

# Re-fashioning stories through feminist filmmaking, an interview with Samita Nandy

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*To conclude this Special Issue 'Re-Fashioning Stories for Celebrity Counterpublics' of the Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies (AJMS), I am delighted to share an interview with Samita Nandy, celebrity scholar, filmmaker and director of the Centre for Media and Celebrity Studies (CMCS). Her research focuses on the cultural dimensions of fame, with a specific interest in celebrity activism, storytelling and the performance of authenticity and intimacy in glamorous narratives. In addition to her academic work, Nandy is also a certified broadcast journalist from Canada and media critic. I had the opportunity to assist her and Kiera Obbard with the organization of the 8th CMCS Conference, which inspired this Special Issue. This interview is thus an opportunity to further expand our reflection on the political possibilities of storytelling and celebrity counterpublics. Our discussion builds on the themes and arguments developed throughout this issue to further explore what popular storytelling means in practice. She reflects on her engagement with celebrity culture and life-writing in her feminist research and artistic endeavours, and how it has empowered her to tell personal and collective stories. The interview format and its themes provide a unique opportunity to contemplate the affordances of a reflective practice paradigm and the artistic applications of disciplinary knowledge, one which bridges academic work with media professions, and which we hope will resonate with AJMS readers.*

*Keywords: storytelling, counterpublic, fame, reflective practice, celebrity culture, practice-based research, acting experience, media production*

**Sabrina Moro (SM):** *Celebrity studies is a vibrant field of scholarly enquiry that is developing at a fast pace, beyond media and cultural studies. What are, in your opinion, some of the most significant challenges and conceptual developments? How have these theoretical insights impacted your practice as a feminist and filmmaker?*

**Samita Nandy (SN):** Thank you for considering special reflection and questions on this issue that we started to develop a couple of years back in celebrity studies. We have had an incredible journey since we started to develop the conference call and publication on celebrity counterpublics. Since that time, we have witnessed significant responses and developments in academic research and celebrity journalism that I now hope to illustrate with my personal experience.

As a trained filmmaker, actor and journalist, I have experienced increased access to industry tools to unfold what we have in common amidst geographical differences – the essence of human storytelling, the narrative structure of which has been commodified in celebrity journalism, but has existed since heroism in oral histories of Greek, Roman and eastern civilization. In all cases, there has been a dominance of class-based patriarchal representations that often remove multiple racial and sexual abilities but, with the support of my late parents, I navigate the multiplicity using my body as a site of knowledge. As an East Indian female orphan, I am reminded of harassment (Nandy 2019c) or dismissal every day because my sexual choices beyond institutions come to the forefront of family, past colleagues, friends and acquaintances in colonialist or patriarchal spaces. Harassing phone conversations from a patriarchal relative in front of me (Nandy 2019b) or behind my back or silencing from a major number of past family and colleagues upon knowing my feminist truths are just few personal areas that I intend to turn into political forces in my feminist filmmaking.

The life sacrifices and financial risk I took in committing to this art on a full-time basis are not the only hard developments in applying my disciplinary knowledge. The creative cognition required to perform such an art is an intrinsic part of my human communication – that is how I share connection – but often not comprehensible unless it is narrowed down to a persona brand to somewhat mitigate harassment or dismissal, and that lack of comprehension is hard on a daily basis. To be primarily known as a sensual artist or ‘famecritic’ invites contacts to demand, silence or to remember me only when they want to criticize or indulge in some celebrity worship at the cost of my own health and artistic well-being. So, despite my sociable personality, a high degree of isolation, privacy and burying emotions are some of the ways to artistically survive, focus and commit to my feminist art. To this end, defending my master’s thesis right after my mother’s sudden funeral or running multiple celebrity studies conferences right after my father’s funeral were painfully safe. Although I am currently privileged to have a secure space, my bereavement journey shares the ethics, ethos and temporariness of feminist artists that can be ultimately impoverished or scandalized for some assumption of a deviant pleasure. However, its potential possibilities are informed by my investigative journalism and postdoctoral phase of research. With the support of my late parents and partner, I trained myself as a

documentary filmmaker during my journalism and academic research. Public relations gave media skills to artistically design and develop the Centre for Media and Celebrity Studies (CMCS). Its call for papers, archived talks and screenings, conference proceedings, public conversations and media coverage reflect and reinforce my shared public practice, and intend to recognize and celebrate many scholars in the field.

