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CARNIVALESQUE CELEBRIFICATION

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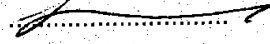
CARNAVALESQUE CELEBRIFICATION

KARNAVALIMSİ ÜNLENDİRME/ÜNLÜLEŞTİRME

Tuğba YAZICI

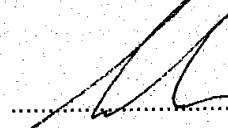
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## **PREFACE**

This thesis is an intersection of my previous readings in cultural studies and celebrity studies over the years. Visual textuality and celebrity texts have always fascinated me in their symbolism to mirror societal transformations. The identification of a novel phenomenon proposed as ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ was a result of my thought process in search of a thesis subject. The similarities in the construction of some celebrity texts demonstrated some resemblance to Bakhtin’s carnival spirit. The literature research phase and the writing phase enabled me to develop my initial idea further into a thesis. I believe that it is a valuable contribution to the existing literature on celebrity culture.

I’m forever indebted to Assoc. Prof. Itir Erhart for her ongoing support and understanding during my studies. When I first met her on campus as a chance encounter a few years ago and started talking to her about her book, I was awestruck by her light. Her positivity, kindness and depth of knowledge have been definitive facilitators during this demanding time. Last but not least, I’m forever grateful for my daughter. She is not only my muse but also my harbor.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to propose ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ which is a particular process whereby ordinary people are transformed into celebrities through carnival-like performances. ‘Carnavalesque celebrification’ harbors the carnival spirit and is situated upon out of ordinariness and performativity. Out of ordinariness is inherent in carnivalesque celebrity texts and is manifested in their visuality, performances and narratives. Performativity is demonstrated through visual textuality and theatricality. Elements of exaggeration and excessiveness are ever-present in carnivalesque celebrity texts. Cultural factors that have laid the foundation for the flourishing of this phenomenon such as narcissistic selfhood, privatized hedonism and sexualized self-presentation are outlined and analyzed. Five attributes of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ are presented and three celebrities who exemplify the phenomenon are identified, namely Lady Gaga, Cardi B, and Kylie Jenner.

### **Keywords**

Celebrity (celebrities), celebrity texts, visual texts, celebrification, out of ordinariness, carnival, carnivalesque.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı ‘karnavalımsı ünleştirme/ünlüleştirme’ adlı bir süreci sunmaktır. Bu süreç, normal insanların karnavalımsı performanslar sergilemek suretiyle ünlü insanlara dönüşmesi olarak açıklanabilir. ‘Karnavalımsı ünleştirme/ünlüleştirme’ içinde karnaval ruhunu barındırmakta ve sıra dışılık ile performativite üzerine konumlanmaktadır. Sıra dışılık karnavalımsı ünlülerin görselliklerinde, performanslarında ve anlatılarında gözlemelenebilir. Performativite hem görsel anlatılarında, hem de teatralliklerinde belirgindir. Abartı ve aşırılık barındıran unsurlar karnavalımsı ünlülerde daimi olarak mevcuttur. Bu fenomenin ortaya çıkmasındaki altyapıyı hazırlamış olan narsisistik benlik oluşumu, özelleştirilmiş hedonizm ve cinselleştirilmiş öz-presentation gibi kültürel faktörler sıralanmış ve analiz edilmiştir. ‘Karnavalımsı ünleştirme/ünlüleştirme’yi oluşturan beş özellik sunulduktan sonra, örnek oluşturan üç ünlü Lady Gaga, Cardi B, ve Kylie Jenner olarak belirlenmiştir.

### **Anahtar kelimeler**

ünlü(ler), celebrity, karnaval, sıra dışılık, görsel metin(ler)

## INTRODUCTION

Celebrities are a huge phenomenon. Celebrity culture is more prominent than ever due to the global expansion of media and entertainment industries. Technological advances in connectivity and visuality have had significant cultural implications on a global basis, resulting in a shift in public's relationship to media (Jenkins, 2008). Not only is the creation and circulation of content unprecedented, so is its reach. Global reach of content continues to grow in direct relation to technological connectivity. Adoption of broadband services and the inclusion of a good-quality camera in smartphones facilitated the rise of visual communication, thus visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999). Exposure to and the consumption of visual content continually affect visual textuality and the meanings associated with it at any given time. The accumulation of knowledge in marketing communications, brand-building and image-making, along with the digitization of media content over the past two decades have bound the celebrification process with developments in technology.

Number of images that a person is exposed to on a daily basis skyrocketed, rendering images more central to communication than ever. Spreadable media (Jenkins, 2013) serves its purpose best with visual media, condensing meanings in a universal format. Visual textuality is increasingly complex as a consequence of the multitude of software programs and applications that enable artistic expression universally. Image creation has transformed into image alteration through the utilization of numerous filters. Ease in the creation of meaningful images and spreadability of these images is changing the cultural landscape, giving prominence to celebrity culture. Visual textuality and celebrity culture seem to be intertwined in their rise and dominance within popular culture. As digital media empowered individuals to create and share their own visual texts, interaction and connectivity that are enabled by social media have unleashed the possibility of celebrifying the private self (Jerslev, 2016). This shift in the celebrification process has expanded the terrain of celebrity

culture; extending it to individuals as well as diversifying the process in the individuality of celebrities. Having claimed control of their own visual textuality, celebrities gained access to a more experimental and individuated form of communication.

The infiltration of visual texts in everyday lives has directly impacted celebrity culture and the celebrification process. Narratives are becoming increasingly visual and this visuality is enhancing the celebrification process with its pivotal component being the constructed 'image'. Visual textuality is the main component of celebrity production and the advances in visual technologies not only democratized the process of iconic image creation but also provided the tools for self-promotion, thus enabling the democratization of celebrification. This influx of constructed images that have often been altered for aesthetic optimization constitute the artery of the celebrification process. The need to distinguish oneself among the multitude of visual texts is more pronounced due to the ever-increasing number of images in circulation and this necessitates a novel way to facilitate the celebrification process. There are similarities in the celebrification processes of some celebrities that gravitate towards the spirit of Bakhtin's Carnival.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze visual textuality and celebrity culture, in search of their common denominators and identify- as a subset of celebrification - a resemblance in their character attributes and performativity to Bakhtin's Carnival. This subset of celebrification is proposed as 'carnavalesque celebrification'. The celebrities that are demonstrated to embody the carnivalesque spirit are Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner. They each utilize character attributes and performances within their celebrification in the sphere of carnival. The dominance of carnivalesque image construction and the exaggeration of performance that turns it into spectacle are among the similarities that constitute carnivalesque celebrification. Celebrities remain to be pivotal cultural influencers who 'define the Zeitgeist of any particular moment' and act as cultural facilitators through mechanisms of media coverage, critiques and gossip that facilitate negotiations and re-making of meanings (Marshall, 2010). Emergence of a



novel phenomenon within the public and the private spheres is often mirrored in celebrity texts. Carnavalesque celebrification is such a phenomenon, juxtaposing high fashion with sexualized self-presentation, performance with spectacle and ordinariness with out-of ordinariness.

In the first chapter of the thesis, concepts of visual texts and celebrity texts are laid out in an attempt to demonstrate the visuality of celebrity texts. In history of images, technological developments within the last two decades and their repercussions on visual texts are unpacked. The purpose of this first chapter is to trace images and visual texts to celebrity texts and to demonstrate their significance in the celebrification process. Projections on the prominence of visual textuality are traced to concepts of icons, myths and utopia. These concepts are utilized to pave the way to the pervasiveness of celebrity culture and are outlined in the second part of the thesis. In the second chapter, an analysis of the term ‘celebrification’ is presented to assist in the comprehension of the process of celebrity construction. This is followed by the introduction of the concept of ‘ordinariness’ in celebrity culture. This concept leads to the related concept of ‘out-of-ordinariness’ which is pivotal in distinguishing carnivalesque celebrification. Out-of-ordinariness is tied to the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959) which at the present is mostly visual due to the proliferation of social media channels and the power of spectacle. Performance as a part of everyday life and its relationship to visual textuality is deconstructed. Celebrity narrative

In the third chapter, Bakhtin’s carnival is analyzed and current societal changes are outlined to draw resemblances. Carnival ethos and the carnival character are detailed in their similarities to the celebrity culture. The final part of the thesis points out to resemblances in celebrity culture and the celebrification process of aforementioned celebrities to Bakhtin’s Carnival. The concept of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ is proposed and outlined in its similarities to the carnival ethos. This is a celebrification process whereby celebrity texts perform carnivalesque characteristics to attain and sustain their celebrity status. Finally, the conclusion elaborates this thesis’

contribution to cultural studies by detailing the proposed concept of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. The proposal of three related celebrity texts, namely Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner, demonstrate the characteristics that distinguish such phenomenon. Carnavalesque celebrification is a by product of the prevalent entertainment culture and the heightened thresholds of the need for differentiation. The out-of-ordinary situatedness and performances of the celebrity texts serve to distinguish them from a multitude of celebrity texts and set them apart in their specific attributes that are carnivalesque. The out-of-ordinariness that enables the carnivalesque seizes to be out-of-ordinary in time and thus requires ongoing creativity and rejuvenation to keep the spectacle going. The thesis is concluded with a summary of the proposed phenomenon of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ and its infiltration into the public sphere.

Bakhtin’s Carnival has been a canonical text in comprehending the significance of carnival in history; the carnival spirit, its codes, symbols and rituals. In cultural studies, transformations in society are often identified in real time, as the phenomenon is taking place. It is the purpose of this thesis to identify such a phenomenon in celebrity culture that has become significantly determinant in influencing the public and the private spheres. As a pivotal, timeless ‘open text’<sup>1</sup>, carnival serves to facilitate the dynamic expression of societal needs and desires that get mirrored in the construction and maintenance of celebrity texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Umberto Eco’s canonical contribution to semiotics (Eco, 1984).

## CHAPTER 1

### IMAGES & VISUAL TEXTUALITY

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the significance of images and visual textuality in contemporary media industry and highlight the pivotal role they play in celebrity culture. The surge in images and their permeation into everyday lives have impacted the way people see the world. When science fiction writer William Gibson coined the term ‘cyberspace’ (1984), it would have been impossible to foresee the quantities and ways in which images are being created, viewed and circulated. It was around the same time that visual culture became a field of academic interest (Mirzoeff, 1999). As exposure to the number of images skyrockets, the proliferation of visuality alters how people see the world. This alteration is not only in the way that individuals see, but also in the meanings they make based on what they see. Media theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff (1993, 1999) defined visual culture as a cultural inclination towards the utilization of visual information as the privileged mode of representation and comprehension. In earlier societies, orality or text-based textuality used to be the basis of communication. In many contemporary cultures, images have become the predominant tool for communication. In fact, primary manifestation of Castells’ (1996) ‘network society’ is through visual culture. Visual texts are created, spread and repurposed at a rapid, unprecedented pace. Consequently, visual culture is directly related to textuality.

