knowledge to ordinary people with practical life experiences with the products in question. One may say that the 'pre-suasion' effect of the social media influencers today, lies in the fact that they are insiders, meaning that in the eyes of the consumer they represent the target audience, not the brand. As Cialdini says<sup>13</sup>: "The highest achievers spent much of their time toiling in the fields of influence. The best persuaders become the best through pre-suasion; the process of arranging for recipients to be receptive to a message before they encounter it".

An example may be Andrew Morrey, an influencer from Australia, who has grown his online brand 'CheepJokes' into an award-winning YouTube & Instagram channel after creating video content for Disney, Star Wars, Marvel and even Nandos, over the past four years. He was awarded "Influencer of the year" at the Mumbrella 2017 CommsCon awards for his content creation for brands both local and international. Another example is Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg - aka PewDiePie. He had more than 60 million subscribers to his so-called "Bro-army" YouTube channel. He surely knew his target audience; he was 'one of them'. He knew what would grab their attention, and he was very interactive with them; sharing their creations, and answering them on podcasts. At the age of 25, PewDiePie had created a YouTube channel that earned 7 million dollars annually through advertising <sup>14</sup>. However, after giving some harsh racist comments on PewDiePie's channel, some brands started to have second thoughts about working with this iconic influencer. Although some critics criticised him, PewDiePie managed to win some hearts back by apologising on his channel with these words: "*It is not that I think I can say or do whatever I want and get away with it. I am just an idiot.*" <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cialdini, R. (2016). *Pre-suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade*. USA: Simon & Schuster Publishing. p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Siciliano, L. (2014). PewDiePie, YouTube's biggest star - by numbers(15.06.2018): <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/social-media/11307719/YouTube-celebrity-PewDiePie-by-numbers.html>.

<sup>15</sup> MacInnes, P. (2018).What is Up pewdiepie? The Troubling Content of YouTube's

At this point, marketers need to figure out how to handle this new trend since the impact of all kinds of social media is that they enable new influencers to emerge, and disperse traditional sources of influence. Brown and Hayes state that as mass media impact gets bigger, so does the role and the responsibility of influencers<sup>16</sup>. Large and small businesses worldwide pour billions of pounds each year into influencing what they think are their influencers, but they have a high risk of investing in the wrong people.

### **Celebrity Influencers that do not exist: CGI**

Relationships that fans feel they enjoy with their celebrities on social media may become very confusing; on the one hand, these relationships appear to be very real that they may become a source of identity for the fan. Getting a reply for a message from a celebrity may make them feel 'seen' and even 'felt' by that celebrity as if he/she is their friend in reality, although this communication takes place in a virtual realm. In the times of traditional media, narratives of intimacy between celebrities and fans were ensured by the medium which kept them at a distance. However, this pseudo 'intimacy' changed with the development of social media, where platforms like Twitter and Instagram offering informal and immediate 'behind the scenes' interactivity. This interconnectivity of the public and the private life became a key ingredient in celebrity culture, and the lives of the 'famous' became a medium for the consumption of their fans. One may say that the relationships that fans develop with celebrities suggest a shift like the sacred in contemporary society.<sup>17</sup>

Today, a 3D computer-generated persona or a hologram may easily be used to influence the opinions, behaviours, and attitudes of con-

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Biggest Star (5th of April 2018): <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/05/whats-up-pewdiepie-the-troubling-content-of-youtubes-biggest-star>.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, D. & Hayes, N. (2008). *Influencer Marketing: Who Influences Your Customers?* USA: Routledge Publishing.

<sup>17</sup> Ward, P. (2017). Celebrity Worship as Parareligion: Bieber and the Beliebers. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (editors: Forbes, B.D. & Mahan, J.H). USA: University of California Press.

sumers like any living, flesh and bone influencer. She/he may make many people follow new trends and consume as she/he commands. At this point, one may question the reasons behind such an easy acceptance of non-human, robotic authority figures by the humans. Some ideas for this embrace can be listed as follows:

- Human faith in the absolute authority of invisible, sacred Powers
- Instinctively knowing that even the 'real' influencers may have many industry-made pseudo-personas created for specific campaigns.
- People already realising that messaging on social media cannot always be considered as 'real' interaction with the expected person. For example, most of the times professionals arrange social media replies and tweets of the celebrities, not the stars themselves. Although the audience suspects this fraud, he/she still pretends to believe that the posts are from the influencer, because getting a response from a celebrity makes her/him feel valuable.

The computer-generated virtual musicians, Gorillaz, had become a hit at the end of the 1990s. Then came the Japanese hologram singer Hatsune Miku. The fashion mogul Marc Jacobs started dressing her for the stage where she was accompanied by many music legends like Lady Gaga and Pharrell. Also, since 2016, there is Lil Miquela Sousa (33 K Followers on youtube/ 1.5 million followers on Instagram by December 2018).

Lil Miquela Sousa, world's first computer generated fashion influencer, was created by Trevor McFedries & Sara Decou. She models for brands like Chanel, Fendi, Moschino, Burberry, Versace, UGG boots, and now she seems to be working on her online designer e-commerce shop.<sup>18</sup> Since April 2016, when her Instagram account was activated, @lilmiquela's follower base kept growing. What were the reasons for her success? Not only is she a beautiful model but also a music artist, a brand ambassador and even an advocate for social changes including Black Lives Matter and transgender rights. Her support for such initiatives can be followed from her Instagram page where she states<sup>19</sup>:

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<sup>18</sup> Lil Miquela Sousa online shop (1.12.2018): <https://store.mique.la/>.

<sup>19</sup> Lil Miquela Instagram posting (20.11.2018): <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqYggACH30z/>.