In that capacity, I have witnessed democratic access to collective movements and tools supporting entertainment industry professionals during COVID-19. As a former journalist and trained actor, I know that tabloids only provide partial access to deeper human experiences and industry connections that celebrities gain as creators but not widely accessible due to public security, lack of artistic training and unethical consumption of their creative selves. However, wider community members including fans can develop their voice using increased access of online resources. As celebrity studies scholar Professor David P. Marshall points out (2021), fan activism's collective action to liberate Britney Spears is one of the many developments in 2021. In rare cases, empowering fans start at the student level. Celebrity studies scholar, film director and actor Ian Dixon (2015) and filmmaker Sheersha Perera<sup>1</sup> identify the significance of creativity in filmmaking and screenwriting students compared to uncreative media standards. They demonstrate how creative freedom can be realized through teamwork, experiential learning coursework and cultural productions in academia. Filmmaker and journalism professor Daivata Patil (CMCS 2019) also offers educational reform by bringing forth her Bollywood productions skills to the University of Mumbai concerning celebrity culture. Caroline Are<sup>2</sup> has been pole dancing since 2016, and teaching since 2019, having performed at and won a set of national and international live and online competitions and showcases, often shared through her social media. In all these rare cases, I observe a demand to empower all artists, including pop stars, using celebrity narratives – a story structure that is not limited to tabloid media but extends to human storytelling in heroes.

To deeply understand media and celebrity studies' developments, it is important to map the trajectory, observations and directions. Since the origins of the fields, competing books have offered necessary theoretical and methodological tools that enable mapping social, economic and political contexts in which famous bodies have been used and sold as expressions of authenticity and ethical issues in the mediation of authenticity. Their analyses provide necessary theoretical and methodological tools to critically explore celebrities' artistic expressions and allow us a further question: How can we actually restore human elements of self-expression in critical studies of fame and practices of celebrity counterpublics?

In studies of fine arts, media and celebrity, publications and conferences offered opportunities for mutual dialogues on what it means to celebrate human expressions in popular culture and everyday life. Since my attendance at the inaugural Routledge-sponsored *Celebrity Studies Journal Conference* in Melbourne, Australia in December 2012, there has been theoretical perspectives and inspiration that informs my feminist art. Will Visconti at the conference set an appropriate example of deep

learning practices embedded in emotions and intuitions necessary to create and celebrate life from a feminist perspective artistically (Muratore 2012). He studied the life and representation of Marchesa Luisa Casati, a celebrated art patroness and muse in art history, and passionately speaks of her in contemporary culture. Till now, Visconti draws on feminist theory and discloses intimate details of the prominent patroness among more feminist icons (2017, 2019). The celebrated muse's spectacular legacy and lifestyle are understood at their best through the power of Casati's vulnerability and passionate drive of love for self. Her desire to become immortal through art led to intimate links with men who were artists and other creative figures. In her intimate connections with them, Casati was generally more interested in creative fulfilment than sex. Visconti expresses this form of intimacy with depth and dignity. The essence of demonstrating intimate fine points in her life lies expresses nuances and subtleties in creative drives that lead to constructing public persona as a form of art. In fact, public personas such as Luisa Casati are 'authors/creators whose bodies were the artworks or texts that they created, so [...] the link is much more explicit between life and art, rather than the application of biographical criticism concerning someone like Dickens' (CMCS 2013: 12). In his presentation, Visconti extends formal academic writing exercises to a performance, where his live, spoken words embody his passion. In fact, his oral narrative becomes a living exemplification of his own performance of authenticity and inspires celebrity studies scholars and artists to express nuances and subtleties in public personas' creative drives. The creation and celebration of talent as a form of art are important to be considered and can be critically explored in research, teaching and fame.