‘A visual culture is the relation between what is visible and the names that we give to what is seen.’ (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 10) This definition emphasizes the importance of culture and context in how the world is seen. Attribution of meanings to a world filled with images is an organic process and is subject to the contextual interpretation of the viewer. These meanings may only be deciphered in their historical context. Thus, culture is determinative in how visual texts are decoded and the hierarchies of meanings attributed to these texts. Visual culture is engaged with visual events in which consumers seek information, meaning, or pleasure in an interface with visual

technology (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 3) The constituent parts of visual culture are not dictated by the medium. Rather, they are determined by the interaction between viewer and viewed, namely the '*visual event*' (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 13). It is this interaction and the multitude of cultural and contextual dynamics to affect it that shape *visual textuality*. The dominance of visual culture in contemporary lifestyle means a parallel surge in visual textuality. Visual textuality that constitute visual culture is also a significant part of celebrity culture with its absolute emphasis on images. Celebrity culture has become a preeminent domain in popular culture. As such, related visual texts become subjected to cultural trends and currents, both in their creation and their interpretation. Celebrification process is highly intertwined with the creation and mass distribution of iconic images. Thus, it would prove beneficial to trace the history of images forward to contemporary celebrity culture.

## 1.1 HISTORY OF IMAGES

German philosopher Martin Heidegger was among the first to state the developments regarding visuality. He argued that 'a world picture...does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture...The world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 129-130). This statement is indicative of the modern inclination to visualize existence and interpret the world through visuality. W.J.T. Mitchell's (1994) '*picture theory*' is also based on visual textuality. He argued that some aspects of Western philosophy and science had adopted more of a pictorial outlook of the world. These arguments pose a compelling challenge to the notion of the world as a written text and indicate that any attempt at defining culture in singularly linguistic terms is susceptible to be challenged by the visual. Therefore, the inclination to visualize existence has caused the world-as-a-text to be substituted by the-world-as-

a-picture (Mirzoeff, 1999). This shift towards a dominance of visual textuality has its roots in technological advancements commencing from eighteenth century onward.

The surge in visual texts is directly correlated with access to the Internet. The Internet was first created by the US military. Its purpose was to enable exchange of messages if there were ever to be a nuclear war (Abbate, 1999). The Internet soon surpassed its initial purpose and became a global phenomenon. Google estimated 5 billion people to be online by the end of the decade. These ratios demonstrate that the Internet is more than just another form of mass media, but rather the first universal medium (Mirzoeff, 2016). One of the most evident utilizations of this medium is through engagement with images; to create, share and view numerous photographs, videos and art. These images are part of a universal effort to comprehend the global transformation. It is the key manifestation in everyday life of 'the network society', a term coined by sociologist Manuel Castells, which indicates a way of social life that takes its shape from electronic information networks (1996). Technological advances such as personal computing and the Internet have caused the transformation of the visual image due to factors such as quantity, geographic extent and its convergence on the digital (Mirzoeff, 2016, p.16). These developments have situated visual textuality as a living, organic part of popular culture that is negotiated on a daily basis.

The nineteenth century was the commencement of a surplus of images; a period that was famously described as a '*frenzy of the visible*' by the historian Jean-Louis Comolli (1980) due to the invention of photography, film and X-ray. It was also the time of the democratization of visual media because it marked the end of discriminative access solely by the privileged and the elite. The invention of photography in 1839 was soon followed by the development of more economic photographic formats. These developments made the portrait and the self-portrait accessible to the working class in industrialized nations. 1895 was the year when the Lumiere brothers recorded the first moving images in France (Mirzoeff, 2016). Almost a century later, video cameras became available for personal use in 1985, followed by the invention of the digital videotape in 1995. The transformation of visual images from analog to digital has been

a major cultural marker (Mirzoeff, 2016). As such, making alterations to the images has become much faster and easier, due to various special effects programs. These developments made the whole experience of shooting and editing of HD videos on a personal smartphone to be posted to the Internet a common practice of the masses.

Previous to the acceleration in technological developments that influenced the state of images, German critic Walter Benjamin and British art historian John Berger had both theorized about images (Mirzoeff, 2016). In his famous essay '*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*', Benjamin (1936) stated that the idea of the unique image was destroyed by photography because of the ability to reproduce numerous and identical copies. Digital media has further pronounced Benjamin's statement with the rate at which images are created, recreated, shared and repurposed. In the following years, a television series and an accompanying book of the name *Ways of Seeing* were created by Berger (1973). In the series, he defined the image as 'a sight which has been recreated or reproduced'. As such, the '*image*' denotes a visible form to time. As soon as the shutter closes, the instant becomes a part of the past (Mirzoeff, 1999). This relationship between image and time harbors influences in celebrity culture. In ancient times, the desire for fame was a matter of immortality by leaving a mark and continuing to be remembered over time. The promise of immortality served as a gateway to transcend beyond time and place (Braudy, 1986). It may be stated that this intricate dance of time and timelessness forms the basis of celebrity culture. By leaving a visual marker in a specific point in time and facilitating its reach to the masses through digital media, the celebrity aims to transcend time with the utilization of an iconic image.

Another turning point in the history of images was more recently, in 2013, when *selfie* was announced to be the word of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary (Mirzoeff, 2016). Selfie was defined as 'a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website'. The rise of selfies to a preeminent status in popular culture demonstrates the democratization of imagery. What once used to be a privilege of solely the elite-class,

in the form of self-portraits, had become a mass cultural commodity<sup>2</sup>. The history of self-portrait has been reworked to become ‘the first visual signature of the new era’ in the form of the selfie (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 30). The selfie marked a turning point in the way people related to images and enabled individuals to become creative agents. According to Mirzoeff, the selfie is a new form of digital conversation that is predominantly visual (2016, p. 63). In terms of content, selfies may be classified in two groups: 1) a performance for the particular individual’s digital community, and 2) as digital conversation. As such, the selfie has individuated the celebrification process further by enabling individuals to have more control over their personal expressions and visual representations. The first kind of selfie; selfie as a performance, democratized the creation of celebrity texts. This was facilitated by the access to social media channels, enabling individuals to make claims to fame through their own efforts. The second kind of selfie became a novel tool to start a conversation and influence the flow of that conversation with the masses. The controlled imagery of celebrification transformed into a more direct and real-time visual communication, all the while enabling the utilization of necessary filters to enhance the related imagery as needed.

Proliferation of images had a direct impact on textuality. Prior dominance of text-based textuality was overcome by visual textuality. The continuous influx of images in everyday lives made meaning-making related to visual textuality a cultural reality. As visual texts became more widespread and pivotal in communication, they perpetuated celebrity texts which are immensely dependent upon iconic imagery to construct and sustain the narratives of the celebrification process. The strong link between visual textuality and celebrity texts is the main foundation upon which contemporary popularity of celebrity culture is situated.

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<sup>2</sup> In art, portrait painting caused the weakening of dominant religious imagery. As such, the individual face gained significance and this was amplified with the invention of printing. Selfie has emphasized the historical traces of the individual face as cultural exchange even further.

## 1.2 VISUAL TEXTS & CELEBRITY TEXTS

Celebrity culture has become one of the primary modes through which information is disseminated. The activities and behaviors of celebrities constitute a significant portion of textuality through which the contemporary world is presented. The viewer scans the image of the celebrity text and checks it against a mental archive of remembered references with a personal attraction to particular aspects of the image that is derived from desire and memory (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 240). History of fame is closely linked to a shift in imagery with the rise of icons and iconoclasm. 'By the sixth century the cult of images had brought about a situation...wherein the images themselves were being worshipped (Braudy, 1986, p. 201). As the dominance of religious imagery in art started to weaken with portrait painting, the individual face gained significance. Printing allowed the face to become 'a medium of more cultural exchange' (Braudy, 1986, p. 266). This amplification in the dissemination of the face and visual texts facilitated the construction of celebrity texts.

Texts are a collection of items such as oral and written words, or images that are created and accepted by the society. French literary theorist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) proposed the term 'texts' to challenge the idea that the comprehension of a work is centralized on the author's intentions. He suggested that the reader also plays a significant role in the meaning-making process (1977, p. 148). The social environment within which the reader makes meaning is another pivotal factor as it enables the examination of the cultural meanings of texts. Celebrity texts are where the creation of celebrities take place. Celebrity texts are 'individual celebrities as 'texts' worthy of analysis in an of themselves' (Boone & Vickers, 2011). As a general rule, celebrities are not to be experienced face-to-face, due to the fact that their celebrity status is conditional on the far and wide spread of their image. The construction of celebrity texts used to be a systematic process carried out solely by the media and entertainment



industries. As the Internet increased the capacity of individuals to create, spread and interact with texts significantly, the dynamics of celebrity texts have transformed. Performances of a private authentic self to attract mass attention have become the critical factor in social media celebrification (Jerslev, 2016, p. 5240). In a highly saturated media environment, texts are in competition with each other for a share of attention. Celebrity texts are the sum of multi-layered textualities that make up celebrities. An eminent characteristic of celebrity texts is their propensity to visuality. Images are the primary building blocks of celebrity culture. Self-naming and storytelling are further developed with imagery to stimulate the imagination of the masses in the construction of celebrity texts. Celebrity texts constitute a cultural negotiation about what are and are not desirable, about distinguishing the constructed from the authentic, and the private self from the publicly presented one (Gamson, 2011, p. 1062). Celebrity texts are laden with layers of meanings pertaining to icons, myths and utopia.

Textuality is immersed in information and communicative of cultural values and beliefs. Each text harbors its own set of rules that determines how the textual representations are constructed. Celebrity texts are composed of multi-layered meanings that are contextually negotiated by the audiences on a constant basis. In deciphering the meanings pertaining to celebrity texts, it is imperative to take into account the multi-dimensionality of textuality. Barthes argued that the image<sup>3</sup> presented the viewers three messages: a linguistic message, a coded iconic message and a non-coded iconic message (Barthes, 1977, p. 36). Thus, the viewer simultaneously receives the perceptual message as well as the cultural message. The literal, perceptual message serves as the foundation for the cultural, symbolic message. The difficulty involved in deciphering the obtuse meaning is evident because of its proximity to disguise (Barthes, 1977, p. 58). Obtuse meanings are often not situated structurally which makes them more difficult to find. Barthes calls the obtuse meaning

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<sup>3</sup> The original terminology pertaining to ‘the photograph’ has been substituted by ‘the image’ for the purposes of the thesis.

‘a signifier without a signified’. Its lack of direct representation renders its description challenging and open to a multitude of possibilities. The reading of such a text remains suspended between the image and its representation, lingering between definition and approximation. The obtuse meaning is often closely linked to myth. Myth is a ‘collective representation’ and determined by the society, thus a ‘reflection’ (Barthes, 1977, p. 165). In conducting textual analysis, the ‘automatic’ reading of a text is questioned in an attempt to identify the process by which meaning is made from texts. These textual dynamics illuminate the textual consumption of celebrities by audiences who make cultural inferences on a continuous basis and fans who formulate celebrity texts into secondary and tertiary texts by contributing their own symbolic meanings.

As proposed by the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, common or potentially shared meanings are sought after, which are those ‘preferred’ or ‘dominant’ meanings encouraged by the text, its context and its medium (1980, p. 134). Hall also proposed oppositional and negotiated readings. These are the potential multiplicity of meanings readers infer from a text<sup>4</sup>. In a negotiated reading, the reader does not fully share the text’s connotative meaning but does so only partially, at times modifying the text to reflect their own position. Inspecting a large number of texts dealing with the same subject, namely a celebrity, enables the reader to detect common themes so that with enough repetition, it becomes possible to distinguish the representation of that particular subject. This approach lays the foundation of para-social intimacy between the celebrity and her audience (Horton & Wohl, 1993). In *Genre*, Stephen Neale proposed instances of repetition and difference. He argued that difference was the critical factor that determined the meaning and pleasure derived from the text (1980, pp. 48-51). This notion of difference in textuality is applicable to celebrity texts and their more favorable reception among the multitude of texts in circulation. Difference derived from the text in comparison to the previous texts that have been encountered is what gives meaning to the specific text. This very difference serves as the identifying

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<sup>4</sup> Semiotics refers to this as ‘polysemy’.

factor for the fan who perceives herself to be different in a specific way that is present in the celebrity text. Intertextuality is yet another determinant in textuality and refers to the process of meaning-making by implicit references to other related texts. The 'primary' texts are the foundation on which the celebrity text is constructed. The secondary texts are those that promote the primary texts, namely the celebrity texts (Fiske, 1987, p. 84-85). Tertiary texts are those that are produced by the audience in relation to the primary texts and includes conversation about primary texts as well as fan fiction. It is the dynamic flow of interfering and meaning-making within these texts that constitute the totality of the celebrity text.

