DIGITAL FAME

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> "The celebrity is a person who is well-known for his well-knownness"
> —Daniel Boorstin

> "I love Twitter."
> —Paris Hilton

A few days ago, I cleaned my room. I organized my clothes, swept the floor, cleared my desk, emptied my trash, and cleared my desktop and emptied my trash. First I cleared the physical desk at which I sit to relax, work, think, and then I cleared the virtual desktop which exists within the flat monitor of my computer, a seemingly endless yet peculiarly removed extension of my working desk. At this moment, I realized that I had begun living within two separate yet dependent worlds: I stood as a physical, living, breathing being in the "real" world, and I existed as a compilation of expressions—words, photographs, videos, noises—in the world inside of my computer. I've developed a certain level of individuality, distinction, of fame within this cyber-universe.

This seminar seeks to explore what it means to be a celebrity and the cultural half-life of fame in the age of condensing Warhol's "fifteen minutes" into a single viral moment. We will examine constructions of "digital fame" through theoretical, historical, and practical lenses. We will begin by developing a framework of modern fame, or fame and its existence since the beginning of television. From there, we plan to examine digital renown from three distinct approaches. A broader spectrum of content, a monolithic audience, and an instantaneously aggregating communal opinion have effectively multiplied and widened the avenues to fame. First we will discuss this democratization of fame—e.g. as opposed to the beginning of the film industry in America which was marked by extremely high input costs and an insurmountable barrier to entry, now anyone can post a video on YouTube to be viewed by millions of people. Then we will investigate virtual figurations of the modern celebrity—how various public figures present themselves and how others present them in the more removed mediums of "Web 2.0." Next, we will examine the various ways in which individuals can transition between these two dispositions (individual/celebrity). How can one establish himself as "celebrity" through production strictly through Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, etc? Finally, each student participating in the seminar will be responsible for a specific "case study" of a cyber-personality. They will unearth as many exchanges, presentations, formations, pieces of this digital being as they can and present their findings during our last session.

This seminar is intended to appeal to a variety of students across a breadth of disciplines. The syllabus contains philosophical, historical, sociological, anthropological, literary writings, as well as certain films and applicable pieces of art. Certainly students with backgrounds in computer science would bring valuable insight into the code behind these digital spaces, and biology/psychology students could help us understand the physical and mental repercussions of allowing cyberspace to invade our lives. More importantly, though, these are new technologies that almost all students have had at least some experience with, whether constructive or obstructive.

Potential Seminar Syllabus
A Philosophical Background
Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author," 1967
Barthes, Roland. "The Harcourt Actor," 1979
Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935
Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" 1970

Celebritology
Boorstin, Daniel. *The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream?* 1961
Braudy, Leo. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*, 1997
Henderson, Amy. "Media and the Rise of Celebrity Culture," 1992
Newbury, Michael. "Celebrity Watching," 2000
Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 1977

A Media-centric World
Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*, 2010
Darley, Andrew. *Visual Digital Culture*, 2000
Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 1981
Keen, Andrew. *The Cult of the Amateur*, 2008
Manjoo, Farhad. *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society*, 2008
Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, 2010

Potential Films
A Face in the Crowd (1957), Elia Kazan
The King of Comedy (1982), Martin Scorsese
Celebrity (1998), Woody Allen

Potential Speakers
David Shields, author/professor
Jonathan Abrams, Friendster, founder
Jessica Rose, acress/YouTube personality
David DeVore, dad of David (After the Dentist)