While Will Visconti's narratives of Casati's mythologized sexuality inspire my concepts of art, Daniel Ploeger's academic practice mobilized me to apply the concepts within and beyond the discipline of fine arts. I know that reading the body as a cultural text is a common practice in celebrity culture. In fame, the body is often read as an object, and it plays a role in shifting attention from a creative spirit. In fact, it plays a significant role in voyeurism and spectator gratification for fans. I made this reflection on the body while reviewing scholar Daniel Ploeger's lecture and performance titled 'Thinking critical/looking sexy: A lecture involving nakedness, among other things' (2013). As I mentioned in my past writings (Nandy 2013), Ploeger presented his unclothed body to critically explore and question how nudity is often perceived as a sexual act. In his performance, Ploeger took a radical step and stripped off his clothes. He reflected on cultural theorist Rob Cover and pointed out how the 'unstable character of relational contexts [...] results in all nudity potentially signifying sexuality' (Ploeger 2013: n.pag.). As we know, this signification is normalized, naturalized and legitimized in celebrity culture and in everyday life. Even though some performance artists appear to reject the normative body through transgressive acts, Ploeger contends that the fascination and anxiety around sex continue to emerge as normal expressions. I believe that such anxiety limits expressions of love in celebrity culture and everyday life. So, at the time, the Brunel University faculty member turned his own body into a performative text to be read and explored in its

nude form. Ploeger inspired me to consider creative artistic presentations in my own academic lectures, public talks and artistic works, and negotiate tensions involved in the commodification of body and emotions in our fame-obsessed society. Although Ploeger specifically teaches in theatre and performance arts, he inspires artistic educators to transgress formal writing boundaries and become creators. In a discipline where teaching and research are committed to inclusion and empowerment of talent, public performances translating theory into practice are not surprising. Ploeger's body performance is admirable because he challenges dominant ways of presenting in academia where formal attire can be the norm. In recent writing, Visconti further expands on the significance of feminist modelling in studies and practices of fashion and celebrity culture (Visconti cited in Nandy 2020).

These scholars, among many others, inspired the launch of the CMCS and my independent filmmaking to address ethics of inclusion in both journalism and education. Such performances address ethical issues in celebrity culture, which is the essence of celebrity studies' research and practices. For me, performative practices, as demonstrated by Visconti and Ploeger, show how layered self-expression can play a particular role in celebrating talent and rethinking dominant representations beyond persona branding in fame. While I am not the only practice-based researcher, my filmmaking, acting and modelling are interpreted for my celebrity studies in media and public relations. What makes my body as a site of knowledge uniquely hard is the ongoing life challenges in making it publicly available on my media and celebrity studies platform. Both research and performance however helped me in verifying processes of developing talent in fame-based practices.

So far, all conferences, workshops, screenings and publications have offered an intimate space to critically read, reflect and rethink fame-based practices for ethical issues. I remember how a delegate at the inaugural *Celebrity Studies Journal Conference* raised a poignant question in my panel discussion that further inspired my ethical representations of aesthetics of fame: How can we situate celebrity studies in humanities and social sciences? The anonymous delegate who asked us the question suggested we need to address some serious ethical and moral issues in fame's intellectual and artistic discourses. I believe that these issues are related to discrimination of states of being in sexism, ethnocentrism, speciesism, ableism and class discrimination, but we need a further emphasis on practices that can bring social change in celebrity culture and its impact on everyday life. The moral and ethical issues in popular representation of talent are some of the most important areas to address in sociological practices of inclusion. The textual analysis of celebrity content and deconstruction of dominant myths in fame can mobilize the public in creating and sharing individual talent in justified ways. However, the question that remains largely unanswered is: how far can the public receive and utilize the knowledge in their own lives? How can we translate reflections on moral and ethical issues into actions of ethical inclusion of talent and, in the process, engage citizens in the public sphere? Over time, the CMCS and my productions offered certain performative spaces to use audio-visual means and enable artistic expressions and reflections concerning