There has been a major media change in the last thirty years in terms of media coverage given to celebrities. Celebrification process is predominantly based on media texts. Texts serve as the means to know celebrities and one of the distinguishing attributes of celebrity text is its attempt to bridge the 'real' person and the publicly presented persona. A large celebrity text is composed of a multitude of primary and secondary texts in varying media and genres that modulate over time as aspects of the person and the persona transform. Audiences get glimpses of the celebrity's private life through secondary texts from intentionally managed sources. These secondary texts provide audiences access to the real person behind the celebrity. Many secondary texts are produced so as to promote or support the primary texts. The quantity of secondary texts that are available for a celebrity of any longevity is considerable and the interaction between primary and secondary texts determine the celebrity's reception by the audience. Celebrity texts are constructed on images which gives a fascinating visuality to them. The media transformation that favored the dissemination of visual texts has perpetuated celebrity culture. Visual textuality and celebrity texts are intertwined in constituting the totality of the celebrity narrative.

## CHAPTER 2

### CELEBRITY CULTURE & OUT OF ORDINARINESS

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the significance of celebrity culture and its contribution to the concept of individuality and the construction of the public self. There have been many definitions offered by scholars over the last twenty years. Inclusion of a few of these definitions and its etymological roots may provide a better understanding. Celebrity may be generalized as an understanding of ‘a distinct social position marked by an exclusive and privileged distance to the mundane and ordinary’ (Jerslev, 2016). This concept of ordinariness is to be revisited again in the following pages, leading to carnivalesque celebrification. Celebrity is ‘the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere’ (Rojek, 2001, p. 10). Another definition focuses on time, stating that the occurrence of becoming a celebrity is marked by a shift in media interest to the investigation of their private life (Turner, 2004, p. 8). Joseph Boone and Nancy Vickers compare the terms ‘celebrity’ and ‘fame’ to trace the utilization of terminology to contemporary cultural tendency towards the incandescence of celebrity (2011, pp. 903-904). Celebrity derives from the Latin nouns *celebritas* and *celebratio*. These nouns indicate ‘the presence of a multitude, a large assembly or gathering, a crowd’. The indication is an attribution of a crowd-gathering quality to the renowned individual. Furthermore, the concept of a large assembly carries religious connotations (Rojek, 2001). The underlying religious connotations encircle celebrity culture to this day, indicated in celebrity ‘icons’ and ‘idols’ and the otherworldly aura bestowed upon them. The origin of the term ‘fan’ is an abbreviation for ‘fanatic’ which is a religious term. *Fame* derives from the Latin noun *fama* – meaning ‘the talk of the multitude, public opinion’ – which in turn is evolved from the verb *fari*- meaning ‘to speak’. These etymological roots point to a link between being famous or a celebrity and being talked about by a crowd (Braudy, 1986, p. 125). There is the requirement of a fascinating, magnetic personality, an interested audience and a relation between the two that is ‘spoken’ into existence

(Boone & Vickers, 2011, p. 904). This relationship renders gossip and rumor indispensable for the formation and sustainability of the renown.

Celebrity culture is a culture based on the popularization or idealization of people on whom celebrity status has been awarded. 'Celebrity culture is at once a commodity system, an industry, a set of stories and participatory culture. The commodity at stake is embodied attention; the value of the celebrity inheres in his or her capacity to attract and mobilize attention, which is then typically attached to other products (a television show, a magazine cover, a record album) or sold for cash directly to people making those other products' (Gamson, 2011, p. 1062). The media are a primary source of promoting these famed people. Celebrities have traditionally been members of the theater and film world, the pop scene, the dance stage, the modeling world, and the sports arena. Included are the wealthy or businessmen or women who have innovated or succeeded in a particular field. Politicians have received celebrity status, and some celebrities have become politicians. Celebrities have been and continue to be sources of role models for adolescents, young adults, and other admirers. Depending on the context of their fame, this has the potential of being either positive or negative, given the fact that celebrity is not always accrued as a result of healthy or positive behavior.

Celebrity studies is based in the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, film studies and media or communications. The field focuses on the analysis of how the developments in media industries have affected and transformed conceptions of celebrity over the past century. Influences on the field may be traced back to the Frankfurt school's emphasis on the way mass media and entertainment constituted a threat to culture, the public's fixation on celebrities, and Marxist indictment of celebrity as a hegemonic formation whereby celebrities and consumers are socially controlled by market forces of capitalism (Boone & Vickers, 2011). Significant contributions to foundation of celebrity studies have been made by media scholars such as Richard Dyer (1987, 1998) on the celebrity formation process, the active role played by the audience and the multiple forces of production and consumption that enabled its construction;

Joshua Gamson (1994) on various industrial relations that constituted the attainment of celebrity status as well as how the onlooking audiences interpreted meanings; and Graeme Turner (2004) who further developed the systematic approach to celebrity construction. The field was legitimized by the publication of a new academic journal entitled *Celebrity Studies* in 2010.

In his canonical *The Frenzy of the Renown* (1986) Leo Braudy demonstrated how the pursuit of fame forms a pattern throughout history, to overcome mortality by the achievement of a reputation that stands the test of time. By contrast, celebrity seems to be ‘a phenomenon that flares in the moment, is experienced in its noisy immediacy, and thrives on the ephemerality that is the condition of its being’. ‘In the twenty-first century, the immortality of traditional fame has taken a back seat to the incandescence of celebrity’ (Boone & Vickers, 2011, p. 904). Boone & Vickers propose a number of categories that distinguish celebrity culture. These are:

*Celebrity has a history.* The eighteenth century marks the beginning of an international fame culture with the expansion of the power of media (Braudy, 1986). As numerous narratives got circulated to amplify reach, publicity enabled their reach to a wider audience. Documentation of private life reached yet another turning point with George Eastman’s camera in 1888. This was also the time when the term ‘celebrity’ started to be uttered to indicate famous individuals (Duffett, 2013, p. 301). Late nineteenth century further reinforced the mechanism of fame with related technological advances that laid the foundations of electronic media industries.

*Celebrity demands a gaze.* Audiences are merely aggregates of individuals (Livingstone, 2005, p. 25). Audiences are usually produced as a consequence of acts of measurement and surveillance by the media industries (Dayan, 2005, p. 52). Celebrities’ status depends on the amount of attention they attract and retain. This single most factor is so critical that they remain visible to get their share of attention to maintain their celebrity status.

*Celebrities perform.* Erving Goffman utilizes the term ‘performance’ ‘to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his

continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers' (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Celebrities' performances are targeted at audiences and are supposed to perpetuate their status.

*Celebrities reside in the public sphere.* Media visibility is an integral part of celebrity culture. The social networks facilitate a constitutive and organic production of the self. This on-line self-production constitutes the essence of celebrity activity.

*Celebrity invites close reading.* 'Celebrities are the very substance of a public discourse through which communities negotiate mores, values and politics' (Boone & Vickers, 2011, p. 908). Reading of celebrity texts is crucial in the comprehension of celebrity as a cultural phenomenon. They often allow for a layered reading that reconfigures related textuality.

These characteristics demonstrate how integral celebrities have been culturally for the last three centuries, how the celebrity culture has always been dependent on the attention of the audiences and how multi-layered the phenomenon is. Celebrity culture is a direct mirror image of the popular culture and a close investigation lays out the sensitivities, symbols and meanings that resonate with the masses at any given time. It serves as a shortcut to deciphering ordinary individuals' dreams, hopes and frustrations. Laden with symbolism, celebrity culture lays out the specific narratives that speak to the masses at the time. It is extremely interesting to trace the changes in the nature of the celebrity narratives as they illuminate the public consciousness. As such, celebrity culture serves as the manifestation realm for the issues that occupy public consciousness.

## **2.1 CELEBRIFICATION**

Celebrification is based on the constant cultural navigation and negotiation of images with the desired outcome. The term 'celebrification' has been defined in different ways. It is utilized particularly for online stardom and 'has become a familiar

mode of cyber-self-presentation (Turner, 2010, p. 14). Chris Rojek described it as ‘the general tendency to frame social encounters in mediagenic<sup>5</sup> filters’. Gamson (1994) utilized the term to accentuate the spread of celebrity culture from the confinements of the media and entertainment industry to institutional domains such as politics and sports. Theresa Senft (2013, p.351) argued that the ‘erosion between private and the public has spread beyond those who are famous and those who wish to be famous’. The Internet has democratized the process of celebrification by disattaching it from the domain of large media corporations. Two of the definitions that serve the purposes of this thesis best have been proposed by Couldry and Driessens respectively. Couldry proposed a definition of the term ‘celebrification’ to designate a transition from an ordinary person to a media form, namely a celebrity (2004). Driessens (2012) makes use of the term to indicate specific transitions from nonmedia to a media person. It is the particular process whereby ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities. Furthermore, Driessens designates celebrification to be a metaprocess<sup>6</sup>, to cover significant social and cultural changes over time and regards the term as ‘on par with globalization, individualization and mediatization’ (p. 643). This designation demonstrates the significance of celebrity culture and the related phenomena in contemporary society.

Celebrity culture harbors the historically and media-specific ways in which the assumptions of celebrity – coined by Richard Dyer as a field of tension between pairs of oppositional dimensions such as public-private and ordinary-extraordinary (Dyer, 1979, 1987) – are negotiated in different ways (Jerslev, 2016, p. 5238). Jerslev suggests that celebrification is ‘a communicative and cultural practice in which celebrity logic is played out in various ways and in various, sometimes interdependent, media circuits, depending on platforms’ technological affordances and cultural and institutional modes of functioning’. She continues to distinguish between the social-media-afforded

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<sup>5</sup> Mediagenic is further explained as ‘elements and styles that are compatible with conventions of self-projection and interaction, fashioned and refined by mass media’ (Rojek, 2001, p. 187).

<sup>6</sup> Metaprocess is a more thorough process of change influencing culture and society on all levels and over a larger historical span (Krotz, 2007).



celebrification that is characterized by continuous and multiple uploads of performances of a private self and is about access, immediacy, and instantaneity. Celebrity today is mostly facilitated by social media and enacted by ordinary persons who successfully manage the self as spectacle. By contrast, there is still the classification of big stars of celebrities who cultivate distance, a temporality of scarcity and performances of the extraordinary. This form of celebrification constitutes quite another media temporality, which belongs to film and television and a traditional media circuit. The diffusion of celebrification through the domains of society has had cultural impacts related to Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle' (Debord, 1994) and laid the foundation for the proposed carnivalesque celebrification.