*I am proud to announce I will be donating a portion of my profits to a trans-led organisation that runs a life-saving support hotline and provides microgrants and guides for legal name changes and updated IDs! I encourage you to check them out and support their work as well.*

She has music videos too; her single “Not Mine” reached number eight on Spotify Viral in August 2017. Lil leads a typical life of an it-girl, attending famous clubs and posting selfies. At the same time, she supports socially minded causes including transgender rights, feminism, gun control, and many others. When Lil Miquela’s audience responses on Instagram are analysed, one may state that the primary audience responds trend is to answer her as if she is a human, a living celebrity. Some responses may be listed as follows: “Hey sugar, love the jacket; You are an angel; I know your taste! See you Sat; How come you never change your hairstyle; You are so cute.Love your hair...your shirt; Not human? Hm, it is ok. Because I like you!” etcetera.

At this point, it should be mentioned that for more than two years the followers were not informed about Lil Miquela being a non-human, a CGI. Taking into consideration that 80% of Lil Miquela’s followers are millennial females, such deception becomes more severe since it may affect their attitudes more in those teenage years<sup>20</sup>. Like Lil Miquela, the 20-year-old male CGI influencer LIL WAVI is on his way to becoming one of the social media stars, blurring the lines between reality and the digital world (Firth, E.2018: introduction). One of his ‘partners in crime’, Blawko, with 2.6B followers (by December 2018) takes sex education classes online and dates Bermuda, the CGI that told the world about Lil Miquela being non-human. All this CGI storyline makes one consider the legitimacy of a question: Is the road to celebrity becoming more and more soul-less?

### **Influencer Effect on Advertising**

Influencer marketing is closely related to the relentless rise and success of word of mouth (WOM) and relationship marketing, and is now

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<sup>20</sup> CNN Business (25.06.2018): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbXhuOPDK4c>.

established as one of the techniques professionals must use<sup>21</sup>. Brown & Fiorella's observation on the 90-9-1 rule states that in most communities 90% of users are followers who seek information but never or rarely contribute, 9% of the users add a little, and the final 1% commands the attention of their broader community. In this sense, the effect of social media influencers can be determined by analysing the data available across social networks by<sup>22</sup>:

- Tracking their social activity
- Calculating the size of their network
- Observing how much other social media users engage with them.

Influencers are mostly people who are responsible for their self-created brand names. They are protective of their reputation; they know that their earnings are highly related to the audience's trust. They are not interested in a quick payout. They do not do the buying, are not visible, cannot be bought, and start neutral- which is why their potential to affect sales is so great.

At this point one thing should be taken into consideration: Influencers are also open to being influenced – the question is how to get to them to generate market awareness, leads and address sales barriers. When one party attempts to influence another to make a purchase, it is only natural that a dynamic change occurs in the context of their relationship. It is essential to remind that Influencer Marketing is not just about quick pay-outs. It is the same kind of slow-and-steady approach as Social Media and Content Marketing, where a campaign is not about directly selling the wares. It is about demonstrating one's authority, credibility, and thought-leadership within the industry. In their article, Lisa K. Scheer and Louis W. Stern declare that a target's attitude toward an influencer is affected by both (1) the influence type used by the influencer to achieve the target's compliance and (2) the performance outcomes that result from the behaviour adopted by the target in accordance with that influence. Before performance outcomes are

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, D.& Hayes, N. (2008). *Influencer Marketing: Who Influences Your Customers?* USA: Routledge Publishing.p:1.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, D. & Fiorella, S. (2013). *Influence Marketing:How to Create, Manage, and Measure Brand Influencers in Social Media Marketing.*USA: Que Publishing. p:7.

known, the target's satisfaction and trust are strongly affected by the type of influence exercised; more dominating influence types result in a less positive attitude. When outcomes of compliance become evident, however, favourable outcomes appear to improve negative attitudes, whereas unfavourable outcomes seem to undermine positive attitudes<sup>23</sup>. In this perspective, Influencer Marketing is not different from any other type of marketing- it is only of value if one can demonstrate that it produces an acceptable return on investment (ROI).

tomoson.com, one of the most significant influencer companies online with 100,801 macro and micro-Influencers as of December 2018, has divided its influencers into 26 categories; namely: eco-friendly, restaurants, office, jewelry, organic, shoes, sporting goods, travel accessories, pets, automotive, books&music, baby, arts & crafts, fitness, toys&games, camera/photo/art, food & drink, auto & travel, home&garden, health, clothing, gifts, family, fashion, beauty, electronics. The top four categories with most favourable influencers were listed as follows: Electronics (35878 influencers), Beauty (23095 influencers), Fashion (14375 influencers), Family (11016 influencers), Auto and Travel (8588 influencers).<sup>24</sup>

For their 2017 listings, Forbes partnered with influencer analytics firm Traackr, using its proprietary data to measure reach, or audience size; resonance, or propensity for virality; and relevance, or engagement related to their area of expertise. After careful analysis, Forbes came up with its long-awaited listings as seen in Table 2:

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<sup>23</sup> Scheer, L.K. and Stern, L.W., (1992). The Effect of Influence Type and Performance Outcomes on Attitude toward the Influencer. *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1 pp. 128-142.

<sup>24</sup> Tomoson company page (December 2018): <https://www.tomoson.com/influencers/categories>.

RANK	SEGMENT FIELD	TOTAL REACH / SUBSCRIBERS
1	Entertainment	246.920.000
2	Gaming	228.000.000
3	Beauty	135.000.000
4	Fitness	196.000.000
5	Kids	72.400.000
6	Pets	68.000.000
7	Tech & Business	63.940.000
8	Food	43.465.400
9	Fashion	31.750.000
10	Travel	17.419.000
11	Parenting	13.000.000
12	Home	7.370.000

Table 1- *Forbes Top Social Influencers Segmentation List 2017* (Source: <https://www.forbes.com/top-influencers/#32ce7f6f72dd>).

