Proposal for Public Media, Private Media (MiT8)
“Media and the Construction of the Celebrity Counterpublic”

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Abstract: This paper traces the transition from the classical idea of fama to the modern celebrity in changes in media from changes in fourth century Roman art and architecture, through the print revolution, to the present and notes the widespread consequences.

Fama does not translate directly as our modern idea of fame. Fama means “talked about,” rumor, or reputation. Fama, the Romans assumed, was unstable and fickle. As a goddess, she was famously malicious. Virgil\(^1\) describes her as a timid, small figure who grows monstrously, like rumors (or a viral video), until she stands with her head in the storm clouds. According to Ovid\(^2\), her home has no doors but a thousand windows.

Fama is closely associated with words. In the Roman Republic, words were useful and dangerous. They were steps to acclaim and high office but they could also lead to jealousy, plots, exile, or worse.

Unlike fama, celebrity is especially visual. Images, unlike words, operate in the semi-conscious plane of symbols. If presented in a powerful way, images can be difficult to

\(^1\) Aeneid, 4, 173-197. Virgil’s descriptions of Fama emphasize the verbal and the monstrous. Her spread of rumors has striking parallels with “going viral” on the Internet.

\(^2\) Metamorphoses, 12, 39-64.
pin down or dismiss. If the image is grand enough, the smallness of the subject can be forgotten. This power of images is magnified as they are reproduced and become more familiar. Thus the image-reproducing capacities of new technologies, starting with printed images, powerfully expanded the capacity of celebrity to shape culture and power.

Using selected examples from the art and architecture of late antiquity, Christian hagiography of medieval world, the new media growing out of the nineteenth-century mass printing and mass literacy, and the contemporary, globalized world of television and the internet, this paper will show how changes in media has helped create a segregated, counter-public of celebrity that seems to transcend ordinary life.

This development has been forged by the three effects created by media change: public images became superficially easier to construct by more individuals but much more difficult to shape into a broad-based and lasting public life and personal heritage. At the same time, they have become less an aspect of the conscious brain than an element of the subconscious.

As a consequence, ancient distinctions between public and private life, legend and fact, normalcy and heresy, fame and celebrity have been progressively blurred and confused.
The paper will conclude by suggesting an endpoint in the detached celebrity, who exists more as an object of media than as an independent human being, and whose celebrity itself becomes a commodity that can be traded but not secured.

**Preliminary Bibliography:**

Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Saint Anthony*


Engel, Laura, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2011)

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine.*


________, “A Short History of Celebrity (review),” *Modernism/modernity* 19 (Number 1, January 2012), pp. 208-209.


Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*


Suétónio, *The Twelve Caesars*.

Virgílio, *Aenied*.

Virgílio, *Metamorphoses*.


CURRICULUM VITAE

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Professional experience:

BOSTON ATHENÆUM, Boston, MA
(March 2009 – present)
* Associate Director of Development-- Communications (October 2011 – present).
* Consultant in Development and Communications (March 2009 - September 2011).

ANDOVER NEWTON THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, Newton Centre, MA
(February 2009 – November 2010)
* Webmaster.

GLOBAL NARRATIVES, Inc. (DBA The Arts Fuse), Somerville, MA
(2007 – present)
* Strategy and Development Director (April 2009 – March 2011) grant writing, development strategy, initiation of membership program.
* Art Critic, Book Reviewer, and Columnist (June 2007 - present).