fame. In doing so, there has been at least a clear emphasis on the basic need for inclusion and acknowledgement. The community participation, its one-on-one human interactions and space for human recognition set a necessary foundation for applying ethical ways in which authentic expressions can be publicly explored, protected or restored in celebrity culture.

**SM:** *Celebrity storytelling is a vehicle for raising awareness on pressing social issues, such as censorship, rape culture and domestic violence, the detainment of undocumented immigrants and cancel culture – to name only the ones covered in this issue. How is your research influenced by your art and activism? What are the social issues that drive your filmmaking practice? How does this audio-visual medium allow you to enact your vision for a more equal and just society?*

**SN:** My research enables me to contest the violent relationship between sexism and speciesism (Adams 1990) that many celebrity activists including vegan actors explore. The research reflects, reinforces and extends the inclusion of all looks and classes that I learned from my grandfather, who was a freedom fighter during Gandhi's era of British colonial India. All my books, chapters in edited collections, conference proceedings and audio-visual material on celebrity activism particularly draw on intersectional feminism and apply it using evidence-based data in investigative journalism and in performance ethnography. The will to act and its resilience is what makes ethical actors visible as celebrity activists and influential for fan activism. The way I verify and would like to share its methods with fans in celebrity counterpublics is within and beyond the tabloid journalism. As a trained journalist and actor, I have been using participant observation and archiving those observations along with public conversations in offline and online platforms that are subject to further inquiry and outreach.

My skills in investigative reporting helped me to particularly observe and verify untold causes for which celebrity activists fight. In conjunction with intersectional feminism, I take particular interest in bearing witness of highly abused animals in the Animal Save Movement. The public method of bearing witness of these animals, largely female, in transport trucks on streets leads to what I call 'street pedagogy' that I started to apply in my experimental filmmaking and dance videos in a feminist context. The value of testimony in the act of bearing witness of violence in activism adds ethical value that is often lost in fame.

In general, I embrace a pedagogical reform in which ethical issues affecting the authenticity of the self can be addressed with credibility and effectiveness. I integrate body performances in rethinking dominant representations of fame and, in the process, address ethical issues in representing the self of all performing artists including film stars. Nellie J. Zambrana-Ortiz strongly suggests that we need to design artistic practices that mobilize dialogues and enable individuals to 'become persons that are anchored in their possibilities and talents, not in their social conditions' (2011: 97). Such pedagogical practices set the groundwork for all ethics to emerge from articulation, inscription and 'reflection of the legitimacy of the presence of



others' (Zambrana-Ortiz 2011: 79). Given the popular demand of celebrities and the knowledge of their authenticity, transgressing traditional power structures in artistic ways is not impossible.

I have used 'performance ethnography' as a method of inquiry to bridge emotional gaps in teaching and learning of fame. These performances are not limited to theatrical acts or choreographed dance movements. They are rather art-based inquiries that act as critical pedagogical tools and include discourse analysis of biographies and interviews as performative texts (Kredell 2009). When ethnographic evidence is interpreted in a discursive framework, moments of gaps, dislocation, repetitions and self-reflexivity can be examined as important factors in social processes that shape fans' learning and understanding of celebrities (Hills 2002: 66). In general, ethnography is a qualitative research methodology that allows for personal narratives to be considered as a scholarly praxis and academic discourse (Spry 2001). When these narratives are performed through embodied acts of writing as well as other physical movements, they open spaces in which self-reflection and dialogue can occur in non-hierarchical ways. From this perspective, ethnography is important in studying discourses of fame. The combined methodological approach of discourse analysis and ethnography is significant as it creates understanding and practices that are beyond the production of interpretive knowledge of celebrity texts.