### **The Influencer Fraud**

In the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) web page, it is stated as follows<sup>25</sup>

*It is essential for people to know when they are advertised to so that they can understand when content is intended to promote a product or brand; and is not a publication's regular editorial content or an influencer's original independent post.*

In case of the CGI influencers, in the beginning, the audience had been kept uninformed as to the actual identity of the influencer (e.g., The case of lil Miquela), and this could be considered as a fraud in this context. Another fraud that is observed among influencers in social media is the use of fake followers and bolts. At this point, Unilever became one of the first companies to clean up influencer marketing

<sup>25</sup> Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) England: <https://www.asa.org.uk/>.

by committing to remove lousy practice from the discipline. As company's CMO Keith Weed announced in Cannes, Unilever will not be working with influencers who have fake followers or who use bots to grow their accounts<sup>26</sup>.

The independent advertising regulator in England, namely ASA, also started to make sure that influencer ads are labelled transparently. The social media posts by influencers that were unclear about their advertisement nature were banned. In 2010, social influence scoring platforms (like Klout, and in later years sites like PeerIndex and Kred) began to emerge in an attempt to sort and rank individuals by their perceived influence based on the content they shared on social networks, the frequency at which they shared that content, and the size of their audience. These sites are usually used for the below-mentioned purposes<sup>27</sup>: Measuring personal interactions to create an influence score; to put some numbers behind the social media interactions; Tracking different topics to see how influential an individual is in particular niches. The scoring system, however, is regarded as artificial and could be gamed by those using automation and minions to update their accounts. Moreover, some people face the danger of getting obsessed with these social influence scoring platforms and base their value systems on that.

## **Conclusion**

"Influencer", as a label, is most commonly ascribed to someone who has a lot of followers or high engagement through his/her social media channels. One may say that such 'influencers' have a high "social currency" rate. Their audience listens, acts, and consumes with them<sup>28</sup>. Brown. & Fiorella, state that the key to influencer marketing is

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<sup>26</sup> Pearl, D. (26.06.2018). Unilever Says No More Fake Followers and Bots. Influencers Cheer, and Question the Future: <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/unilever-says-no-more-fake-followers-and-bots-influencers-cheer-and-question-the-future/>.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, D. & Fiorella, S. (2013). *Influence Marketing: How to Create, Manage, and Measure Brand Influencers in Social Media Marketing*. USA: Que Publishing. p:2.

<sup>28</sup> Hennessy, B. (2018). *Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social*

to stay ahead of consumer needs and preferences to make them shift toward your product.<sup>29</sup> However, although the target audience is more analyzable statistically with the help of Big Data, the individual emotional analysis is becoming more versatile. Today, with the so-called 'Ikea Effect', perception of value seems to increase when people contribute to the creation of a product. Participation in the production phase is one of the consequences of 'prosumerism' that became influential with social media. In this respect, a shift in authority in social norms takes place, and this has consequences for advertising, especially in the case of influencers.

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Media. USA: Citadel Press. p:12.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, D. & Fiorella, S. (2013). *Influence Marketing: How to Create, Manage, and Measure Brand Influencers in Social Media Marketing*. USA: Que Publishing. p:77.

# PERFORMING AND PERCEIVING THE MICROCELEBRITY STATUS IN SNAPCHAT: AN ITALIAN CASE STUDY

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## Abstract

We can think of microcelebrity as a set of techniques involving people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web and having a curated persona which is narrated in order to be perceived closer to the audience - besides its wideness - as a part of a continuous conversation.<sup>1</sup> In other words, micro-celebrities curate a persona that feels "authentic" to the audience.<sup>2</sup> The democratization of celebrity<sup>3</sup> within online spaces which enable a "perceived interconnectedness",<sup>4</sup> led also to the development of the de-sacralization of celebrity.<sup>5</sup> In fact, social media, while showing the symmetrical communication between fans and celebrities<sup>6</sup> make also visible the work and the gathering of antifandoms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: celebrity and community in the age of social networks*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Marwick, *Status update. Celebrity, publicity & branding in the social media age*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Driessens, 'The Celebrityization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16, 6, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Crystal Abidin, 'Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness', *Ada: A journal of gender, new media and technology*, 8, 1, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Stefano Brilli, 'Where is the sacred in online celebrity? Praise, loath and physical interaction with Italian webstars.', *Mediascapes journal*, 11, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Amanda K. Kehrborg, 'I love you, please notice me: the hierarchical rhetoric of Twitter fandom', *Celebrity Studies*, 6, 1, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Harman and Bethan Jones, 'Fifty shades of grey: Snark fandom and the

Our aim is to understand what kind of practices define the micro-celebrity status in an online space, such as Snapchat, which does not display networks nor feedbacks, and how these practices are perceived. We chose to explore the Italian Snapchat because of the peculiarity in its adoption: It began to spread among Italian users not as Instant Messaging app but as a platform which introduced the ephemeral stories format. We have conducted a 1 year long online ethnographic research among an Italian Snapchat network of users, combined with 10 in-depth interviews.

Our results show that on one side users performed specific tactics in order to present themselves as popular within the network; on the other side users perceived these tactics as “staged”. Microcelebrity practices seem to have been assimilated by individuals, and this makes these practices well recognizable and mostly perceived as deceitful.

## Introduction

In 2013 Snapchat launched stories, which are a collection of contents lasting 24 hours.<sup>8</sup> This technological improvement made possible to create a transient repository of recent content, which can be public - shown to everybody on Snapchat - or semi-public - friend list, friend list with restrictions. Moreover, the invisibility of social networks and of conversations summed with the ephemerality of content give to Snapchat an *anti-networking appeal* which seems to work in a social media environment which has been structuring itself in the opposite direction.

Considering celebrity as a process which is constantly negotiated with an active audience<sup>9</sup> and that the democratization of celebrity<sup>10</sup> on social media is represented by ordinary people gaining visibility and an audience with which to engage, the aim of this work is to under-

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figure of the anti-fan', *Sexualities*, 16, 8, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Snapchat, 'Surprise!', 2013, <https://www.snap.com/it-IT/news/post/surprise/>.