## **2.2 CELEBRITY NARRATIVE**

The single most fundamental factor that constitutes a celebrity text is the celebrity narrative (Gabler, 2001). The narrative is the ingredient that transforms a famous person into a celebrity. Gabler states that celebrities provide entertainment for the masses through the simple act of living because of their capturing narratives. It is these 'narratives that have entertainment value' that are lived out by celebrities that capture the attention of the audiences and turn audiences into fans. With celebrities, the medium becomes life and the entertaining, attention-grabbing narrative ensures the sustainability of celebrity status. This is what makes celebrity narratives so captivating for the masses; they are wrought with plotlines of rags to riches, sex, romance, violence and success. As long as the foundation narrative and publicity are in place, the construction of celebrity is inevitable. The foundation narrative is the main component of the celebrity mix and the publicity machine that takes this narrative to the masses is the engine that makes the system work. It is when the celebrity ceases to provide a worthwhile narrative to be covered in media or to be coveted by the audiences that the

celebrity perishes (Gabler, 2001, p. 8). The sustainability of the celebrity narrative is a requirement for the continuation of celebrity status.

Gabler states that celebrity is a kind of performance art and as such, celebrity narratives require a live personality starring in the narrative, the potentiality of the narrative to take twists and turns over the lifespan of the celebrity and the potentiality of making real-life contact with the celebrity. These factors keep the celebrification process ongoing, meanwhile maintaining the public gaze that is so crucial on the celebrity. They also reinforce celebrity text's dependence on tangibility by ensuring she remains 'in the public consciousness'. The tangibility is what ensures that the celebrity text remains relevant and in circulation for entertainment. 'Seen as a narrative form, celebrity is a great new entertainment in a society ever hungry for entertainment. It is pliant, novel, authentic rather than imagined, by definition plausible and suspenseful since it is constantly unwinding' (Gabler, 2001, p. 10). As such, the audience may have a tendency towards the real-life narrative rather than the fictional one, demonstrated by the insatiable attention to celebrity texts.

Celebrity narrative is the totality of the stories related to the celebrity's life and constitutes one of the components of the celebrity text. The narrative becomes individuated in line with the peculiar developments in the celebrity's life. In spite of the fact that successful storytelling by media professionals plays an integral role in the construction of the celebrity text, the intrigue that the narrative holds remains critical. An interesting narrative with many twists and turns increases the potential of audiences to identify with the narrative and engage with it on an emotional basis. In this aspect, the celebrity narrative serves as the glue that keeps the audiences and the celebrity together. Distinguishing factors related to the celebrity narrative serve the celebrity. It is through the continuous flow of the narrative that the celebrity gets to maintain her status. Gabler states that celebrity narrative and the celebrity's tangibility are about identity (2001, p. 14). It is through the real-time unfolding of the narrative that the audiences witness the authenticity of the celebrity text and bond with it to the extent that the narrative echoes a part of their own identity or their ideals about an identity.

### 2.3 THE ORDINARY IN CELEBRITY

In his article *The Unwatched Life Is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of The Ordinary in Celebrity Culture*, Joshua Gamson lays out how the concept of ordinariness is situated within the celebrity cultural system and how it has been elevated as a result of the Internet and relatively new media entertainment format; reality show (Gamson, 2011). Traditionally, celebrity is manufactured and managed by a tight, highly controlled industry. Often the narratives that give life to celebrities arise and disseminate through media professionals such as publicists and journalists. Consumers of celebrity culture make varying uses of these narratives, often negotiating and remaking meanings. Celebrity narratives serve consumers of celebrity culture in different ways; some utilize these narratives to facilitate fantasies of a better life, to build their identities by modeling their object of admiration; some utilize them as a means of social connection through gossip; and some utilize these stories as subjects of conversations whereby they seek to distinguish the constructed image from the real (Gamson, 2017; Turner, 2010). Nevertheless, these narratives serve as reference points to decipher the codes and symbols that move the masses at any given time.

Even though fame goes back many centuries as cultural history, celebrity culture is contemporary. It is a phenomenon primarily dependent on media industries that have the means to construct and disseminate images on a mass scale (Gamson, 2011, p. 1068). Ordinariness has a firmer place than ever before within the cultural system of celebrity. A number of critics have argued that fame and celebrity are different in their relationship to exceptionality in that fame is directly connected to it whereas celebrity is disconnected from it. Visibility is the sole criteria of value in contemporary celebrity. The requirement for the celebrity industry is that celebrities live for the camera. The distinguishing factor for celebrities is the narrative; a celebrity provides entertainment through her own life, through the very act of living (Gabler, 2001, p. 5). Within this system, ordinariness finds plenty of opportunities to flourish.

Contemporary celebrity harbors two opposing narratives about how merit relates to celebrity status. In one, individuals gain fame by earning admiration and getting attention due to achievement, merit or talent; ‘achieved celebrity’. In the other, individuals become famous as a result of a process orchestrated by an industry team, artificially constructed for mass consumption; ‘attributed celebrity’ (Rojek, 2001, p. 16-18). The main difference between the two is that the first is the narrative of extraordinary individuals, whereas the second is that of ordinary individuals who have benefited from the efforts of media and marketing professionals.

There are two main developments that have facilitated the flourishing of ordinariness in celebrity culture; reality TV and the Internet. The commencement of reality TV was in the late 1980s, at a time when the producers were looking for a way to overcome challenging economic conditions of the industry such as rising costs of production and fierce competition for advertising revenue. Reality programming offered numerous advantages, among which were lower production costs in comparison to scripted programming and no-name, nonunion cast. Turning ordinary people into celebrities is one of reality TV’s main storylines (Holmes, 2006). It is the process by which ordinary people become celebrities that fascinates audiences. Reality TV functions through the systematic narration of how ordinary people move from the periphery to the cultural center, becoming ‘media people’ (Couldry, 2004). ‘To a degree, then, reality TV – financially driven, industrially produced, centrally controlled – has transformed celebrity culture by opening up unprecedented space for ordinary people to become celebrities. Perhaps more significant, it has accentuated the story of how a nobody becomes a somebody, pushing forward the rhetorical fantasy of democratized celebrity’ (Gamson, 2011, p. 1065). Reality TV has transformed the perception of celebrity as a status that may be bestowed upon anyone.

The Internet is yet another facilitator for the infiltration of ordinariness in celebrity culture. As a consequence of Web 2.0 phenomena, users were enabled not only to consume web content, but also create it (Beer & Burrows, 2007). Entertainment industry gained an extended reach by getting direct access to ordinary people, thus

widening the pool of potential celebrities. In turn, ordinary people gained access to ‘the digital tools of self-publicity’ (Bennett & Holmes, 2010, p. 76). This was also the start of the surge in microcelebrities. This technological development marked a substantial shift in celebrity culture because it generated a ground-up, do-it-yourself celebrity production process (Turner, 2004). The celebrity production power that used to belong solely to large media companies shifted to include self-promoting individuals who eagerly employed available tools such as social media channels to reach a broad base of audiences. As such, the entry barriers were drastically lowered by the Internet (Gamson, 2011, 1065). This democratization of the celebrification process has further facilitated the elevation of ordinariness in celebrity culture. ‘Internet celebrity culture has, then, made it easy for ordinary people to build an audience, bypassing the traditional celebrity industry; elevated the role of fans or audiences, turning them into powerful producers of celebrities, hyperaware of their star-making capacity; and moved to the forefront new celebrity characters and narratives that seem to defy the traditional celebrity system’ (Gamson, 2011, 1067). This new availability necessitated self-promoting ordinary individuals to explore methods of differentiation to stand out from the crowd.

The shift from extraordinary merit to the ordinary has transformed celebrity culture. Extraordinariness was a factor that served to keep the masses at bay and elevate the perception of the celebrity text. It was the very factor to situate celebrity texts within the realm of utopia. The aforementioned developments in technology and media that gave way to the ordinary to find representation within celebrity shortened the perceived distance in the minds of the audiences. This shift in perspective, facilitated by the elevation of ordinariness, has transformed the celebrification process, giving power to ordinary individuals to experiment with celebrification and the related areas of image and narrative construction. There seems to have been an addition to the ongoing interplay between extraordinariness and ordinariness within the celebrity culture; the out of ordinariness.

## 2.4 THE OUT OF ORDINARY IN CELEBRITY

The trajectory of celebrity culture has shifted from the extraordinary to ordinary. Within the domain of celebrity culture, there has been yet another subtle flourishing related to ordinariness and that is the ‘out of ordinariness’. The exponential rise in the sheer quantity of visual and celebrity texts has necessitated a novel way of distinguishing oneself among many similar texts. Merriam Webster’s definition is unusual, different or strange: not what is considered to be normal<sup>7</sup>. This concept of out of ordinariness is very much situated in juxtaposition of the concept of normal. It has connotations of an inherent shock factor due to its positioning outside the realm of normality. Out of ordinariness positions the related element in an open domain where the cultural norms and values have been flexed or pardoned. This openness enables the revelation of something shocking and excessive and a relaxation in the reception of what has been revealed. The boundaries of societal tolerance become thinner as out of ordinariness gets played out and tests the territory where the corresponding reception gets negotiated. This continuous interplay of testing a territory that is more receptive in nature and the flexing of the inherent openness of the territory to allow the manifestation of what has been revealed capture the carnival spirit.

The realm of out of ordinariness exists in mutual openness. Openness inherent in its nature becomes the enabler of cultural negotiations and the flourishing of meaning-making. As such, there is a reformatory quality to out of ordinariness which not only challenges the ordinary and normal, but also holds space for infinite possibilities<sup>8</sup>. Out of ordinariness harbors novelty and experimentation as their sprouts venture to claim space. The carnivalesque suspension of normality serves the ongoing expansion of the inherent openness, making room for stark comparison of what is

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<sup>7</sup> Merriam Webster online dictionary; ‘out of the ordinary’. The phrase is being utilized as ‘out of ordinary’ throughout the paper.

<sup>8</sup> Similar to the general principle behind unfinalizability in Dostoevsky.

deemed to be normal. The negotiations and meaning-making that co-exist with the shocking and out of ordinary may at times leak out into the domain of normality to redefine and possibly expand what has been accepted as ordinary or normal. Out of ordinariness necessitates a shock factor which demands suspension of judgments associated with normality and claims space to float and just be, distanced from the willingness and tendency to name and categorize it.

As extraordinariness and ordinariness get situated in celebrity textuality, so does out of ordinariness, making its way into celebrity culture. This novel way is situated firmly on demand of gaze and the performance attributes of celebrification. The facilitation of 'demand of gaze' requires that the celebrity text is highly attention-grabbing. More so than admiration, attention becomes the focal point of textual construction. Anything goes, as long as public attention is directed onto the celebrity text. By placing a firm claim on public attention, the celebrity text opens itself up to negotiation and exploration of uncharted territory in meaning-making. The facilitation of the performance attribute of celebrification requires sustainability of the 'act' that gives rise to the public gaze. The gaze and the performance are intertwined in that the bigger and the better performance brings forth the bigger and better public gaze. Out of ordinariness becomes the mode of conduct to place a claim on public attention. Celebrity text is driven towards performances that are received to be out-of-ordinary so as to create secondary and tertiary texts in a ripple effect that expands the reach of the celebrity text further. Intensification of performance demands creativity, adaptability and heightened visuality. Heightened visuality is based on expertise in image-making. The visual image is bolder and statement-making. Images are based on the essential 'shock' factor to stand out from the multitude of visual texts. Creation of 'gossip' is a necessary by-product of heightened visuality and enables the inclusion of unlikely audiences into the conversation mix. Celebrity text becomes a domain of cultural negotiation, flexing the acceptance borders of the public through the introduction of new visual texts that are open to further discussion and meaning-making.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CARNIVAL & CELEBRITY TEXTS**

Mikhail Bakhtin and his historical study of the medieval carnival (1968, 1984) served as the basis of proposed ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ that constitutes the basis of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a guideline to the concepts that seem to correlate with aspects of celebrity culture which in turn lay the foundation for ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. Bakhtin’s carnival theory is extensive and not applicable to the proposed phenomenon verbatim. Essentially, it is the carnival spirit itself that serves as the foundation of carnivalesque celebrification and is applicable to explain the cultural foundation of the proposed phenomenon.

