

Consumption

Perhaps the most obvious relation between the carnival and consumption is that the carnival is characterized by excess. Excess itself implies a form of transgression from the norms of moderation so that consumption itself often becomes integral to a carnival's subversive activity. Moreover, theorists tend to highlight the significance of the carnival participant's engagement in simultaneously producing and consuming the event. Given its ubiquity in the history of human culture, the carnival may be the paradigmatic example of what has recently been termed "prosumption" (a portmanteau of production and consumption). Insofar as the argument can be made that we are (or always have been) moving toward a society where activities of production and consumption are collapsing into one another, as suggested by George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, the carnival becomes an increasingly important metaphor and the carnivalesque an increasingly important object of study.

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See also Liminality; Prosumption; Resistance; Rituals; Semiotics; Social Movements; Spectacles; Tourist Gaze

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CELEBRITY

Celebrity is the status of being well-known, praised, exalted, or attributed with importance, and it is also used to describe people or things endowed with such status. So someone can *have* celebrity and also *be* a celebrity. The provenance of the word is revealing: from the French *célébrité*, which derives from the Latin *celebritas*, meaning honored or renowned, the term has strayed into English language dissociated from references to accomplishments or great deeds.

Celebrities do not typically ply their labor so much as their presence, usually in the form of a moving visual image that appears on television or computer screens or a stationary representation on a print advertisement. Either way, the effect is to implicate those looking at or reading about the celebrity in an act of consumption. As Egon Franck and Stephan Nüesch have pointed out, "the well-knownness [*sic*] of celebrities has become a viable commodity all by itself" (2007, 225). It has become tradable "independent of accomplishment, heroics, or talent." Celebrities are, by definition, renowned, though not necessarily for anything they have done or said.

History

The condition of being well-known is immemorial: dramatists and philosophers earned reputations for their wisdom, and political and military leaders for notable achievements since the growth of Aegean city-states from 900 BCE. Homer, Pythagoras, and Plato remain canonical figures. Alexander the Great commemorated victories over the Persian Empire by naming cities in his honor: the Egyptian port Alexandria was founded in 332 BCE. Alexander has been identified by Leo Braudy, in his *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986) as the first figure to foment his own fame.

Certainly, famous people appear throughout history; indeed, the way we study history is principally through the decisions and deeds of the famous. But celebrities index a particular type of historical context, one in which fame and accomplishments are decoupled. Some scholars argue that this is not unique to the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. “In the first half of the eighteenth century a process occurred by which a nascent culture of celebrity began to form side by side with an existing culture of fame,” recorded Stella Tillyard in her work “Celebrity in 18th-Century London” (2005, 22). She identifies three specific sets of circumstances: a weak English monarchy with limited moral authority, the lapsing of legislation controlling the numbers of printing presses, and, to some extent, printing itself, “and a public interested in new ways of thinking about other people and themselves” (22).

Combined with limited prohibition on libel and the proliferation of places of entertainment, these led to a culture in which the casual and unconstrained conversation we now know as gossip about others’ lives, public and private, became a kind of right of citizenship. There is a resemblance to the social conditions that underlay the growth of celebrity in the 1990s: (1) a loss of confidence in traditional leadership, (2) a multiplication of global media channels, and (3) an uncommon interest in the personal and hitherto confidential affairs of other people.

Voyeurism/Performance

As the authority and indeed credibility of established leaders receded, consumers searched for newer sources of inspiration. They found them amid the burgeoning media channels filled with inexpensive content culled from music videos, talk shows, and what was once called light entertainment. In another era, prying into those aspects of another’s life considered private might be unwholesomely voyeuristic, even prurient. Yet, in this field of inquiry, the media found a new resource; and, during the 1990s, more invasive forms of journalism gave rise to a new type of figure for which impertinent inquiries became a necessary condition. To be a celebrity, one required others to take an interest in one’s personal affairs. Those others were the consumers known as fans.

