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# Introduction

P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond

## CELEBRITY INTERSECTIONS

### Road, Paths, Fields, and Landscapes

From first sentence to last, the writing and editing of this book has taken over 18 months to complete. We have traveled down numerous scholarly roads during this period, making the book stronger, tighter, and more relevant as we did so. Where you start is never exactly where you end up: thinking, drafting, reviewing and revising takes you on different paths, in this instance magnified by the fact that 26 authors have been going through this shimmering, shape-shifting process with us. Celebrity culture doesn't stand still and neither did the volume as we responded to these delirious transformations as they took place while the book was being developed.

One can compare the journey of a collection like this to the trajectory of a young celebrity, seeking to make the right career decision, taking different turns to achieve that singular end. One can compare the development of a collection like this to the mindset of its editors, both of whom come from different academic traditions and who see celebrity culture intersecting in distinct and divergent ways. We have assembled a companion that speaks to academic journeying, that takes seriously the vibrant pulse of celebrity culture, and which addresses in fresh and dynamic ways those celebrity intersections that we see as important and necessary, as they manifest historically and in the folds and flows of the contemporary cultural landscape.

Our introduction is built out of these intersections: we take different turns on what the volume does, and where it might be placed within the fertile fields of celebrity. We hope you enjoy and are stimulated by this companion to celebrity.

*P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond*

## CELEBRITY IN THE ACADEMY

On a very basic level, this is bound to be a fascinating book. After all, the object of study – celebrity – clearly fascinates. The media, in its various guises, are absolutely filled with stories of the famed and celebrated. Online culture in all its many mobile and social media structures continues to use celebrity as the “click-bait” to draw attention and guide the searching user through all manner of content and stories. At the same time, all this activity, all these vignettes on stars and the notorious have generally been seen by cultural critics and audiences alike as the ephemera of culture and history, the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary culture that, like a piece of sea-glass, attracts the eye but we know that in its origins had only a momentary utility that led to its current state as a discarded and forgotten fragment of an object. Celebrity is often then flashy, but in its flashiness – its very “glamour” as Gundle expresses it (2008) – it betrays its temporality in terms of value.

And yet, for a very long time, a culture of celebrity has proclaimed its significance and – though the personalities change – it endures as a remarkable social, cultural, economic and, perhaps surprisingly, political phenomenon. Celebrity circulates through our cultures. It migrates or more accurately invades, sometimes without any resistance by borders and languages. Thus, in 2014 the name Justin Bieber was equally known in China as it was in his native Canada. Celebrities connect to our own identities and our own sense of selves and thereby inhabit an inner-sense of meaning and, occasionally for fans, an outer-sense of proclamation of their personal and collective significance (Redmond 2014). Celebrities are sometimes the conduit for comprehending our world or for someone trying to comprehend cultural values around gender, youth, or class and how these are re-presented through celebrities. Indeed, celebrities operate as a transcendence of categorization in their obvious display of their uniqueness, their singularity and their public visibility and thereby serve as the locus of debate about all forms of cultural codes, etiquette and discussion of what is “normal” and acceptable.

This dialectic of ephemera and very clear value is intriguing and perhaps this puzzling conundrum has operated as a stimulus for the growth of the study of celebrity by academics and intellectuals as much as by popular pontificators. The entirety of this book has been written by university-related academics. They have approached its study from a wealth of directions and disciplines that further identify the impact of celebrity culture. Before we further reveal the contents of this book, it is worthwhile to identify how celebrity has migrated into academic study and how this Companion has led to a collection of the most innovative and current scholarship on a phenomenon that is enduringly fascinating.