#### **3.1 CARNIVAL ETHOS**

The carnival culture emerged as a reactionary outlet for the masses that needed to release their anti-establishment feelings against the religious and social doctrine. The Church allowed a designated period of folly of about 3 months every year for the masses to break loose of societal norms and values (Gaufman, 2018). Carnival is a time of total freedom and experimentation of out of ordinariness. During this time, the masses are allowed to transgress into what is normally looked upon as taboo and experiment with alternative identities within this fabricated site and timeframe. It is a period of time when societal norms are open to reinterpretation and as such built up pressures and subversion may be released. Carnival is also a site for the blossoming of sub-cultures. The potentiality of ‘existence as is’ becomes a vehicle of change and acceptance within the cultural sphere. The unacceptable becomes acceptable and the unthinkable becomes thinkable. The blurring of borders and the permission for transgression enable the perceptions of subcultures to soften. The temporality of the



carnival culture harbors the possibility of a long-lasting release of the prevalent culture and associated hierarchies.

The temporary transfer of power to the masses and its intrinsic anti-elitist characteristic renders carnival a populist phenomenon. This is another way in which carnival culture weaves its similarities with celebrity culture. Illusion creation process that is inherent in the carnival culture is also directly related to celebrity culture. The contemporary 'populist Zeitgeist' (Mudde, 2017) is a primary attribute of the celebrification process. Interestingly enough, the carnivalesque celebrification is situated in the subset of populism and out of ordinariness. The out of ordinariness itself becomes the populist approach to construct a celebrity text. Through the performance of out of ordinariness, the celebrity text magnetizes the masses against the established ordinariness into an illusion of dissent. The transgression of borders allows for the 'low culture', namely the popular culture to enter the realm of the 'high culture', infiltrating into socially accepted forms of textuality. Celebrity texts enable the convergence of low culture and high culture in a melting pot of negotiation, shrinking the socially perceived notions of hierarchal continuum. As such, the temporality of carnival culture is evident in the temporality of out of ordinariness. It is a matter of time before what was once perceived as out of ordinary becomes ordinary.

Carnival culture's fascination with the material side of existence, hence the body and bodily functions are paralleled with the affinity of celebrity culture to the body and the image. The dominant visuality of the celebrity text feeds the imagination of the masses and aids in the narration of the celebrity text. The body of the celebrity text is often the primary text that overpowers all related textuality. The visual dependence of the celebrification process is further accentuated in embellishments, creativity and colors in carnivalesque celebrification. The more striking the presentation of the celebrity text becomes, the more the 'gaze' gets directed to it. The claim to attention is realized through the spectacular presentations of the body. The body acts as a tool of communication, the site of the spectacle. The body as the primary celebrity text is also the primary element of carnivalesque celebrification.

Game element is another attribute of the carnival culture that may also be traced in carnivalesque celebrification. The celebrity text distances itself from seriousness and embraces playfulness in presentation of the self. The celebrity text harbors the potentiality of an element of surprise on a constant basis and seeks to shock its audiences. This need to shock the audiences as a means to out of ordinariness brings about a decreased threshold for shame. Spectacles and presentations of the self as an out of ordinary celebrity text necessitate a thicker skin and higher shame resilience to be able to withstand the possible backlash from the audiences. At the same time, this game element and quality of playfulness enforce lower standards of critique since all is perceived as a joke or a game. The acceptance levels regarding specific spectacles of celebrity texts get renegotiated within the realm of game and mockery.

For Bakhtin (1968), the carnival represented not only a time of emancipation but also a transgression through mockery, laughter and games. Mockery was utilized to challenge the authority and the elites and fun was a primary method of release from societal pressures. The carnival constituted a whole new world; an alternative world to the official world. According to Bakhtin, this 'two-world condition' corresponded to liberties for the masses to criticize social hierarchies during the designated time of the carnival. Carnival was a site of resistance, criticism, opposition and dissent in its own temporality. 'The carnival and its revelry was an alternative realm of being and doing and stood as (1) a critique of the dominant elites, (2) an expression of resistance to elite privilege and (3) a utopian space in which differences of rank were abolished and a common humanity could come together' (Langman, 2008, p. 662). It symbolized a time when all sanctions were lifted, a site where norms, values and meanings could be renegotiated. The promise of transgression beyond existing social forms enabled temporary equality, a dissolution of officialdom.

### 3.2 CARNIVAL CHARACTER

The proposal of the ‘carnival character’ to be the ‘social character<sup>9</sup>’ of the present age of ‘globalized transnational capitalism’ is based on contemporary narcissistic selfhood in which privatized hedonism realized in consumer-based lifestyles and identities serves as the dominant mechanism of escape (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 472). The emergence of carnival character as proposed in their pivotal paper serves to explain the emergence of carnivalesque celebrification. The establishment of the cultural foundations for the carnival character is instantiated in advancements in technology, rise of consumerism and amusement culture. One of the consequences of what Kellner (1989) called ‘techno-capital’ – namely, the production of a multitude of consumer goods, the universalization of the products of the culture industry, and numerous consumable experiences – has been a considerable decline in values like loyalty and commitment. This has been the result of frequent fluctuations and changes in work conditions and relationships that characterize modern life which replaced the previous linearity and continuity of the narrative of life (Sennett, 1998). These social developments caused work to assume a less significant role in the formation of personal identity and leave its prior central role to consumer-based selfhood based on the amusement culture of the present age (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 477). In accordance with these changes, a novel ‘social character’ emerged as the ‘carnival character’.

The carnival character utilized privatized hedonism as its escape mechanism. The plethora of consumer goods, experiences and spectacles enabled privatized hedonism to be endlessly fed and related desires to be endlessly aroused. ‘The ‘carnival character’ is thus a kind of psychic withdrawal from the institutional worlds of work, politics or communities of faith to the pluralities of sites and regions of pleasurable fulfillment in the dream worlds and hyper-realities provided by consumer society’

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Social character’ is a concept proposed by Erich Fromm as a historical manifestation of selfhood that served as the basis of desires.

(Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 483). In the present age, carnivalization has become a commodity, linked to consumerism. The carnival character is expressed as self-indulgent privatized hedonism within the plethora of consumer goods and services. It is realized in the realms of consumerism and leisure, both of which serve to gain recognition and initiate relationships (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 480). Traditionally, beginning from early childhood, the formation of character was based on the child's interaction with parents who served as role models to instill cultural values. The onset of capitalism also initiated the weakening of the parents' influence over children, instead replacing it with larger social institutions like political bodies, schools and mass media. The infiltration and colonization of childhood by modern culture industries resulted in the emergence of 'consumption-based character structures' (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 481). Langman identifies these character structures as those 'in which various goods, fashions, lifestyles and cultural tastes/expressions provide the person with fantasized identities, meanings and gratifying experiences in the 'shopping mall selfhood' (Langman, 1992). Consumerism and entertainment culture have magnetized individuals to illusionary worlds of utopia, fostering the sustainability of the carnival character.

The distinguishing features of the carnival character are proposed to be its ever-changing nature that lacks a solid sense of self and her hedonism. The temporal, transient and spontaneous nature of the carnival is mirrored in the carnival character. 'Privatized hedonism can be thought of as an ideological justification for a complex pattern of global consumption in which consumers pursue a variety of themed or simulated experiences provided by the culture industries' (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 482). Among these culture industries are mass mediated carnival cultures, theme parks and resorts, and the travel industry (Gottdiener, 2001). These simulated, themed environments provide mechanisms of escape for carnival characters. This is a consequence of the fact that in the present age, work no longer provides a sense of self, meaning and identity. Another aspect of the changing work dynamics is that it no longer provides a basis for community (Langman & Ryan, 2009, p. 483). These shifts

in the societal fabric have resulted in ‘migrations of selfhood from such traditional loci as religion, work or nation’. Entertainment and amusement have gained dominance in the maintenance of individuals’ identities.

### **3.3 BODY SPECTACLE & FASHION**

Carnival is a site of costumes and masks that enable fluidity of identities. This characteristic emphasizes visibility and body spectacle that echoes in the frequent transformation of looks and the chameleon style that is present in ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. Heavy use of fashion elements to create fascination through visibility is an attribute that is shared by all carnivalesque celebrities and serves as part of the performance. The enlarged sphere of show business has predominantly been supported by the fashion industry for the last century. As egalitarian imagination and a societal fascination with self-presentation fueled the spectacle of fashion, show business, its communication and textuality expanded. The consumption of entertainment which was limited to theatres, cinema and television screens, and official events stretched out to private spheres through personal style choices. This progression from the public into the private spheres was in line with the tremendous marketing efforts of high fashion brands that commenced in the 1990s (P. C. Gibson & Pesce, 2017, p. III). This interaction between fashion and show business got immensely perpetuated by the advances in technology such as the Internet and social media channels that enabled the domestication of entertainment. The dominance of visual textuality and massive dissemination of images related to glamorous celebrities, paired with the availability of fashion items impacted the cultivation of current celebrity culture that feeds on fashion and beauty industries excessively. As the concepts of leisure and entertainment continue expanding their spheres, concepts of spectacle and self-performance become embedded in everyday lives of ordinary people who watch celebrities as symbols of aspiration.

The enlargement of possible spaces of spectacle pronounced visuality further and necessitated elements related to imagery to take center stage. The phenomenal growth in fashion and beauty industries within the last two decades is unprecedented (Jones, 2013). This is in congruence with the infiltration of celebrity culture in everyday lives. The fascination with images and visual textuality is actively supported by the fashion and beauty industries. ‘Fashion forges the celebrity text’ (P. C. Gibson & Pesce, 2017, p. IV). It is through fashion that the narrative symbolism of images is constructed and sustained in celebrity texts. The codes that are embedded in celebrity narratives are often brought to materialistic realm through visuality, built upon the meticulous utilization of fashion elements. As the sphere of entertainment became more visual, so did the necessity of attracting and maintaining the attention of the audiences through visual feasts; aesthetically fascinating, ever-shifting visual textualities.

### **3.3.1. Sexualized Self-Presentation & Celebrity Culture**

One of the indulgences of the carnival is sexual gratification and sexuality - being so central within ‘bodily lower stratum’ - gets played openly in the ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ as sexualized self-presentation. The emergence of a mostly unacknowledged system of promotion within the last decade is carried out by young female celebrities and is seen as part of the ‘pornification’ of contemporary visual culture. In this new mode of self-presentation, the widespread acceptance of references, images and appropriations that were once exclusive to pornography have become the norm (P. C. Gibson, 2014). This new mode denotes a highly sexualized presentation of the body to achieve a particular appearance and display. This mode has been influenced by particular celebrities who are viewed as *being sexy* rather than being stylish or having style. This new mode of self-presentation is separate from that of high fashion yet co-exists with it. Extreme commercialization is evident in the promotion of this new mode along with a uniform, rather homogenized look that is required of young

women. The monetary repercussions for garment and beauty industries are endless; various celebrities have co-created or endorsed lines of clothing, cosmetics and fragrances that are representative of this sexualized mode of self-presentation.