In public spaces, these performances can strengthen the moral and ethical interests of many artists and scholars in humanities and social sciences. Dwight Conquergood (1985) particularly maps moral and ethical dimensions of performances in higher education. For Conquergood, the performance approach offers a critical methodology that emphasizes the production of embodied knowledge and emotional connections that are often overlooked in celebrity journalism. The usage of embodied acts in public spaces engages with aural, visual and kinesthetic learners. It facilitates self-reflection, mutual dialogue and multiple narratives in the cultural production, circulation and reception of diverse talents in popular culture and in everyday life. As critical pedagogical tools, performances educate the public on the human meanings of celebration. The approach opens ethical spaces to explore and restore emotions that are often lost in the production, circulation and reception of celebrities. The strong need to restore emotional connections in studies and practices prompts the development of public performances as a method. The performances can facilitate the inclusion of public talent, bridge gaps between the commodification of public personalities and implement ethical ways in which talent can be understood and received.

The significance of performance arts and its role in emotions are rooted in my personal journey of interpreting film stars. My passion for understanding talent in film production goes back to my high school years when I started portrait art, sketching film artists as well as talented companions who demonstrated a passion for arts. However, the artistic journey in understanding dominant practices of film production did not fully explain specific myths of stardom and mediation of emotional expressions. Over time, I resurrected different genres of dance and captured its movements

in independent modelling as my artistic ability to perform. For me, performance became an embodied act that engages with all senses, i.e. kinaesthetic, somatic, aural as well as spatial, that is central to the emotional expressions of an authentic self. My performance involves choreographed steps of touching, feeling and extending the body (the skin and its performative extension, clothes) that can subvert cultural repression of emotions as a driving force of performing an authentic self in celebrity culture. In my filmmaking, I did documentary, experimental videos, and independent shorts that capture spontaneous states of being through symbolic practices and spatial arrangements of performance. The symbolic representations of this performance are part of an autoethnographic narrative that draws on personal experiences of intersectional feminism and racism. As Tami Spry (2001) argues, performing autoethnography is a method of scholarly praxis that recognizes the body as a site of knowledge and discourse. These performative acts include emotional expressions and are based on familial scripts that structure our sense of identification in personal and professional lives (Spry 2001). My ability to recognize the lack of diversity in our celebrity-obsessed society is grounded in emotional loss during deaths or violence, and reclaims authentic expressions in the post-Weinstein era of Hollywood and Bollywood.

**SM:** *In the present issue, Chris Campanioni draws on Anoushka Shah's concept of 'civic entertainment' (2019) to argue that stories are a pillar of democracy for they provide the rhetorical tools to engage with institutions and challenge them when needed. How does this mediated relationality manifest in your own artistic approach?*

**SN:** My filmmaking approach and acting are artistic because I ask open questions that are both intuitive and reflective. These questions are often inclusive and non-verbal in western and eastern places. To address these questions, I use a lens-based inquiry where the body is a site of knowledge and creates evidence-based data, leading to performance ethnography in feminist contexts. As a cis-gendered female, I am aware of how the body is subjected to sexual politics in the public space. So I choose a style of sensory aesthetics, an artistic approach I will expand in my *Celebrity Studies* book review (2016), to reinstate my version of what is seductive, magical and charming. As a former journalist, I know tabloid press often simplistically reduces this charm to a desire, addressing authenticity questions as a result of the paradox of the ordinary and extraordinary in glamour – that is, the data available for critical explorations of journalists but not the actor behind the stardom they create. As a trained actor, I know the charm is living out those layers of life and feeling its magic beyond a social role yet often lost or limited in comfort zones. One of the purposes of such art, as in 'civic entertainment', is to enable seeing things in unseen contexts and to engage the public in a way that generates pleasure.