### **Universities and Celebrities: A Long Historical Association**

Celebrity culture had invaded many aspects of politics and culture long before academics actually began studying the phenomenon with any degree of intensity, and indeed had invaded the academy by the mid-twentieth century if not earlier. A

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remarkably understudied area of celebrity study is how universities began using the famous for their own ends. On a basic level, universities have always been in an industry obsessed with impact: they want their individual location to be noticed, their impact and prestige to be recognized and their “work” valued, and thus they have consistently wanted to be attached to those who were most visible in many domains of public activity. Thus, for centuries they have been the place for the provocative lecture and the site of invitation to the most famous literary or performing arts star. Moreover, the drive for fame at universities of the highest level has been collecting winners of prestigious prizes such as Nobel Laureates. Admittedly these attempts at creating attention and fame by universities were couched in other educational, social and cultural values; nonetheless, universities along with many institutions of business, culture, entertainment and politics played in the same arena of a sophisticated attention economy and worked very hard at building prestige and impact through the personalities they associated with it as an institution. Their actions in inviting recognized figures from other professions and other walks of life was a simple and basic form of celebrity cultural production in and of itself as it pulled the person from their place of skill or achievement and into the orbit of the individual university for a celebration and not something directly related to their work or achievement.

In a much more systematic way, the relationship between celebrities and universities was built through the system of honorary degrees and doctorates where the individual university reached out beyond its borders to connect to some prominent individual. It is one of those surprisingly mundane practices of universities that made them less monastic and more “worldly” in their desires and interests. The honorary degree emerged in Oxford and Cambridge in the fifteenth century and parallel processes occurred in many of the European universities in the following centuries (Heffernan and Jons 2007: 390). In research that explored the use of honorary degrees in Nordic universities, Dhondt explains that the practice was designed to connect the university to the nation and the community through anniversary celebrations; but its expansion in the nineteenth century then was a form of connection outward that made the event richer, particularly in relation to the royalty present. Ultimately, Dhondt explains, “the degrees also acted as relational gifts and expressions of political and cultural relationships, rather than acknowledgment of an individual’s academic prowess” (Dhondt 2014: 92). And so even in universities some 200 years ago, nonacademic reasons such as cultural value and visibility were an essential part of the ceremonies that universities produced.

By the twentieth century, the conferment of honorary degrees and doctorates had become standard practice for each graduation in many universities in North America and Europe. For instance, Oxford handed out 1,487 honorary doctorates during the century (Heffernan and Jons 2007: 391). By 1950, both Cambridge and Oxford had standardized their practices and awarded eight to ten a year. What became remarkable was the emergence of stars and celebrities in the pantheon of honorary doctorates, and the practice increased over the twentieth century. Cambridge achieved some notoriety in 1962 by conferring an honorary degree on the film comedian Charlie Chaplin. But this momentary celebration of the popular in universities is

dwarfed by the practices of most universities in the United States and the United Kingdom.

By the last three decades of the twentieth century, the award of honorary doctorates to popular music performers, television personalities or film stars was no longer an exception, but a rule. For example, one institution, California State University (CSU), began its practice by awarding John F. Kennedy, often considered the first celebrity politician, its first honorary doctorate in 1962. By the 1990s and 2000s, CSU was handing out awards to the chef Julia Child (2000) and film and TV stars Nicholas Cage (2001), Bill Cosby (1992) and Danny Glover (1997). Although its policy for honorary doctorates was not dissimilar to Cambridge or Oxford – it gave awards to the “distinguished” in particular fields, and the person had to be “widely recognized” – it is clear that the university was drawn to the entertainment industries to produce visible personalities for its convocation ceremonies, and the idea of “widely recognized” trumped any other value.

Some individual celebrities literally collected honorary degrees in a way that gave them the positive visibility similar to film premieres and endorsing perfume. Bill Cosby, a recipient of an honorary doctorate from CSU in 1992 along with literally dozens over his lifetime, received five doctorates between 2009 and 2014 from Marquette, Boston University, University of San Francisco, California Polytechnic, and St Paul’s College. This kind of frequency of awards makes university graduations yet another prominent stop or possibility in a managed “attention economy” career. Meryl Streep, clearly an A-list star, received doctorates as early as 1983 from Yale and as late as 2009 and 2010 from Princeton and Harvard respectively: clearly the universities’ reputations dovetail beautifully with the actor’s credentials. Similarly, Oprah Winfrey received honorary doctorates from the prestigious Princeton in 2002 and Duke University in 2009 (Meyers 2013).