In her analysis of celebrity style a decade ago, fashion scholar Pamela Church Gibson had designated two different ideals: ‘the sexy’ and ‘the über-stylish’ where the sexy look was influenced by the glamour model (2011). It was around that time when scholars identified the phenomenon as the ‘pornification’ of culture (McNair, 1996). Another analysis dubbed the phenomenon as ‘the mainstreaming of sex’ (Atwood, 2009). This trend has tipped the scale towards ‘sexy’ celebrities, rather than the ‘stylish’ ones. The body ideals and the clothing code of this novel system are different than those of high fashion. The influencer celebrity texts that promote this new system are curvaceous in stark comparison to the traditional slim body of high fashion. This new code of overly sexualized look has been described as ‘porn chic’ by a feminist academic (Lynch, 2012). The look constitutes of long hair, very high heels, extremely long nails, overly made-up face and baring of bodily parts. Celebrity texts who promote this look routinely subject themselves to fillers and cosmetic surgeries to attain the nearly impossible curvaceous body image. Cosmetic surgery is in boom mostly as a result of these influential celebrity texts. This ‘über-sexualized’ look has become mainstream in recent celebrity texts and young women who follow them as influencers in social media as well as multiple celebrity magazines (P. C. Gibson, 2014b, p. 197). This alternative look showcased by celebrities requires ‘constant self-surveillance and endless maintenance’ which only serve to entertain performance-seeking audiences of social media channels and economically feed the hungry fashion and beauty industries (P. C. Gibson, 2014a, p. 201). This sexualized self-presentation is highly evident in ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ and resonates with the sexual indulgences of the carnival.

## CHAPTER 4

### CARNIVALESQUE CELEBRIFICATION

The purpose of this chapter is to propose the concept of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’, point out to the cultural factors that have enabled such phenomenon to materialize and outline the attributes of the proposed phenomenon. Previous chapters investigated the main concepts related to ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ so as to provide a solid foundation for the reader to build on to transition to the proposed concept of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. Even though it may not harbor all of the attributes of Bakhtin’s Carnival, there are sufficient similarities to the carnival ethos to deem the phenomenon as carnivalesque. The phenomenon is not limited to the proposed celebrities. The three celebrities who are proposed to exemplify ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ are merely demonstrative of the phenomenon and do not constitute an exhaustive list. There are alternative celebrity names in recent history who seem to have paved the way to carnivalesque celebrification such as David Bowie, Freddie Mercury, Prince and Michael Jackson. The phenomenon may currently be more pronounced due to the prevalent utilization of digital media.

The transition from a nonmedia person to media person, namely the process of ‘celebrification’ has become more widespread due to previously discussed technological advancements and related rise in self-promotion. This trend coupled with the pervasiveness of ‘ordinariness’ have necessitated the budding of a novel way to stand out from the multitude of celebrity texts. In this thesis, ‘out of ordinariness’ is proposed to be that novel way of celebrification. Through the construction of the celebrity text as out of ordinary, the claim for attention is intensified. This out of ordinariness harbors carnivalesque qualities. It is the aim of this thesis to propose ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ as a process based on Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival theory (Bakhtin, 1968, 1984). The celebrity text becomes the site of carnival.



The celebrity text as carnival is out of ordinary. It seizes to be readily defined. It transgresses social norms and boundaries. The 'shock' factor associated with 'carnavalesque celebration' is alleviated because of the out of ordinary nature of the celebrity text. The celebrity text becomes the embodiment of transgression and as such offers a utopian expression of resistance for audiences. Out of ordinariness becomes expected from the specific celebrity text, yet the domain of out of ordinariness remains vast and to be explored. Costumes are emphasized in a way in which each costume reinforces the carnivalesque. The celebrity text as carnival site is therefore more colorful and experiential than the rest. The practice of constantly stretching boundaries demands more creativity and risk-taking. In this context of the carnivalesque, shame may hold no place. Societal norms and values cease to be applicable to the celebrity text as carnival site, thus prohibitions that may otherwise be considered as taboo are bypassed. The celebrity text becomes somewhat of a 'free zone', free of being reprimanded.

Bakhtin's notion of carnival culture provides a theoretical framework to analyze specific celebrity texts. The 'transgression of cultural norms and values' is one of the primary structural factors of carnival culture and the out of ordinariness associated with the celebrification process and the construction of the celebrity texts is directly related to this transgression out of the 'ordinary' domain into the 'out of ordinary' domain. By including elements of carnival culture within the celebrification process, the celebrity text becomes carnivalesque. The carnival ethos is situated against the formality of societal structures. Among the characteristics of carnival culture are coarseness, vulgarity and anti-establishment themes. Carnavalesque celebrification further enhances the 'spectacle' of celebrification and is more dependent on the 'visuality' of the celebrity text. The image is more embellished and open to creativity. Playfulness becomes a part of the celebrity text. The temporality of the carnival phenomenon is also evident in visual textuality of 'carnavalesque celebrification'; change is ubiquitous.

Celebrification was designated to be a metaprocess like globalization, individualization and mediatization by Driessens (2012). This designation is indicative of its significant influence on contemporary culture and society. The prominence of carnival character has previously been detailed (Langman & Ryan, 2009). The merger of these two factors constitutes an environment conducive to the flourishing of this phenomenon. Gabler points out to the protean nature of celebrity and how it can touch upon almost anything in the culture. 'One is almost assured that if an issue is roiling somewhere in the consciousness there will eventually be a celebrity narrative to dramatize it' (Gabler, 2001, p. 13). As such, celebrity texts act like mirror images for ongoing cultural transformations and negotiations.

*'Carnavalesque celebrification'* is a particular process whereby ordinary people are transformed into celebrities through carnival-like performances. Carnival is a time of visual textuality with the colorful decorations, the accentuated costumes and masks. This visuality of the carnival may be traced back to 'carnavalesque celebrification' with its emphasis on the visual; how the celebrity text looks. The exaggeration of visuality becomes congruent with the narrative of the celebrity text. The celebrity text seeks to shock, to awe the onlookers with its visual textuality. Visuality becomes the predominant attribute to distinguish the particular celebrity from others. The intentionality in the preparation of the visual textuality becomes one of the distinguishing factors in carnivalesque celebrification. The costume serves to attract and maintain the gaze of the media, and the audiences. The visuality becomes attached to the celebrity narrative and thus necessitates the recreation of alluring visuality on a constant basis. The emphasis on costume, make-up and hair; the totality of visual presentation is much more pronounced and requires a more creative approach to the celebrification process.

The transition from written to visual textuality as the dominant form of media communication affected the celebrification process. The expansion of visual media enabled the celebrification process to become more accessible to the masses. As visual media expanded with the inclusion of photography, film, television and the Internet,

the enabling apparatus that serves to instantly rise to celebrity status became more prevalent (Braudy, 2011, p. 1072). The visual emphasis on carnivalesque celebrification transforms the celebrity text into a spectacle. The creation of various costumes and valorization of the visuality of celebrity text becomes the primary concern. The costumes also serve to individuate the celebrity text and pronounce the out of ordinariness. The claim on out-of-ordinariness makes room for experimentation with various visual textualities and standard borders get renegotiated for the flourishing of the carnivalesque. Besides celebrification and the carnival characterization of the society, the rise of visual media to prominence, the inclusion of ordinariness within celebrity culture that gave way to out of ordinariness and the accentuation of performance, spectacle and enchantment in the presentation of the self in everyday lives are factors that have paved the way for ‘carnavalesque celebrification’.

#### **4.1. PERFORMATIVITY & SPECTACLE**

Building up to ‘carnavalesque celebrification’, having discussed the concept of out of ordinariness and examined Langman & Ryan’s ‘carnival character’, it would prove beneficial to mention Irving Goffman and presentation of self in everyday life as the performativity component of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. In his canonical book Goffman (1959) proposed a conceptualization of social behavior and presentation of the self in everyday interactions as part of a performance. He utilized ‘performance’ as a central term in his theory to suggest ‘all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 32). He proposed that individuals alternate between the roles of actors and audiences in changing scenes on a constant basis and they serve to legitimize each other’s projected impression of reality based on the performance. His theory suggests that ‘authenticity is a question of acting authentic’ (Mortensen & Jerslev, 2014, p. 629). The social architecture of his

theory is situated on two separate spaces; namely, *front stage* and *back stage*. The behavior that takes place on the front stage is official, formal and in line with the script of the given role that is socially imposed. Rehearsals of these roles that take place on the front stage are done on the back stage. These spaces may be a multitude of spaces that are private. Front stage and back stage spaces are closed-off from each other at all times.

Moving on from Goffman's theory and terminology, Joshua Meyrowitz's (1985) also proposed an analysis of new cultural developments in an attempt to decipher the aforementioned impact on individual and societal context. He pointed out to the appearance of new spaces for role-making and new audiences to legitimize these acts. He suggested that these new sets of performances resulted in the blurring of the boundaries between front stage and back stage. Thus, a new space emerged that he called the 'middle region'. As the audiences gained access to the previously private spaces that were the back stage, a new viewing experience became possible that he named the 'side-stage' (p. 47). The proposed weakening of the front stage due to digital media and the resultant emergence of the middle region that enabled the side-stage is also the expanding realm of 'carnavalesque celebrification'. The continuous performing self of the celebrity text ensures the sustainability of the out of ordinary visual textuality from the domain of the front stage yet adds the 'unrehearsed and raw' quality from the domain of the back stage to constitute a middle region where the 'blurring' is allowed. The tension between the embellished and polished visuality of celebrity texts and the rawness inherent in the carnival spirit becomes the middle region playground where the 'carnavalesque celebrification' is performed. The visual construction of the out of ordinariness of the celebrity text is based on a 'shock factor' rather than the usual glamorous images of perfection. The highly stylized and fabricated images are intentionally and purposefully situated in the middle region so as to embody the unrehearsed rawness of the carnivalesque. This convergence of two dissimilars constitute the spirit of the carnival and serves 'carnavalesque celebrification'.

## 4.2. PERFORMATIVITY & VISUALITY

Clothes and styles may serve as expressions of resistance in accordance with the carnival spirit. The authentic expression of identity through the choice of clothes is a way to repudiate mass-marketed fashion trends. The performance of the celebrity text is accentuated with the context appropriate appearance and style which in itself is inappropriate for societal standards of fashion. The costumes and masks that are prevalent in carnival culture are mirrored in ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ as a search for authenticity of the performative self. The visual differentiation enabled by clothing and style is maximized through embellishments such as accessories, hair and make-up that stand out from the mainstream and serve as a reclamation of out of ordinariness. Celebrity texts that are subject to ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ embody and celebrate the carnivalization of appearance and style.

The carnivalization of appearance and style pertains to the utilization of fashion as a way to claim out of ordinariness. The emphasis on visual textuality necessitates embellishment and creativity of clothing and style. The appearance becomes a statement, dominating the subliminal conversation between the celebrity text and the audience. The carnivalization of clothing transforms the experience of dressing up into costume creation and role-playing. Each opportunity to dress up manifests as an invitation to a costume party, namely a carnival. The costumes translate into statements to solidify the authenticity of the celebrity text. Experimentation with different costumes is a part of the ludic character of the carnival culture. Fashion serves as a tool of gamification that facilitates the expression of authenticity and out of ordinariness. The playfulness of costumes and enhanced creativity enables the celebrity text to embody carnivalization. Hair and make-up aid in constructing the carnivalesque costumes of the celebrity text that grab the attention of audiences. Fashion and style reflect the out of ordinariness of the celebrity text as well as the temporality of the specific appearance of the celebrity text since there is a continuous shifting and changing of the appearance.