I use sensory aesthetics to enable ethical pleasure that is cruelty-free. It is urgent to enable undivided freedom and restore our pillars of democracy in class-based colonial patriarchy – a root cause of oppression that both women and men face. Like many, I am not a tall, fair, skinny, blonde model often idolized and victimized in tabloid



media and the high fashion industry using exploitative labour and needless and costly waste. Moreover, yes, dominant star representations in Hollywood and Bollywood do not reflect my marginalized positions. However, we have the capacity to create still and moving images that are ethical and accessible to all compared to only focusing on high-budget productions of stars in a class-based society. Nevertheless, one does not need to be a star to be an actor, which often fans mistake. I am socially aware that I am not writing, filming and acting for capitalist patriarchal reasons of stardom in choosing my minimalist art that does not lead to status or income. There are many capitalist ways to become well known and affluent and gain instant gratification from it. In navigating these existing politics of pleasure, it helps to have a certain sense of self (e.g. my sex-positive feminist self) to develop a sociopolitical framework. However, in mediating that self, I offer fluid ways of becoming rather than reinforcing a whole and static self that does not speak to all in hegemonic cultures.

*SM: One of the main arguments that runs through the contributions of the present issue is the importance of considering storytelling as a method and as a media text. For instance, Kiera Obbard and Nidhi Shrivastava, respectively, show the political potential of narrative strategies that interrupt, diffuse and disrupt systems of power through an intricate negotiation of proximity and distantiation from the stories shared. What narrative styles do you draw on in your own work?*

**SN:** In my career as a performance artist, I started off with unscripted narratives in places where I would take journeys of my own life – after all, art reflects life. I started putting together still and moving images that were beyond glamorous gestures and postures in my independent modelling but inspired by generic styles of fashion film at first – with the help of soundtracks and edits, they were woven into non-verbal visual stories that were open to interpretation. At the core, the paradox between ordinariness and extraordinaries in these experimental films would resonate with narrative structures of celebrity in tabloid. But, in my visual story, that could be a typical snapshot of day, week or month that reflects my media career prior to starting my Ph.D. in celebrity studies.

In general, as I mentioned before, the narrative structure goes back to stories of heroism in times of Greek, Roman and eastern civilizations. So narrative framework both reflects and challenges systems of power that do not recognize certain eras or cultures. In this narrative framework, one of the aesthetic styles I recently used was freezing ‘behind-the-scenes’ of the actual shots. I would present them in black and white to symbolize authenticity of truth as we had in monochromatic documentaries in the past. In the process, I found that these monochrome instances help reading the subject in way that would differ from pleasurable distractions of colour. Many other backstories in these narrations would have slow or reversed motions that would freeze and add increased value to rehearsal times before leading to the final production of the shoots in the filmmaking. The poetic nature of titles of these pieces shows the fluidity of all. Overall, the consistent narrative practice in my everyday life helped me establish a style of craft and, more importantly, a sense of artistic self, that would

reflect or reinforce in further creative choices in my current development of scripted characters in acting roles.

**SM:** *Your scholarship and filmmaking practice are profoundly transdisciplinary, transnational and transmedia. What kind of intertextual readings and storytelling does this give way to?*