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, Hanover, NH
(October 2000 – May 2010)
* Contributing writer, Dartmouth Life, Vox of Dartmouth, Alumni Website and other publications (June 2004 – May 2010) numerous news stories on research, conferences, student activities, campus programs, profiles and interviews.
* Consultant in email communication projects (May 2002 – December 2002)

Consultant to the S.E.E.ing the Future Conference and its report on the future of the science funding in the United States, organized by the Jemison Institute (October 2000-July 2001)

WBUR Arts, WBUR-FM/NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, Boston, MA
(December 2001-July 2006)
* Art and architecture critic, on-line web-based arts project

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS ART COMMISSION, Boston, MA
(December 1987 – December 2004)
* Chairman (December 1995 – December 2004)
* Vice-Chairman (December 1992 – December 1995)
* Commissioner (December 1987 – December 2004)

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, Boston, MA
(June 1992 – September 2004)
* Consultant in Marketing and Development, speechwriter (December 1994-September 2004)
* Director of Development and Campaign Communications (July 1994 - December 1994)
* Campaign Communications Officer (June 1992 - July 1994)

MUSEUMS MAGAZINE, ART KNOWLEDGE CORP., New York, NY
(January 1997-January 2006)
* Contributing writer, contributing editor, website consultant

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, New York, NY
(September 1999 – December 2001)
* Website consultant and contributing writer

DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
(December 1994 – October 1999)
* Director of Information and Institutional Relations, Webmaster, Technology Projects Manager, Manager for AMICO

HARVARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS [comprising the Fogg Art Museum, the Busch-Reisinger Museum, and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum], Cambridge, MA
(January 1979 - May 1992)
* Director of Publications and Information, Harvard University Art Museums (July 1990-May 1992)
* Director of Communications, Harvard University Art Museums (July 1988-July 1990)
* Director of Publications and Public Relations, Harvard University Art Museums (July 1986-July 1988)
* Publications and Public Relations Officer, Fogg Art Museum and Busch-Reisinger Museum (July 1983-July 1986)
* Publications and Public Relations Officer, Fogg Art Museum (Jan. 1979-July 1983)

HARVARD UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS OF NATURAL HISTORY, Cambridge, MA (May 1974 - June 1978)
* Director of Exhibits (Sept. 1976 - June 1978)
* Director of Museum Education (Sept. 1976 - Sept. 1977)
* Assistant Director of Public Programs (Sept. 1975 - Sept. 1976)
* Editor of Publications (May 1974 - Nov. 1976)

* Writer/Editor, Landscape Architecture Dept.

* Editorial Assistant

Selected short-term assignments, consulting projects, and freelance:

Art Museum Image Consortium (AMICO), Pittsburgh, PA: founding organizer, member of Users and Uses Committee, coordinator for Wellesley College (1997-1999); consultant in research and development and in educational materials (2000-2001)
The Arts Fuse, Boston, MA. contributing critic, reporter, and columnist (2007-present)
Boston Phoenix Literary Supplement (PLS), Boston, MA: critic for art and architecture books (1994-1997)
Boston Zoological Society, Boston, MA: exhibition and slide presentation design for groundbreaking of new Zoo pavilion (1978)
Connecticut Valley Spectator, Lebanon, NH: news and features correspondent, reporter (2007-2008)
Cultural Education Collaborative, Boston, MA: member Plans and Policies Committee (1976-1978)
Dance Circle of Boston, Inc., Cambridge, MA: board member and design consultant (1974-1975)
Dartmouth College, Office of Public Affairs, Hanover, NH: consultant in various communications and publications projects (1997-present)
Harvard University Gazette, Cambridge, MA: freelance writing and reporting on outstanding Harvard students, historic preservation projects, community service projects, and historical topics (1992-1993)
Museums of Boston, Boston, MA: member steering committee, co-chair program committee (1983-1984)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC: exhibition guides in collaboration with Art Knowledge Corp. (1998-present)
ODC Dance Company, San Francisco, CA: founding member (1972), writer, business manager for company now listed as one of the “Notable American Dance Companies” in World Almanac.

Grants, awards, honors:

Grants for general museum operations from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, and many individual donors and foundations.

Award from the 94th Infantry Division Association, World War II, on the dedication of the 94th Division Mural, Massachusetts State House, October 2003.


Grants in support of museum educational programming from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the National Science Foundation, and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, 1976-82.

Selected talks, publications, lectures, talks, and citations:

Books, book chapters and contributions, reports:

*The Simmering Horizon: Meditations on Art, Media, and Technology,* ms. in preparation.