### 4.3 ATTRIBUTES OF CARNIVALESQUE CELEBRIFICATION

There are specific attributes of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ that set it apart. These attributes are visibility, performance, out-of-ordinariness, undercurrent narrative and shock factor. Below is an explanation of each attribute:

- 1. Sexualized, Fluid Visuality:** Fame and celebrity have always been dependent on visual textuality. The image serves as the primary domain where the fantasies, hopes and desires that enable the celebrity text to flourish for the masses reside. This emphasis on visual textuality materializes as an excessive sexualization of the image in the carnivalesque. The visual textuality related to carnivalesque celebrification is more colorful, more playful and more creative, thus enabling ‘...the re-enchantment of the text, its coating with the aura of fabulousness’ (Wicke, 1995, p. 133). The remnants of intentionality, strategy and individuation are evident in the visibility of the celebrity text. The presentation of costumes, hair and make-up serve to construct the celebrity text as situated outside the norm, outside ordinariness. There is an element of shape-shifting fluidity, chameleon style present in constantly changing visual textuality of the carnivalesque.
- 2. Intentional, Exaggerated Performance:** ‘Carnavalesque celebrification’ brings about performance as an everyday endeavor. Performance, spectacle and enchantment become the main ingredients that the celebrity text utilizes to attract the gaze. ‘If fame includes such an element of turning away from us, celebrity stares us right in the face, flaunting its performance and trying desperately to keep our attention’ (Braudy, 2011, p. 1072). The intentionality of performance maintains the spectacle and invites onlookers to participate in the creation of secondary texts. Gossip often accompanies the outrageous theatricality and facilitates word-of-mouth reporting among the audiences. Performance in carnivalesque celebrification is a site of cultural negotiation. As such, it serves to thin out rigid borders that are the keepers of taboo.

- 3. Out of ordinariness:** The ever-present out of ordinariness that characterizes carnivalesque celebrification is a factor that keeps the audiences on their toes and warrants the continuity of entertainment. Expecting the unexpected is the established norm and audiences have higher than average expectations regarding the carnivalesque celebrity text. Out of ordinariness facilitates attention and maximizes risk-taking. The celebrity text dares to charter into uncharted territory, all the while taking advantage of the additional leeway she has been granted by the audiences. Out of ordinariness serves to accentuate cultural issues such as class, race, and gender, thus allowing flow of communication and negotiations among the audiences.
- 4. Undercurrent narrative:** There is always an undercurrent narrative in 'carnivalesque celebrification'. This narrative is not salient, yet the audiences are aware of it. It often has to do with the past of the celebrity text that lingers over all present actions. This distinctive, yet subtle narrative acts like an undercurrent, ever-present beneath the surface narrative. Ethical considerations subside to aesthetic concerns. The undercurrent narrative serves the celebrity text favorably as long as the audiences find it fascinating by aesthetic standards (Gabler, 2001, p. 11). The fascination and intrigue caused by the undercurrent narrative serve to facilitate and sustain attention.
- 5. Shock factor:** Exaggeration, excessiveness and shock become the overarching characteristics in visuality and performance. The celebrity text embodies a shock factor that hooks the audiences in and gets them invested in her. It may be evident or subtle, but allows the mechanism of gossip to work in favor of the celebrity text. 'Carnivalesque celebrification' is assisted by the revelation of shock factors. The more shocking the visuality, performance or narrative get, the more carnivalesque the celebrity text becomes. Shock factor may be related to the ever-present undercurrent narrative or may get repeated singularly throughout the out of ordinary events related to the life flow of the celebrity text.

These attributes generate ‘carnavalesque celebrification’. The phenomenon promises entertainment value and aids in cultural negotiations and meaning-making. The domain of carnivalesque celebrities purveys a looser ground for what may otherwise be more rigid territory for thoughts and beliefs. This looser ground enables infiltration of difficult cultural issues to the foreground. The carnivalesque characteristics enable higher tolerance and acceptance levels, thus facilitating change.

#### **4.4. EXAMPLES OF CARNIVALESQUE CELEBRIFICATION**

‘Carnavalesque celebrification’ is played out in three celebrity texts, namely; Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner. The list is not exhaustive, rather an attempt to exemplify the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the three celebrity texts embody the carnival spirit and aforementioned attributes of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’.

##### **4.4.1. Lady Gaga:**

Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, professionally known as Lady Gaga, was born in 1986. At the beginning of her career, she was a go-go dancer in New York City. She worked as a songwriter for Sony before she signed a deal with Interscope Records and made a tremendously successful entry into the pop music scene in 2008 with her debut album, *The Fame* which gained both commercial and critical success with five number one hits on Billboard’s Pop Songs chart. Her subsequent albums *The Fame Monster* in 2009 and *Born This Way* in 2011 were especially critical in substantiating her status as a pop star. Her discography to date is extensive with five studio albums, one film soundtrack, three compilation albums, three video albums, four EPs, twenty-nine singles (including two as a featured-artist), and nine promotional singles. As of May 2019, Gaga is the 11th top digital singles artist in the United States, with



cumulative single certifications of 61 million digital downloads and on-demand streaming (Recording Industry Association of America, 2019).

She maintains her striking visuality with the help of a team that she calls the 'Haus of Gaga', consisting of stylists, designers, choreographers and producers. She has constructed her celebrity text mainly based on controversial costumes. The 'meat dress' she wore at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2010 was positioned as part of a 'rich legacy of feminist artists working with food and issues of the body' (Iddon & Marshall, 2014, p. 29). Her costuming has been linked to couture, gay culture and post-fashion (Duffett, 2016). Scholars took an interest in her and 'the way in which Gaga uses fashion and dress to simultaneously enact, problematize, and queer questions of 'fame', 'beauty', 'sexiness', 'femininity', and 'blond female famousness' (Iddon & Marshall, 2014, p. 45). Her visual fluidity and stylistic shifts serve in the hyperdifferentiation of her celebrity text (Rossolatos, 2015). She frequently utilizes elements of sexuality in her visual textuality.

Lady Gaga was a performance artist and this is evident in her textuality. The emphasis is on performance (Duffett, 2016, p. 449). Her 'unpredictable theatricality, avant-garde fashion, gender-bending performance' all serve to reify her differentiation. 'Lady Gaga is the product of strategic thinkers and creators who maximize profit through careful management of brand partnerships, synchronization deals, merchandising, and development and exploitation of a consumer-producer base through social media' (Iddon & Marshall, 2014, p. 234). Gaga's over-stylised gendered performance 'activates a vision of the carnival of the oppressed' (Iddon & Marshall, 2014, p. 16). She utilizes 'monster' references in performances, thus claiming the notion of monstrosity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). She reified the adoption of these relational terms by tattooing the words 'little monsters' on her arm (Valentinsson, 2018, p. 720). She calls for 'Paws Up' – which is performed by outstretched arms and bent, curled fingers to represent monster claws - during her live performances as a physical expression of unity among her fans (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, p. 361). This very act itself is a strategic performance, part of her spectacle theme.

Out of ordinariness is played out in her claim to monstrosity, disability and difference. What seems to be the core idea behind the creation and diligent management of a consumer franchise, monstrosity is more a method of ‘hyperdifferentiation’ than anything (Rossolatos, 2015). She strategically crafted this theme to claim out of ordinariness as her identity. ‘If ‘normality is the degree zero of monstrosity’, then monstrosity is a metaphorical schema that transposes us to the limit of normality’ (Rossolatos, 2015). Her celebrity text is based on not being normal, not belonging to the mainstream and being out of ordinary. This territory she carved for herself resonates as ‘end of normal’, thus serving her hyperdifferentiation (Halberstam, 2012). Her out of ordinariness seems to be strategic and intentionally constructed as part of her celebrity text.

Undercurrent narrative of having been abused for being the way she is; having been sexually abused at the age of 19 and ‘her history of being bullied in school for being different’ are reasons for marginalised groups to identify with her celebrity text (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, p. 361). The theme around her fandom that situates her as the ‘Mother Monster’ and her fans as ‘little monsters’ positions her as the symbol of ‘mothering, nurturing’ and carries an undertone of hierarchy between her and her adoring fans, situating her as the holder of an extremely strong archetype (Jung, 1959).

Shock factor is embodied in the celebrity text through her eccentricity which is the norm (Rossolatos, 2015, p. 234). Rumors of her being a hermaphrodite have added to the eccentricity of her celebrity text. Her choices regarding costumes and live performances during concerts have habitually harbored shocking elements, thus ensuring the continuity of fascination with her celebrity narrative. She frequently utilizes shock factors in her performance and self-presentation to maximize attention.

#### 4.4.2. Cardi B:

Belcalis Marlenis Almánzar, professionally known as Cardi B, was born in 1992. At the beginning of her career, she was a stripper in New York City. She gained nationwide attention when she debuted on a reality show named *Love & Hip Hop* in December 2015. On June 16, 2017, her commercial debut single ‘Bodak Yellow’ was released by Atlantic Records. Her debut studio album, *Invasion of Privacy*, was released on April 6, 2018, and gained universal acclaim from music critics. Her discography to date includes one studio album, two solo mixtapes, 27 singles (including 18 as a featured artist) and 12 music videos. She became the first female artist to have all tracks from an album certified gold or higher by the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America, 2018). The panel ‘Invasion of Privacy: The Sociology of Cardi B’ at the Association of Black Sociologists' annual conference, convened in Philadelphia in August 2018, gave the rap star its sole focus (Association of Black Sociologists, 2018).

Cardi B’s visual textuality is extremely strong. Her visual experimentation is bold and colorful, at times paying tribute to her Afro-Latina and Caribbean roots. She is constantly shape-shifting through different styles, with the help of a glam-squad that ensures the right use of costumes, hair and make-up. Visual fluidity is an attribute of ‘carnival celebrification’ and she naturally flows through costumes and styles to provide a visual feast for her onlookers. She accessorizes herself with hats, jewelry and glasses. She frequently changes her hair color and employs her hair to create more striking looks. She has made use of cosmetic alterations to her bottom and breasts to enhance her sexual visibility in line with contemporary aesthetic standards of sexualized self-presentation. The continuous shape-shifting and excessive embellishment of her visual textuality retain the gaze.

Cardi B’s past as a stripper and her subsequent role in reality TV have resulted in her extensive experience with performance. She has a unique accent that instantly distinguishes her and her unapologetic authenticity serves to mesmerize audiences. She

is very vocal in her opinions and does not hold back in her excessive utilization of social media which provided her with her initiation into the public sphere. She utilizes her exotic dance background in her live performances and music videos which serve to polarize and captivate audiences. ‘I love playing a character!’ she said during one of her live performances (The Cut, 2017). Her vulgarity, particular accent and outspokenness accentuate her exaggerated performance. She routinely utilizes humor to entertain and amuse her audiences which is also a carnivalesque attribute.

Out of ordinariness is embodied in Cardi B’s dramatic communication style and her extravagant personality. She transcends her underprivileged background and challenges cultural norms with her racial and sexual identity. Her candor regarding her sexuality serves to enrich her celebrity text and empower women who identify with her. ‘Fortunately, women in the hip-hop and adult entertainment industries have found representation in Cardi B, who openly speaks about her experiences as a stripper and a female rapper in an industry that is still perceived to be male-dominated... She serves as a model to project the voices of women who represent the feminine perspective in diverse social niches must be bolstered’ (The Daily Princetonian, 2018). Her ordinariness is the starting point of her celebrity narrative as out of ordinary.