**SN:** Although open to interpretation, intertextual readings of my audio-visual work recognize the diverse racial and sexual identities we have. While the lens of tabloid might show the paradox of ordinariness and extraordinariness in it, my artistic approach of storytelling (Nandy 2019a) recognizes the diverse layers of human life that are lost in the tabloid. I apply sensory aesthetics in fame and attempt to rewrite its patriarchal history in the construction, distribution and reception of my art in the celebrity culture that we live in. When still and moving images in my filmmaking are read in relation to my digital posters, captions, interviews, articles, posts and photographs behind the scenes of shots or as a part of press relations, they allude to poetic, sensual and dramatic layers of life beyond my personal branding – ‘famecritic’ – that is not about criticism but contextualizing and understanding the aesthetics and politics of fame. There are many no-make-up instances in addition to glamorous settings, for example. Whether I use a narrative device that is glamorous or non-glamorous, it is not problematic unless it becomes dominant, exploits humans and animals and excludes diverse expressions of beauty, which we unfortunately find in standardized productions of the glamour industry. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (2007) explain that writing a history of celebrity texts and explaining its changes demand self-reflection on celebrity culture in which it is written, both textually and visually (Nandy 2012). In the process, the embodied act of writing reflects and reinforces fame in a way that is not static and objective but is a subjective process in mapping the history of fame. Using intertextual readings of all cultural productions around my performances, I intend to contribute my art to bridging gaps in the industrialization of fame. I offer living examples of celebrating talent beyond social structures that commodify it in the West and East.

**SM:** *Your work successfully undoes cultural hierarchies that oppose art to popular culture, activism to entertainment, academia to media industries. Could you elaborate on your creative process?*

**SN:** My creative process draws on my artistic approach – it is intuitive and reflective in designing personal and professional life. After all, as I indicated earlier, life is reflected in the expression of art. I train myself in dramatic arts and regularly practise skill-based exercises in filmmaking, scriptwriting, voice training, memorizing lines; apply a combination of acting techniques (e.g. method acting including scene study, improv, monologue and fieldwork research for characters), physical movements (e.g. high-impact fitness and choreography) and cognitive processes to accommodate unknown places and times in living more than one role in life, and to manage the human pain and pleasure of its interchangeability. I pick acting technique(s) that

will allow me to deeply know how my own nerves and muscle respond to various situations in everyday life, in general, and then to apply them to the character and do justice to human stories beyond our social roles. I regularly read trade magazines related to acting, such as *Backstage* and publications by actors' union SAG-AFTRA instead of reading tabloid magazines. Using such practice-based research, I can undo cultural hierarchies in the class-based sexism and racism among other unethical systems in visual or literal representations. My other creative side is hiring crew members, open casting calls, location scouting and time(s) to enable such practices within and beyond a single institution in Hollywood or Bollywood. For celebrity studies scholar Graeme Turner, industrial production is important because it contributes ways of understanding the celebrity as a commodity that supports political and economic developments of brands (cited in Nandy 2012).

Over a long period of trials and errors, my intuition told me what kind of spaces and times in life enables me to create authenticity beyond unethical brands. For example, I created my own version of decolonized unscripted audio-visual material by physically moving to Portugal while continuing lived moments in Spain and India. I had been responding to many calls to visit and contextualize the Roman and Arabic histories, which led to a particular study of Andalusian music – it is a contextual tool representing my western and eastern observations in Canada and India. The liminal spaces in between the places allow my bohemian spirit that often gets lost in the process of gentrification in standardized industrialized arts that I studied in my Ph.D. The planned structure of tourism did not do justice to capture non-verbal communication and nature in everyday life here. So, like many times, I moved again. If you have heard an actor or any artist, for that matter, say he or she is nomadic, well, there is an impulse for it. My journalistic background and minimalist lifestyle help me adapt and embrace common among differences fairly quickly.

I reflected on this intuitive process many times and asked if it is hard. Despite re-examining Canadian myths in my Australian Ph.D., the emotional process of leaving material belonging with my birthplace in Canada was not easy. In doing so, permanently letting go of 39 years of family belongings completely tore me within days of their funerals. However, the minimalist process allowed me to realize shared dreams to give a voice to decolonized feminism elsewhere. In this creative process of turning personal view into the political stance, I knew settled friends and family might fear the unknown and leave me rather than appreciating the independence in my art or visiting my artistic place. However, past life in Australia taught me the emotional strategies of acquiring and focusing on diverse life skills to discover or create something out of nothing – that is art. The spark of that art in unknown spaces at unplanned times is extraordinary. Multitasking is part of my creative process as well. I prioritize times of the day as I would recognize priorities in the times of my life, and that can change. I can be slow-paced to reflect and shape stylistic qualities in my feminist creations. The long process, as opposed to overnight end results, will show me unknown ways.