<sup>9</sup> Romana Andò, 'The revenge of Asia Argento: Desecrating celebrity as a means of celebrity culture', *Mediascapes Journal*, 11, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Driessens 'The Celebrityization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16, 6, 2013.

stand how microcelebrity practices are enacted and perceived in Snapchat. Within this social media the interactions as well as degradative comments are private, the markers of popularity (i.e. number of followers) are invisible to the audience and the content is ephemeral. Moreover, we chose to explore the Italian Snapchat because of the peculiarity in its adoption: It began to spread among Italian users not as Instant Messaging (IM) app but as a platform which introduced the ephemeral stories format.

### **Understanding Snapchat: disappearing content among trusted ties**

Snapchat is an image-based IM launched in 2011.<sup>11</sup> In the dedicated literature, Snapchat has been labeled as “mobile application”<sup>12</sup> and also as an “ephemeral media platform”<sup>13</sup> and “ephemeral messaging application”.<sup>14</sup> These last two definitions are based on its main characteristic, which is that the application enables the production and diffusion of content - pictures, videos, textual messages - which by default dis-

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Grieve, ‘Unpacking the characteristics of Snapchat users: A preliminary investigation and an agenda for future research.’, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 74, 2017; Taj W. Makki, Julia R. DeCook, Travis Kadylak and Olivia JuYoung Lee, ‘The social value of Snapchat: An exploration of affiliation motivation, the technology acceptance model, and relational maintenance in Snapchat use.’, *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 34, 5, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Danielle Young, ‘Now You See It, Now You Don’t... Or Do You?: Snapchat’s Deceptive Promotion Of Vanishing Messages Violates Federal Trade Commission Regulations.’, *The John Marshall Journal of Information Technology & Privacy Law*, 30, 4, 2014; Sonja Utz, Nicole Muscanell and Cameran Khalid, ‘Snapchat elicits more jealousy than Facebook: A comparison of snapchat and Facebook use.’, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, ‘Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> T. Franklin Waddell, ‘The allure of privacy or the desire for self-expression? Identifying users’ gratifications for ephemeral, photograph-based communication.’, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19, 7, 2016.

appears.<sup>15</sup> This ephemerality results as one of the main reasons of its success, as it helps users avoiding the context collapse<sup>16</sup> and prevents “clogging up” phone’s storage capability.<sup>17</sup>

On the side of content production, scholars noted that using Snapchat is similar to the act of chatting through images<sup>18</sup> and as content is visible for 10 seconds (or less) after the recipient opens it<sup>19</sup> users have to carefully pay attention to snaps.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, from previous research we know that the content shared is mostly spontaneous and mun-

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<sup>15</sup> danah boyd, ‘Why Snapchat is Valuable: It’s All About Attention’, <http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2014/03/21/snapchat-attention.html>, 2014 ; Christopher Kotfila, ‘This message will self-destruct: The growing role of obscurity and self-destructing data in digital communication.’, *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 40, 2, 2014; Katie Elson Anderson, ‘Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: Snapchat and the rise of ephemeral communication.’, *Library Hi Tech News*, 32, 10, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, ‘To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter.’, *Convergence: the international journal of research into new media technologies*, 17, 2, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, ‘Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> James E. Katz and Elizabeth Thomas Crocker, ‘Selfies and photomessaging as visual conversation: Reports from the United States, United Kingdom, & China.’, *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2015; J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, Kathryn Barnett, Cesia Roche and Jimmy A. Young, ‘“Snapchat is more personal”: an exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships.’, *Computers In Human Behavior*, 62, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Kotfila, ‘This message will self-destruct: The growing role of obscurity and self- destructing data in digital communication.’, *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 40, 2, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> danah boyd, ‘Why Snapchat is Valuable: It’s All About Attention’, <http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2014/03/21/snapchat-attention.html>, 2014; Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, ‘Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015; Andrew C. Billings, Fei Qiao, Lindsey Conlin and Tie & Nie, ‘Permanently desiring the temporary? Snapchat, social media, and the shifting motivations of sports fans.’, *Communication & Sport*, 5, 1, 2017.

dane,<sup>21</sup> where by spontaneous we mean that users mostly shares pieces of everyday life, but also silly content like ugly selfies.<sup>22</sup> This is not only linked to the disappearance of the content but also to the network users build within the app. In fact, researches have shown that Snapchat is used among people who well-know and trust each other.<sup>23</sup> This implies that it is not used for networking<sup>24</sup> and that, as the content is shared within people who already know each other, it is shared with no concerns about the self-presentation.<sup>25</sup> Utz and colleagues,<sup>26</sup> and Piwek and Joinson as well,<sup>27</sup> found in particular that users establish

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, 'Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.', *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> T. Franklin Waddell, 'The allure of privacy or the desire for self-expression? Identifying users' gratifications for ephemeral, photograph-based communication.', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19, 7, 2016; Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, 'Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.', *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015; James E. Katz and Elizabeth Thomas Crocker, 'Selfies and photomessaging as visual conversation: Reports from the United States, United Kingdom, & China.', *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2015; Sonja Utz, Nicole Muscanell and Cameran Khalid, 'Snapchat elicits more jealousy than Facebook: A comparison of snapchat and Facebook use.', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, 'Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.', *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015; J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, Kathryn Barnett, Cesia Roche and Jimmy A. Young, "'Snapchat is more personal': an exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships.", *Computers In Human Behavior*, 62, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, Kathryn Barnett, Cesia Roche and Jimmy A. Young, "'Snapchat is more personal': an exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships.", *Computers In Human Behavior*, 62, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, 'Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.', *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Sonja Utz, Nicole Muscanell and Cameran Khalid, 'Snapchat elicits more jealousy than Facebook: A comparison of snapchat and Facebook use.', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Lukasz Piwek and Adam Joinson, "'What do they snapchat about? Patterns of use in time-limited instant messaging service'", *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, 1, 2015.