Undercurrent narrative is her background as a stripper and how she became Insta-famous, then moved on to become a reality TV star and then a chart-breaking A-list rapper. Her narrative as a ‘rags to riches’ minority who is unapologetic for how she made money to survive the challenging times in her life gives her women fans hope and represents a model for their lives. Her celebrity narrative harbors definitive elements of class, race and gender and serves as a symbol of utopia for underprivileged groups who find a voice in her.

Cardi B is shocking in her social background and the uninhibited expression of her sexuality. She entertains by polarizing audiences with an element of shock in her speech, her lyrics, her performances and her visual textuality. Her audience expects the unexpected from her and this very quality enriches her celebrity narrative by fascinating audiences. Her celebrity narrative is wrought with peculiarities of her past

and personal life that unfolds in the public sphere. She is granted permission to transverse cultural and sexual boundaries and as such serves to embody the carnivalesque in bringing cultural change. Her celebrity text constitutes a free zone that allows her to withstand scandals.

#### **4.4.3. Kylie Jenner:**

Kylie Kristen Jenner was born in 1997. She is an American media personality, model, businesswoman, and socialite. She has starred in the E! reality television series *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* since 2007. In 2015, Jenner launched her own cosmetics line called *Kylie Lip Kits*, which was renamed to *Kylie Cosmetics* the following year. According to Forbes magazine, Jenner's net worth is estimated at USD 1 billion, making her, at age 21, the world's youngest billionaire as of March 2019 (Forbes, 2019).

Kylie Jenner's visual textuality is pronounced with hypersexuality. She was named as the most influential celebrity in fashion by The New York Post in November 2018 and her costumes are supposed to generate related internet searches by ten folds. Her visuality is meticulously curated on a daily basis by a glam-squad. Her professionally taken photos are posted in her social media channels that reach hundreds of millions. Her visuality is highly curated and sexualized with the application of professional make-up and the aid of fillers in her lips, breasts and bottom. She experiments with different hair colors and hairstyles frequently and changes costumes a number of times a day to keep her image appealing for the gaze of the masses.

Kylie Jenner has been in a reality show with the other members of her family ever since she was 10 years old so she is experienced in performance. She is an avid user of social media and her utilization of her social media channels is almost non-stop. She has been the face of her cosmetics line, showcasing her lip kits on her own filler augmented lips, ever since its launch in 2015. She is extremely used to being in the

limelight and leverages her influence over teens through her social media channels. Her performance is ongoing and conveys the characteristics of reality TV with non-stop tutorials of her make-up products and her recent motherhood.

Kylie Jenner embodies out of ordinariness with every aspect. She has undergone an excessive number of plastic surgeries at a very young age and has completely transformed her look. Her family, the Jenners-Kardashians has been occupying the entertainment industry with their reality show for over a decade with various scandals related to her father and her sisters. Her family has amassed the wealth of a dynasty and became very powerful in Hollywood. She was declared to be the youngest self-made billionaire with her cosmetics company. These are all narratives that serve her out of ordinariness.

The undercurrent narrative has to do with visuality. She has gone under excessive cosmetic surgeries at a very young age which has completely transformed her face to a completely different look. She has transformed her body to become hyperfeminine and sexualized with excessive and continuous use of fillers. Her lip kits that were the start of her company have become synonymous with her filler augmented lips. She has crafted a new identity for herself through cosmetic surgeries and built a cosmetics empire on this very illusion. Her celebrity narrative continues to fascinate teens who idolize her for representing false utopia in visuality.

Shock factor is inherent in Kyle Jenner's celebrity text and narrative. Her experimentation with cosmetic surgeries and fillers have served as a model for the explosion in beauty and aesthetics industries within the last decade. Her hypersexual visuality, excessive use of make-up and costumes, frequent transformation of her hair color and style all serve to render her celebrity narrative more shocking and fascinating for the masses who follow her every move through social media channels. The fascination with the visual illusion she created is a significant element of her shocking celebrity narrative. Her use of cosmetics to ensure the sustainability of the illusion has served her cosmetics company to soar to billion dollar sales in a mere three years. She

serves as the poster-girl for women's obsession with 'beauty ideals' and 'image' and perpetuates these cultural norms.

\*

Contemporary celebrities Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner all embody similar carnivalesque attributes. Especially evident are the out of ordinariness in their celebrity narratives and their exaggerated performances. It is interesting how they all have performance backgrounds through their past work or television shows. These performing experiences seem to have rippled into their everyday lives and accentuate performativity in their celebrity texts. Their sexualized-self presentation and fluid visuality are distinctive when compared to other celebrities. They all utilize visual textuality excessively and embody chameleon style and shape-shifting as a primary characteristic of their celebrity texts. Their celebrity narratives carry undercurrent narratives pertaining to reformative elements that are outside the domain of culturally accepted standards and norms.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to identify a recent process whereby ordinary people are transformed into celebrities and maintain their status through the systematic use of specific attributes that bear resemblance to Bakhtin's carnival, proposed as 'carnavalesque celebrification'. The attributes of 'carnavalesque celebrification' embody the carnival spirit and serve to mirror the societal needs and expectations that are manifested in celebrity texts. Three celebrities exemplify the proposed phenomenon. Even though this is not an exhaustive list, these celebrities demonstrate the outlined attributes in their celebrity texts. These carnivalesque celebrities are Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner.

The proposed phenomenon is closely related to the cultural and technological developments that have led to the dominance of celebrity culture and the emergence of a novel social character as the 'carnival character' (Langman & Ryan, 2009). Contemporary narcissistic selfhood perpetuated by technological advancements, rise of consumerism and amusement culture enabled privatized hedonism. The constant need to be entertained and amused as an escape mechanism is satisfied by the multitude of channels and types of media. The Internet and reality TV have served to introduce the concept of ordinariness into celebrity culture. Emergence of social media, as well as numerous applications and filters that enable the enhancement of images facilitated a surge in digital self-promotion in hopes of the attainment of celebrity status. The inclusion of high definition cameras in smartphones and enormous reach of social media channels elevated visual textuality. As the increase in the number of media types and channels enabled the rise of celebrity culture, fertile grounds emerged for a plethora of individuals to claim celebrity status. As the dominance of visual textuality in communication increased, images became more pivotal than ever. Image-enhancing industries such as fashion and beauty industries have demonstrated phenomenal growth within the last decades. 'Demand for attention' became a primary determinant in



celebrity culture and as such, carnivalesque domains like sexuality came to the foreground of visibility for some celebrities.

‘Carnavalesque celebrification’ embodies the carnival spirit and demonstrates five specific attributes that all pertain to aspects of out of ordinariness and performativity. These attributes are:

- 1) Sexualized, fluid visibility
- 2) Intentional, exaggerated performance
- 3) Out of ordinariness
- 4) Undercurrent narrative
- 5) Shock factor

These attributes all coincide with contemporary cultural tendencies and transformations that get manifested in celebrity texts as carriers of cultural symbolism. The rise in visual textuality has had a positive impact on celebrity culture with its emphasis on images. The first attribute of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ has to do with visual textuality; sexualized, fluid visibility. The carnival spirit harbors chameleon style, shape-shifting and fluid identities. Costumes, colors and masks are signature traits of a carnival. The carnivalesque celebrity has a hypersexualized text that keeps shifting to attract the attention of the audiences. Costumes and outfits are all meticulously planned to make a visual statement. Length and color of hair are constantly changing, atypical hair colors – including neon and rainbow colors- are applied in an attempt to render the celebrity text more striking. Chameleon style is evident in frequent visual transformations. Use of heavy make-up, nail decorations and accessories such as masks, hats, glasses and other props to complement the intended style is the norm. Skin-baring is frequent to sexualize the visual text.

The second attribute of ‘carnavalesque celebrification’ is intentional, exaggerated performance. The carnivalesque celebrity puts on an ongoing performance for her audiences. She is an experienced performer with the willingness to include nuances of exaggeration to her performance. Goffman’s performance theory (1959) provides a significant reference point for the continuous sexualized self-presentation

as exaggerated carnivalesque spectacle. The performance is often strategized and intentional, harboring elements of theatricality that are intended to attract attention. Use of profanity, humor, dispute and controversy are common to stimulate mass interest and fascination with the celebrity text. Excessive, exaggerated performances contribute to the attribute of out of ordinariness, which is the third attribute. Out of ordinariness is a main ingredient within the carnivalesque domain. Carnival is a time when societal norms and rules are suspended for a designated time. This out of ordinary time when anything is possible and allowed gives rise to out of ordinary happenings. The carnival spirit is present in the out of ordinariness related to the carnivalesque celebrity texts. It is through their visuality or narratives that these celebrities are perceived to be outside the territory of ordinariness. Out of ordinariness is the primary characteristic in carnivalesque celebrity texts which require ongoing maintenance and bears reformative and rebellious qualities.

The last two attributes are undercurrent narrative and shock factor, respectively. Undercurrent narrative is the ever-present story that remains as a backdrop to the celebrity text. It often remains in circulation through gossip and is a story that is unusual. This unique story feeds into the out of ordinariness of the celebrity text, similar to its visual textuality. It often has to do with the celebrity's past and serves as a hook to invite audiences in to identify with the celebrity text. The undercurrent narrative may be claimed or unclaimed by the celebrity, which nevertheless feeds the gossip engine. The mystery, intrigue and fascination that is fueled by the undercurrent narrative embellish the celebrity text furthermore as a site of amusement and entertainment. The last attribute of 'carnivalesque celebrification' is shock factor. This may be a stand-alone factor related to any one of the previous attributes or different shock factors that occur throughout the celebrity's life flow. The carnivalesque celebrity needs to shock her audiences to keep the carnival spirit alive. Shock factors may be linked to visual textuality, performance or narrative and seek to magnetize audiences into the carnivalesque celebrity text. Utilization of shock factors assists the celebrity text to remain tangible and relevant in celebrityland.

The three proposed carnivalesque celebrities, namely Lady Gaga, Cardi B and Kylie Jenner all embody the carnival spirit in their out of ordinariness and performativity. The ongoing spectacle, preoccupation with the constant construction of striking, sexualized visuality and out of ordinariness inherent in their identities, narratives and self-presentation styles are carnivalesque factors that mesmerize audiences. Exaggeration and excessiveness inherent in their celebrity texts create intrigue and fascination. Carnivalesque celebrities are rule-breakers who transgress culturally accepted standards and norms. In celebrity culture, aesthetic standards often overcome ethical standards and as such, the intention behind the spectacle is rendered unimportant as long as it serves to entertain and amuse the masses (Gabler, 2001). As long as the celebrity narrative is fascinating by aesthetic standards, it gets accepted by the audiences.

In this thesis, ‘carnivalesque celebrification’ is the proposed phenomenon pertaining to celebrity culture that utilizes Bakhtin’s carnival theory as a reference point, witnessing the conjunction of cultural studies with celebrity studies. The introduction of the concept of out of ordinariness may also serve to expand the aforementioned discussions around the concept of ordinariness in celebrity studies. As the differentiation of society unfolds, novel flourishings are sure to manifest. It would be interesting to follow the unfolding of these celebrity texts in the years to come and the theoretical implications related to the carnivalesque. Further analysis of carnivalesque attributes and celebrities that bear resemblances to the carnivalesque throughout history of fame would prove beneficial for scholars interested in celebrity studies. The study seeks to bring attention to novel ways of celebrification such as ‘carnivalesque celebrification’.

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