**Published articles and columns:**


“Digital Logjam: The brave new world promised by digital technology remains, for art museums, just beyond the horizon,” WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. April 2004.


“Ten Masterpieces in Manhattan,” Boston Sunday Globe, October 10, 1993 (front page and lead story, Travel Section).

Articles on student ecology projects and work with the homeless, teaching and student awards, minority student, commencement, etc. Harvard University Gazette, Spring and Summer 1992.


“Géricault,” Harvard University Art Museums News, Summer 1991. (described by former Fogg Art Museum Director Agnes Mongan as the best piece of writing she has seen on Géricault.)


“Public Images,” Boston Review, March 1990. (cover story.)

Book and Exhibition Reviews (selected list):


“Building on the Edge: The innovative new building of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston takes museum design into uncharted territory” WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. April 2006.

“A Stella Year,” review of *Frank Stella 1958* at the Harvard University Art Museums, September 2005, WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. February 2006.

“The Real Degas,” review of *Edgar Degas: Six Friends at Dieppe* at the RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI October 2005, WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. October 2005.


“A Religion of One,” review of *Marsden Hartley* at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, March 2003, WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. March 2003.

“Weird Lost World,” review of *Cosimo Tura* at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. March 2002.

“Societe Anonyme,” review of *Société Anonyme Anniversary Exhibition* at the Yale Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. WBUR Arts, the online arts pages of National Public Radio station WBUR, Boston University, Boston, MA. February 2002.


“Sargent in Silhouette” a guide to the John Singer Sargent exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. The Art Knowledge Corporation in cooperation with the National Gallery of Art, 1999.


“Coffee-table cues: We are (maybe) what we display— from the tilt of the Titanic to the odd familiarity of Arbus faces,” PLS: The Boston Phoenix Literary Supplement, December 1995. Review of six contemporary coffee table books (cover story).


“Installation and Place,” Sculpture, September 1990.


Public lectures, seminars, and conferences:


“That Withered Paradigm: The Web, the Expert, and the Information Hegemony,” Media in Transition, a conference to inaugurate the graduate program in Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, October 1999. Published in Democracy and New Media (see above).


Guest seminar on the history of image copyright, Computer Sciences Department, Dartmouth College, October 1997.
Guest seminar presentation on the state of image copyright, Computer Sciences Department, Dartmouth College, February 1997, and November 1997.


Technology and World Wide Web projects:

Founding organizer, Art Museum Image Consortium (AMICO); numerous web-based projects, including Truth in Advertising (with Prof. Miranda Marvin) and The Shock of the View: Artists, Audiences, and Museums in the Digital Age (with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN); The Secret Gallery: Hidden Stories of the Collection (Gallery Investigation at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College), relaunch and content improvements (November 2006) Colby-Sawyer College website.

Citations, articles about:


Mark Nunes, Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures (New York, 2010), p. 169.


Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture (New York, 2006), pp. 29, 52-54, 263, 284 (glossary), index.


Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), *Museology Bibliography* (BMUSE), undated on-line database.


(Also unpublished academic papers, course syllabi, Masters and Ph.d. theses, and blogs)

Education and training:


Harvard University: Graduate School of Design, courses in design and graphics, 1974-1975.

Oberlin College: Bachelor’s degree in art history, design, 1973.

Professional classes, seminars, and conferences in public relations, institutional communications, marketing, design, museum education, grant writing, computer-assisted design, computer graphics and graphic applications, typography, print production, desktop publishing, HTML, the World Wide Web, and other computer application topics.
Languages: French, Italian, reading knowledge of German, Latin, classical Greek.
Computers: thorough knowledge of IBM, MS-DOS, Windows, and Macintosh; trained in desktop publishing, web design and management, graphics, word-processing, spread sheets, operating systems including Excel, Word, WordPerfect, PageMaker, PhotoShop, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe PhotoShop, html, various content management systems.
Travel: extensive travel in the United States, France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands; additional travel in Austria, Canada, England, Germany, Switzerland.