and maintain connections with family members, friends, or significant others. As confirmed by Punyanunt-Carter, Delacruz and Wrench,<sup>28</sup> users tend to share personal content which seems to be more adherent to the representation of the “true” self. So Snapchat not only facilitates self-disclosure and self-expression<sup>29</sup> but it also a tool for relational maintenance<sup>30</sup> which reinforce social bonds.<sup>31</sup>

As noted by Bayer and colleagues,<sup>32</sup> the private nature perceived and enacted in Snapchat is supported by the absence of affordances enabling the visibility of feedbacks. In fact, users can in no way show public appreciation or scorn towards content produced by others. Moreover, unlike other social media platforms - Facebook or Instagram to cite the most popular - Snapchat does not give to its users the possibility to browse each other’s friend lists.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, J.J. De La Cruz and Jason S. Wrench, ‘Investigating the Relationships Among College Students’ Satisfaction, Addiction, Needs, Communication Apprehension, Motives, and Uses & Gratifications with Snapchat.’, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 17, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Jette Kofoed and Malene Charlotte Larsen, ‘A snap of intimacy: photo-sharing practices among young people on social media.’, *First Monday*, 21, 11, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> T. Franklin Waddell, ‘The allure of privacy or the desire for self-expression? Identifying users’ gratifications for ephemeral, photograph-based communication.’, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19, 7, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> James E. Katz and Elizabeth Thomas Crocker, ‘Selfies and photomessaging as visual conversation: Reports from the United States, United Kingdom, & China.’, *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, ‘Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Rachel Grieve, ‘Unpacking the characteristics of Snapchat users: A preliminary investigation and an agenda for future research.’, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 74, 2017.

## **Micro-celebrity practices: popularity metrics, strange familiarity and ordinary users**

Terry Senft, who first coined the term 'micro-celebrity', defined it as 'people "amping up" their popularity over the web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites'.<sup>34</sup> In Alice Marwick and danah boyd's opinion,<sup>35</sup> micro-celebrity is a practice with the same aim of maintaining popularity among people constituting one's public, perceived as 'fans'. This goal is reached by managing and constructing a presentation of the self compatible with this kind of idea about the 'other' in mind.<sup>36</sup> The success of this management of this kind of self-presentation can be measured through clicks, views and public interactions, following the logic of the online attention economy: more likes mean more status for the micro-celebrity.<sup>37</sup>

In comparison to conventional celebrities the relationship with the audience is managed to seem more 'real', but at the same time 'both [media celebrities and micro-celebrities] must brand or die'.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective online presentation responds to the process of self-commodification where online identity can be described as a product made in order to be consumed by users. In order to succeed there is constant documentation of the everyday life while working on an image of the self which is at the same time fictionalized (as it is tailored for others to be consumed) and 'real'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: celebrity and community in the age of social networks*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, 'To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter.', *Convergence: the international journal of research into new media technologies*, 17, 2, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, 'To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter.', *Convergence: the international journal of research into new media technologies*, 17, 2, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Alice E. Marwick, 'Instafame: luxury selfies in the attention economy.', *Public culture*, 27, 75, 2015; Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang and Raymond Welling, 'Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers.', *Celebrity Studies*, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: celebrity and community in the age of social networks*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Alice Marwick, *Status update. Celebrity, publicity & branding in the social media age*,

Moreover, as pointed out by Marwick and boyd on social media platforms 'all individuals have an audience that they can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interaction'<sup>40</sup> so that micro-celebrity practice can be understood as a pervasive cultural phenomenon. We can observe that the 'performance of celebrity has become part of the daily practice of millions of consumers'.<sup>41</sup> So there is a normalization of the 'celebrification process'<sup>42</sup> through which ordinary people get into celebrity logic acquiring a media form by performances of an authentic and at the same time commodified self.<sup>43</sup> About this process, started well before digital media, David Giles states that the increasing visibility of ordinary people has nowadays come to the point that these online celebrities started to replace traditional celebrities despite their audience has not to be 'mass' but it can become 'global' because of digital media affordances.<sup>44</sup>

The democratization of celebrity<sup>45</sup> and the tendency to adopt a communicative style oriented towards ordinariness<sup>46</sup> within online spaces which enable a "perceived interconnectedness",<sup>47</sup> led also to the development of a visible de-sacralization of celebrity.<sup>48</sup> In fact,

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New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, 'To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter.', *Convergence: the international journal of research into new media technologies*, 17, 2, 2010, p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Chris Hackley and Rungpaka Amy Hackley, 'Marketing and the cultural production of celebrity in the era of media convergence.', *Journal of marketing management*, 31, 5–6, 2015, p. 469.

<sup>42</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, Reaktion Press, London, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Nick Couldry, 'Teaching us to fake it: the ritualized norms of television's 'reality' games.', Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, eds. *Reality TV. Remaking television culture*, New York: NYU Press, 2004, pp. 57–74.

<sup>44</sup> David Giles, *Twenty First Century Celebrity*, Emerald Publishing, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Oliver Driessens, 'The Celebritization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16, 6, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Graeme Turner, 'Approaching celebrity studies.', *Celebrity Studies*, 1, 1, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Crystal Abidin, 'Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness', *Ada: A journal of gender, new media and technology*, 8, 1, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Stefano Brilli, 'Where is the sacred in online celebrity? Praise, loath and physical

social media while showing the symmetrical communication between fans and celebrities<sup>49</sup> make also visible the work and the gathering of antifandoms.<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion, the micro-celebrity practice contains (visual) self-presentation techniques that are used to create an image for fans to consume, which has to be maintained over time as for a web-celebrity the connection to the audience is a critical asset. Social media platforms are spaces that provide visible metrics of popularity, which enhance a self-branding process and where 'ordinary' users can find online fame.<sup>51</sup>

### **Research questions and methodology**

Given this scenario this paper tries to answer the following two research questions:

- RQ1: What kind of practices define the microcelebrity status in an online space which does not display networks nor feedbacks?
- RQ2: How are these practices perceived?