In his *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*, Joshua Gamson argued that fans became simultaneous voyeurs of and performers in

commercial culture” (1994, 137). Gamson’s research into the fans’ experiences indicates that, while they were popularly regarded as manipulable consumers of the popular media in which celebrities regularly appeared, fans were in fact aware of their own roles in creating, shaping, and perhaps destroying celebrities.

Perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of the simultaneity of voyeurism/performance came in 1993 with the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, who was the *ne plus ultra* of celebrities, though without explicit commercial interests. “Since her death, a new (and improved) generation of commodities circulate with her image on them—commemorative stamps, plates, and dolls,” observed Diana Taylor. “The music and books she’s inspired have reached the top of the charts and grossed millions of dollars.” Taylor described the consumption of Diana as an “orgy of promiscuous identification. . . . ‘The people’ are not only the consumers, but also the constructed of this death” (2002, 75–76).

Commodities

A culture in which worshipful devotion to celebrities was a prominent feature took shape incrementally through the 1990s, though the celebration of Diana was a reminder of how it was possible to personalize a relationship with someone known only through images, whether on screen or in print. This collective sensation of intimacy was crucial to celebrities’ value: the illusion of having a human relationship with celebrity figures effectively offered a nexus of consumption, linking consumers to products that bore the endorsement or imprimatur of someone they experienced as familiar. When Marina Sejung Choi and Nora J. Rifon wrote, “consumers are constantly transporting symbolic properties out of products into their lives to construct their self,” they suggest a mechanism through which celebrities transmute into commodities: “Celebrity emulation may take the form of purchasing and using the product endorsed by the celebrity, thereby obtaining the celebrity-conveyed meanings and constructing a satisfying self-concept” (2007, 309).

Buying cologne, jewelry, cars, or any other piece of merchandise associated with a celebrity, by this account, links consumers not just to celebrities but to the values, sentiments, and imagery they seem to personify in the eyes of the consumer. This was especially pertinent in a global market that, in the 1990s,

segmented demographically; human figures in whom a variety of consumer groups invested relevance were transcendent—they cut across markets.

Lee Barron invoked Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* citizenship to understand how consumers were invited to engage and share with fashionable celebrities endorsing products, in particular clothes, cosmetics, and personal products: "To purchase such items may, symbolically at least, enable the consumer to share in the glamour of such celebrities" (2007, 457).

In this sense, celebrities not only advertise commodities, but the culture in which those commodities acquire value. Celebrities promote what Christopher Lasch, in his *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (1991), called "consumption as a way of life": their sheer presence persuades consumers to buy goods for which there is no obvious need. To extend Barron's point, the "need" is developed in the *habitus*, the way in which experience is constituted. Celebrities are both fabricators of and ambulant advertisements for consumer culture.

Authenticity

"Celebrities are rapidly filling the roles that priests, politicians, and wealthy philanthropists once served," wrote Daniel Harris in 2008. "We are transferring moral authority to the only public servants that remain: pop singers, Hollywood stars, and the casts of our favorite sitcoms" (138). We should also add evacuees from reality TV shows to this group. As traditional leaders once guided opinion on how to prosecute the good life, celebrities later instructed by example, consuming conspicuously and inexhaustibly.

By the early 2000s, "the attention economy," as Charles Fairchild calls it, needed careful management: as advertisers vied for consumer's interests, new forms of entertainment appeared, most noticeably reality TV, featuring unexceptional people conscripted into what might forty years earlier be mistaken for a Philip Zimbardo experiment (in which participants were secreted in a simulated prison and observed).

As preposterous as the concept might have seemed, reality television, with its fly-on-the-wall documentary format, proved an improbable success, and its *dramatis personae* were unlikely celebrities. In his study of "idols," which, as contestants in shows such as *American Idol* and Britain's *The X Factor*, were

close relatives of the reality TV characters, Fairchild stipulated: "Their celebrity is dependent for its public validation on the ways in which each emerges from anonymity" (2007, 357).

Authenticity was key: the shows pioneered a type of consumer identification by establishing what Fairchild recognized as "trust," not just in the contestants but in the integrity of the whole enterprise. Viewers voted for who they wanted to remain in the show and who they wanted ejected, providing for a kind of interactive democracy. It engendered, as Fairchild detects, an ingenious form of branding that was "primarily about creating sustainable relationships with consumers by constructing and mobilizing their loyalty and trust" (2007, 358).