**SM:** *In this issue, Michael Ka-chi Cheuk reminds us of the importance of situating celebrity counterpublics within their social, cultural and political contexts. Could you tell us more how this plays out in the way you select symbols and materials used in your craft?*

**SN:** Depending on the context, I use a combination of gestures and postures to signify cultural expressions that embrace and/or contest certain forms of patriarchal glamour. For example, I use certain eye, hand, leg and foot movements to symbolize my feminist agency. I have used sunglasses for UV ray protection or style statements, but I often portray eye movements without accessories or make-up. Similarly, I show the movement of legs and feet in cruelty-free vegan stockings, no high heels or any shoe for that matter. I draw on eastern Indian traditions of recognizing the connection with bare feet on the ground or the floor. However, I use nylon stockings, an aesthetic intermediary device that brings partial intimacy with what I am stepping on. Similarly, I use veils that can disclose while providing a certain degree of intimacy and tactility. With these materials' help, I extend parts of self beyond normative sitting, standing or walking positions on the street or in a studio. With a particular piece, there is reversal of body movements. There are both variations and repetitions of related emotions to show layers of human personality. These symbolic acts also show how the feminine self can be accommodated and embraced in a wider way that is not articulated in everyday life and popular culture. In applying these symbols, I use cruelty-free vegan material for ethical slow fashion.

In the craft of filmmaking and acting, there is a sense of multiplicity, dislocation and liminality. Charles Garoian's refers to liminality as 'an aesthetic dimension, wherein socially and historically constructed ideas, images, myths, and utopias can be contested and new ones constructed' (1999: 10). My performances aim to contest and refashion our notion of a pre-determined selfhood in a feminist setting. In prioritizing its progress over the perfection of standardized self, it attempts to free oneself from social conditions while navigating the conditions in imperfect ways. The performative practices in liminal spaces can embody a multiplicity of love, hope and care in humanity (Denzin 2007) that are often overlooked in fame-based practices. These new spaces can restore celebration of life as indicated in the etymology of the word celebrity in Latin *celebritatem*, and strengthen our studies and practices.

**SM:** *Thank you for taking the time to do this interview. Having worked with you on the organization of the 8th CMCS Conference and the subsequent publications, I know how committed you are to bringing together scholars and practitioners across a wide range of fields, including celebrity studies, media production, journalism, fashion, etc. In addition, your scholarship and media interventions reflect a dedication to public intellectualism that I find all the more refreshing given the current state of university and research funding. I am very grateful for your insights into how we might further bridge the gap between academia and media industries, given the urgent need for more accessibility, inclusivity and diversity across sectors.*

*The pedagogical values of transdisciplinary storytelling also transpire through the ways in which you weave in your personal story with artistic and theoretical considerations.*

*It illuminates the social significance of storytelling for celebrity counterpublics in a very compelling way. I am deeply moved by your journey, inspired by your ethical commitments and learned new vocabulary to articulate my own experiences. The interview is a format that lends itself very well to the embodied knowledge, emotional connections and intellectual collaborations you theorize so eloquently. Not only do these self-reflective moments reaffirm the feminist tenet that the personal is political, they also show how these innovative life-writing strategies challenge dominant representations in celebrity culture, academia and beyond. This interview is both an intimate account and a strong theoretical piece, and it exemplifies the ways in which sensual, embodied and affective encounters can facilitate the ethical and political transformations this Special Issue sought to explore.*

## Notes

1. Dr Sheersha Perera is a filmmaker and researcher whose work can be found at <http://biggirlfilm.com>.
2. Dr Carolina Are is a researcher, activist, blogger and pole dance instructor whose work can be found at <https://bloggeronpole.com/>.

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