The first question is about the relation between the practice and platform's affordances, trying to understand how individuals, who are used to micro-celebrity as a self-commodification practice within online social media, respond to Snapchat's 'limitations' in visibility and permanence. While the second question aims to widen up the understanding of audiences' reactions to such strategic communication which in Snapchat has to find peculiar tactics in order to be ensued.

While most of the studies about Snapchat used surveys as main tool to obtain data because of the ephemeral nature of the content produced

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interaction with Italian webstars.', *Mediascapes journal*, 11, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Amanda K. Kehrberg, 'I love you, please notice me: the hierarchical rhetoric of Twitter fandom', *Celebrity Studies*, 6, 1, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Harman and Bethan Jones, 'Fifty shades of grey: Snark fandom and the figure of the anti-fan', *Sexualities*, 16, 8, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang and Raymond Welling, 'Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers.', *Celebrity Studies*, 2016.

within the app<sup>52</sup> or mixed quantitative and qualitative methods<sup>53</sup> this study used a qualitative methodology based on a digital ethnography research<sup>54</sup> - which lasted from May 2016 to May 2017 - and on ten in-depth interviews conducted via Skype.

In the first phase, as the researchers are positioned as Snapchat users their experience was employed a) to build a network of Italian users and 2) to explore contents produced by these contacts during one-year long participant observation. The primary sources employed to build a network were Italian online media sharing news about Snapchat and mentioning its users; blogs collecting lists of Italian accounts and posts on other social media where accounts tried to acquire new followers on Snapchat. Then starting from these existing ties, another source for adding users were the mentions - to other users - happening within Snapchat stories the researchers were following. Also, in these first steps, we started collecting field notes, gaining insights about networking tactics adopted by Italian users.

In the second phase, we daily monitored and participated in the conversations happening within the built network, both by interactions via private messages and by producing contents such videos or pictures posted within our public stories. During this period field notes were collected regularly about contents shared and on the emerging practices we noticed.

In the third phase, we conduct ten in-depth interviews with active participants - where 'active' means users producing stories on daily basis - from researchers' network, regarding their experience in Snapchat and their perception of other users' popularity.

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<sup>52</sup>Lukasz Piwek and Adam Joinson, "What do they snapchat about? Patterns of use in time-limited instant messaging service", *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, 1, 2015.

<sup>53</sup>Jette Kofoed and Malene Charlotte Larsen, 'A snap of intimacy: photo-sharing practices among young people on social media.', *First Monday*, 21, 11, 2016.

<sup>54</sup>Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the internet: embedded, embodied and every day*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015.

## **Quantifying popularity and questioning authenticity**

From the interviews and the field notes we were able to reconstruct 1) the initial phase of Snapchat adoption among some Italian early adopters, 2) the consequences derived both from the platform's affordances and from the specific timing of the adoption, 3) the micro-celebrity practices invented and performed and 4) their reception.

*Networking VS affordances: struggling to get an audience.*

As Snapchat began to spread in Italy when the platform introduced the stories, the first thing we noticed, also by direct experience, was that users did not have a pre-existing network of friends within the app. Moreover, in social media if there is no one sharing contents and watching ours then being on the platform is pointless. So people had to find an audience, as one interviewee said:

*I downloaded Snapchat in 2014 and in 3 days I removed it from the phone as nobody was using it. Then in 2015, I suppose, I started noticing on Twitter people talking about it and I downloaded it again [...] I started adding contacts from there [Twitter] [...] and I looked for other users on the web (D., m)*

As also other interviewees said, users find out about Snapchat on other social media - mostly by influencers - or by online media sources. As a result, the network they build was not necessarily made of pre-existing ties or close friends. Moreover, Snapchat did not suggest users to follow if you did not have their mobile phones already, and in order to look for a user you had to know the spelling of hers or his nickname, otherwise, the platform would not allow you to find a similar one. This is why

*At the beginning it was difficult, I think we were all struggling trying to find someone to follow (C., f)*

In response to this *struggle*, some users tried to organize and to create collective accounts to be 'taken over' by whoever wanted to participate. In order to spread the word a key role was played by popular social media accounts who were the first to take part in this project:

*I started following [name] - an Instagram influencer - at some point, she mentioned [name of the take-over account], I started following it and discovered people to follow (E., f).*

Following popular social media accounts was not enough as, in order to have an audience, it was necessary to find people to connect with. In a space which became appealing because of the stories format not having a public was an obstacle. This is why after the promotional phase of these take-over accounts ordinary people with no direct experience of internet fame started to participate.

### *Networking practices as visibility tactics.*

So, because of the affordances of the platform and because of the timing of Italian adoption of Snapchat several networking strategies needed to be invented. These strategies can be divided into two groups on the basis of where they were taking place: *Outside Snapchat* and *Inside Snapchat*.

In the group of strategies taking place outside Snapchat, there is the diffusion of one's nickname or 'Snapcode' - a sort of QR code - through different social media in order to invite people on Snapchat and to make one's nickname visible. Moreover, at one point, one influencer created a Telegram super-group (with hundreds of users) as he mentioned several times in his stories that he was commenting what was going on in Snapchat in a group chat with some friends. A tool such as a group was considered useful in order to do not miss out conversations, which could happen because of the ephemerality of content and because there were not searchable hashtags. Group chats or Facebook groups started popping out in order to have a place in which gather together, get to visualize the network and chat in public. Another way to gather invented by other users were the *SnapAveritives* held in cities like Rome or Milan. These events were basically meetups, during which users get to know in person people from their network but were also an occasion to meet new users and spend some time together as Snapchat passionates. And, of course, appear in other users' stories while snapchatting the event.