The ordinariness of the characters reinforced the vital authenticity: unlike the remote, inaccessible, and untouchable Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s, the new celebrities were recognizably common. Their celebrity might be fleeting and, of course, subject to the caprice of consumers, but, during their short reigns, they typically endorsed products, authored prescriptive DVDS, wrote magazine columns, appeared on talk shows, opened nightclubs, and engaged in all manner of activity that entailed selling products and, in some way, kept fans involved in a culture of perpetual consumption.

The upsurge of interest in celebrities has been explained as an ersatz religiosity in a secular culture, a media-borne enterprise produced and sustained by global corporations, and, more conspiratorially, a political distraction that diverts attention from pragmatic affairs that affect material lives.

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See also Authenticity; Citizenship; Commercialization; Commodities; Fans; Promotional Culture; Reality TV; Self-Presentation

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CHANNELS OF DESIRE

The concept of *channels of desire* basically refers to ways in which various social agents mediate communication about what is desirable and what is not. As such, it incorporates all social autocommunication about the goals and purposes of life and the practices and aspirations that constitute it, from schooling and other socialization systems to mass mediated imagery. Desire is a triadic relation between a desiring subject, a desired object, and another, possibly collective, desiring subject. Desire is mimetic. Hence, in its broadest sense, society at large and its institutional orchestrations of, as well as individual member's communications concerning, what is of value and what is not represent the overarching channel of desire.

For analytical purposes, it is necessary to break down the general concept of channels of desire into some of its more significant constitutive and institutionalized parts. Georg Simmel was one of the pioneers who analyzed the functioning of fashion and proposed a trickle-down theory, according to which desire is channeled from the higher social classes to the lower classes through processes of emulation, and conversely, the higher social classes are obliged to engage in stylistic renovation to maintain class distinctions of taste. The predominant source for channeling this process has historically been the advertising industry. Consequently, advertising and its role in the historical development of contemporary forms of social communication are leading aspects of channels of desire.

The manipulative ways in which advertising is seen as shaping social and personal worldviews have generated a plethora of critical analyses. The notion

of channels of desire in a consumer culture context is therefore often associated with the work of a certain branch of critical sociology that is concerned about the spread of consumerism and materialism, in particular through the manipulative power of contemporary mass media. From this perspective, the rise of consumer culture, with its processes of industrialization, commodification, and mass-mediated commercial communication is the background on which one must understand the workings of channels of desire. The eponymous work of Stuart and Elisabeth Ewen stands as prototypical of this school of thought, with its critical analysis of the social history of the proliferation of "a wide, repeatable vernacular of commercial images and ideas" (Ewen and Ewen 1982, 9). Primary sources of these commercial images and ideas are the industries of advertising, movies, and fashion.

To some extent, behind this critique there is a tacit moralism, an understanding that desire is somehow dubious and less acceptable as a social principle of organization compared to the more acceptable fulfillment of personal and social needs. But as has been argued elsewhere, desire represents a way of understanding human social motivation that fundamentally challenges the idea that it is possible and useful for social scientists to isolate more basic, presocial sets of utilities and privilege them with the denomination "need."

As a consequence, desire, here, is understood not so much as addressing the cornucopia of things, services, and experiences that contemporary consumers can long for beyond the satisfaction of their basic needs, but more generally as the way in which the social environment influences our aspirations in life. This is why the question of channels of desire opens up and becomes much more inclusive of various social forms of communication. From the basic socialization patterns to the plethora of social contacts and mass-mediated imagery that constitute modern lives, all of these teach us something about what is desirable in life, not just in positive but also in negative terms—channels of desire teach us goals and aspirations in life, but likewise we are taught what not to desire, depending on various social taste patterns.

This implies that the classical channels of desire, as evoked in the legacy of Ewen and Ewen, remain important, although they possibly work in more complex ways than we are usually inclined to think. In her discussion of the historical emergence and the