The aforementioned take-over accounts are just one example of the networking strategies happening inside the platform. Others are represented by mentions and hashtags. Being mentioned by someone in her

or his story (the nickname was written on the video) did not cause a notification, so mentions were not a tool for communicating between two users but an internal strategy of promoting an account, therefore making this account visible and most likely to get new contacts. Users also started inventing hashtags that, similarly to mentions, were not functionalities provided by Snapchat. In fact, hashtags did not aggregate content: they were not browsable, they were not a hypertextual link between contents shared with the same hashtag on them. So when a user created a hashtag (i.e. #myfavouriteparfume) it was in order to have other users participating and talking about it. In this way, while explaining the meaning of the hashtag, they had to mention the creator within their stories giving her or him credit for the creation and more visibility.

The last activity, which was not understood as 'strategic', that was taking place inside Snapchat was totally invisible as it was happening through private messages. In fact, interactions represented the way in which users got to really network, to know each other. Having multiple interactions - commenting stories - was part of the everyday experience within the platform. At the same time interacting with each other increased the possibility to get new strong ties within the personal network, who will eventually spread users' nickname.

### *Performing the micro-celebrity status in Snapchat*

While interactions such as private chats are considered ordinary, a public display of the desire to interact was an indicator of some sort of popularity. Sharing stories in which one is asking to get questions in chat and then answering to those questions in the story, made some users think about the success in terms of followers of an account

*If you ask people to ask you questions about you, or your job, or anything...you must have lots of followers...I mean, otherwise...are you crazy or something? What's your issue? [laughs] (F. 2, f)*

The public display of interactions and giving for granted that an audience would be curious about you and would ask you questions is considered normal for a micro-celebrity. Therefore acting like this on Snapchat represented a good proof, in some interviewees' opinion, of one's centrality in the network.

A similar tactic was sharing screenshots of the answers received. As Snapchat does not show feedbacks nor followers then users started to show off their success using screenshots as content within their stories, which also represented a proof of popularity: more screenshots meant more followers. Of course selecting the screenshot to show gives to the users much more control and power over the feedbacks circulating publicly about the contents she or he produces. So, despite what goes on in other social media, Snapchat secrecy when it comes to audience participation represents a tool in order to eventually keep private anti-fandom work.

As we have seen the micro-celebrity practice is closely tied to self-branding and self-commodification. In Snapchat there were two ways to commodify one's identity: creating a format and - sometimes consequently - creating a niche. Creating a format meant creating coherent and recognizable contents - i.e. using the same filters, giving a name to the format - about something - i.e. cooking. As an ordinary user explained:

*I started answering to questions my contacts were asking me on Twitter about my work and I answered to them on Snapchat as it was fun [laughs] I kinda invented a format, it was called [name] (D. 2, m.)*

Contents produced could also be about study interests, passions or any other kind of personal knowledge - i.e. book blogging. Later on, during the same interview, talking in general about Snapchat the user also underlined how having a format on Snapchat is a sign that a user is popular:

*I mean [nickname] had a format, and she did this kind of thing because I suppose she works with social media and she was kinda famous, so having a format is something that you're not doing if you're not well known (D. 2, m.)*

As the interviewee was an ordinary user, these two descriptions of what a format is, made clear that self-branding can be observed reflectively in other users creating formats, but as a practice, it was so absorbed in the everyday self-presentation practice that one is not aware of performing it. Moreover having a format is linked to operat-

ing within a niche of expertise. For example an interviewee - expert user of social media - said:

*[nickname] was talking about movies all the time [...] you know it happens like that...you are passionate about something and you're the first to talk about that on a social media and you colonize that theme so when someone thinks about that you're the first to be remembered...he became the movie guy...(A., f)*

As Snapchat was a new space and because of the peculiarity of its affordances users had the chance to be *the first* to talk about something and *to colonize a theme*. This kind of expressions gives back metaphorically the idea that social media are places in which one can conquer - being recognized - and settle down his or her domain of competence, a niche, that works like a calling card for a user's brand.

### ***Perceiving the micro-celebrity status***

Giving visibility to invisible interactions happening on Snapchat answers to the need for quantifying one's success among the network. The number of screenshots containing answers or content produced because stimulated by an ad hoc hashtag, as well as the number of mentions a user was capable to obtain represented a correspondence with those markers of popularity present in other social media - such as the number of followers, comments, likes. Also, when ordinary users performed the screenshot tactic but with fewer contents it was judged as a *poor thing* to do and these users were sometimes looked at as some sort of *wannabees*:

*She was showing the answers received and she got tons of them, but for example [nickname] did that too and received like 3 answers, poor thing...he tried but: no. (F., f)*

Moreover, when these markers of popularity were not shown but just mentioned during the stories, implying to have an active and demanding audience, doubts about the honesty of those users started to spread:

*They were all like "A lot of people asked me"...WHO?! HOW MANY?!  
I can say that too and totally fake it! (D., m.)*

This underlines that with no markers given by the platform and no proofs shown by the user, the idea of someone pretending to be famous was a backfire. *Faking, pretending* and *trying too hard* have been expressions used several times by the interviewees when talking about the performance of popularity in Snapchat.

In this scenario, and in contemporary social media ecosystem where users are aware and used to the presence of influencers collaborating with brands, it was very clear to the audience that someone was - or became - an influent account when the market intruded her or his stories in the form of product reviews or snapchatting about some branded event.

*[nickname] started showing products, talking about products and that was when I realized that she must have become famous! (C., f)*

However, even in this case, not being able to quantify popularity was tricky. As at the beginning of Snapchat adoption in Italy most of its early adopters were passionate social media users, sometimes working in the communication field, and this led other users to question the authenticity of these signals from the market in their stories.

*I kinda had the thought that as they worked in the field of communication...even if they were not SO popular on Snapchat they still got products and special treats from brands because they suggested each other to the brands...like a Snapchat MAFIA [laughs] (D. 2, m)*

The idea of a *Snapchat mafia* circulated along with stories users posted while talking in general about the platform. It has been noticed that a recurrent idea was that there was a group of users knowing each other from work, or from other social media, who carried on strategies to enhance their popularity or to fake it. This never clearly mentioned users were part of what was called *the little group* - in Italian *gruppetto*. This name, as well as *Snapchat mafia*, gave the idea of some inner circle, an exclusive group of people with connections with brands who played some sort of tricks to deceive about their *real numbers*. Being publicly so vague about whom maybe part of this *mafia* shows how

public degradative comments about celebrities (or supposed celebrities) were absent probably because anti-fandom, as well as fandom, needs to gather and organize, but mostly it needs someone popular to refer to while for Snapchat ordinary users popularity was often questioned.

Other doubts about the honesty of users, in general, were about the aforementioned creation of ad hoc hashtags and the attempts to start interacting with other members asking or answering to questions.

*We're not stupid. Creating hashtags is just for your name to spread, even asking questions is to show how influential you are... (M., m)*

Again, these practices were interpreted as some sort of dirty work whose goal was not interacting with other people but getting more views and followers. Also, micro-celebrity practices, such as for example posting screenshots, were considered by some a way to show off with no respect for the audience:

*It was so boring watching those screenshots...it was just showing off! It was not about the content of the screenshot at all (D. 2, m)*

These attempts were often rejected and described as almost offensive to one's smartness. The other side of the coin is that users may be so exhausted by the micro-celebrity practice that they spot the goal of self-branding even when it is not intended.

## **Conclusions**

In the dedicated literature Snapchat has been described as a social media - or an IM app - not used for networking<sup>55</sup> where content is shared within trusted ties<sup>56</sup> with no concerns about the self-presenta-

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<sup>55</sup>J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, Kathryn Barnett, Cesia Roche and Jimmy A. Young, "Snapchat is more personal": an exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships., *Computers In Human Behavior*, 62, 2016.

<sup>56</sup>Lukasz Piwek and Adam Joinson, "What do they snapchat about? Patterns of use in time-limited instant messaging service"., *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, 1, 2015.

tion.<sup>57</sup> Therefore a place in which users tend to be more adherent to the representation of the “true” self.<sup>58</sup> However, as practices are located within a cultural context, this Italian case study shows that when Snapchat spread in Italy it was perceived as a social media with the goal of creating and watching stories. These stories are a performative space and this performativity is emphasized by the presence of filters for the internal camera.

So, in the beginning, users tried to find ways to connect with other members, answering to the need for an audience and for entertaining. Early adopters managed to avoid some of the structural elements in order to increase their networks.

As users did not have markers of popularity they tried to put their conversations *at work* in order to become more visible, performing micro-celebrity practices (not always consciously). Networking attempts, as a response to Snapchat affordances, were a visibility tool. In this way, most of the content produced during the interactions can be understood as commodified, created in order to be productive in terms of social attention. This also means that users posting screenshots had a complete control within the public negotiation of their celebrity status.<sup>59</sup> By the interpretations given by some of the interviewees, we understood that mentions exchange, based on the interactions users had, worked as an exchange gift with the goal of receiving visibility. This led us to think that positive feedbacks and a good behaviour were strategically performed in order to increase one’s network by being mentioned.

Moreover, screenshots of private comments received worked as signifiers of users’ “success” among the network, responding to the need to quantify the success because of the absence of popularity indicators.

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<sup>57</sup> Joseph Bayer, Nicole B. Ellison, Sarita Y. Schoenebeck and Emily B. Falk, ‘Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat.’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, J.J. De La Cruz and Jason S. Wrench, ‘Investigating the Relationships Among College Students’ Satisfaction, Addiction, Needs, Communication Apprehension, Motives, and Uses & Gratifications with Snapchat.’, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 17, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Romana Andò, ‘The revenge of Asia Argento: Desecrating celebrity as a means of celebrity culture’, *Mediascapes Journal*, 11, 2018.

Quantification tactics resulted as an efficient practice to prove one's centrality, but at the same time, they had relevant backfires on users' credibility and perceived honesty. More digitally literate users said that these tactics were perceived as a not interesting nor honest way of being on Snapchat, basically a trick. Following this perspective also being too participative (hashtags, conversations, meetings) arose suspects, blurring the line between authenticity and inauthenticity. However, these suspects were never expressed publicly. This evidence along with the need to build a network - which often happened through the mentions derived by interesting content and good behaviour or by positive feedbacks to one's content - may mean that desecrating practices within this particular online environment were difficult to perform.

In conclusion, we found out that everyday life as a microcelebrity practice, as it is been internalized by users of all levels, became well recognizable and because of that mostly perceived as non-authentic. Transparency expressed by the numbers shown on other social media is, therefore, an affordance which reassures users: without these markers the micro-celebrity practices feel deceitful, leading audiences to desecrate it privately.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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These proceedings collect 11 selected contributions presented during the *IV Celebrity Studies Journal Conference*, held in Rome, at Sapienza University in June 2018. The collection aims at presenting how celebration and its desecration – the main focus of the conference and of the publication – are an ongoing process produced by a disorderly sequence of significant moments in the celebrity's career and in the audience's experience of it in which the media (traditional and digital ones) play a significant role.

Understanding processes of desecration is a fundamental step into furthering the knowledge of contemporary society since celebrity culture is not only related to the showbusiness but to politics, market and, more in general, to everyday life. The field of application (and investigation) of celebrity studies is vast and the contributions we are presenting here are no exception. They use a variety of approaches, employ different investigative and research tools, cover different media, touch on a variety of themes and have been applied to the understanding of events of past and contemporary phenomena. The collection has been 'ideally' divided into three sections: Stars, Celebrities and Fame; Power, Politics and Prestige; and Celebrity Strategies for the Market and Beyond.

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