It is also not true that universities avoid controversial celebrities with somewhat dubious reputations. The boxer Mike Tyson received an honorary doctorate from the Central State University in Ohio in 1989, while the controversial cricket player and celebrity Shane Warne was awarded a doctorate for his contribution to cricket from Southampton Solent University in the UK in 2006. When one realizes that the Aerosmith lead-singer Steve Tyler, the “celefiction” (Nayar 2009) star Kermit the Frog, and Kylie Minogue (who was awarded a Doctorate in Health Sciences for her aid in breast cancer awareness by Anglia Ruskin University in the UK) have received these apparently significant honorific awards and achievements (Saunders and Thomas 2011; Douglas and Sastry 2012), it becomes evident that universities have been well aware of the meaning and significance of celebrity far in advance of their legitimizing their study in their disciplines.

Along with the practice of bestowing honorary doctorates, one can see that celebrities were given outside legitimacy in a very similar way by the state and royalty over the same period. Henry Irving was the first actor to be knighted in 1895 (*The Speaker* 1895), but by the mid-twentieth century, bestowing knighthoods on celebrities became an almost yearly ritual, including Paul McCartney in 1997, Alec Guinness in 1959, Laurence Olivier in 1947, Tom Jones in 2006, and Bono in 2007 (Ranker 2014). Indeed, even France’s Napoleonic system of the Légion d’Honneur

has been granted to the most famous domestic and international stars of entertainment.

### **Studying Celebrity – Seriously**

In a sense, this book is recognition of the very significance of celebrity within our culture. It is a moment of contemplative reflection on the capacity of the celebrity to migrate and comfortably camp as a way of being in all sorts of dimensions of contemporary life. It is interesting that the university and the state deployed this “power” of celebrity regularly and often; but then again, those in positions of power are perhaps more aware of these different ways in which power and influence manifest and move through cultures and societies.

This book also identifies what could be described as the maturation of a field of study within the academy. The study of celebrity, as becomes apparent in reading the short biographies of our contributors, has emerged in a variety of disciplines that have advanced in universities over the last 50 to 80 years – an almost delayed doppelganger of how celebrity itself has with various degrees of legitimacy migrated through our cultures. Although one will see some older nineteenth-century disciplines such as political science, social history, literary studies and sociology, for the most part the emergence of the study of celebrity has arisen in the “new” disciplines of the academy. At the core of its study are fields such as Film Studies, where Richard Dyer’s seminal text *Stars* would first have been explored in 1979, with precursors coming from the comparative film and literary work of Barthes in 1957 (1993: 56–7) and the sociology of media research by Edgar Morin (1972). From literary studies, our closest authors in this collection are Loren Glass, Pramod Nayar and Graeme Turner. Writers such as Barry King, Gaylyn Studlar, Diane Negra, Matt Hills, and Sean Redmond in this collection have strong affiliations with film (and television, the later interloper) studies, although I am sure this characterization does not completely match their interdisciplinary toolkits for the study of celebrity. Another active pole for the study of celebrity has been communication studies, particularly as it has been inflected and refracted by cultural studies in various intellectual cultures internationally. This intersection describes some of the intellectual origins of some of our contributors such as Liza Tsaliki, Graeme Turner, Fred Inglis, Douglas Kellner, Jaap Kooijman, Sean Redmond, Alison Hearn, David Marshall, and Andrew Tolson. Connecting strongly with this tradition is a kind of scholarship which is related to technology and culture and is often grouped around media and digital media in some way and operates as another influential source for the study of celebrity. In this collection, writers such as Alice Marwick, Toija Cinque, and Misha Kavka along with David Marshall and Alison Hearn and Stephanie Schoenhoff identify this particular direction of celebrity studies that often further aligns directly with studies in consumer culture and what is often called self-branding. What can be discerned is the transdisciplinary scholarship in the collection and within the works of our contributors. Many rely on strong traditions in sociology, social theory, political studies and media ethnography, such as David Andrews, Joke Hermes, Chris

Rojek, Kerry Ferris, Olivier Driessens, Saeko Ishita, David Andrews, Victor Lopes, Steven Jackson, Andrew Cooper, Ellis Cashmore and Nick Couldry; but their work has clearly challenged some of the conventions in those disciplines as they have explored the formations of cultural power and significance in provocative ways. And because of the position of celebrity in contemporary culture, gender and feminist studies has also been a natural home for its study as well: by my estimation more than half of our contributors would claim this tradition as another intellectual source and resource for their work on celebrity. In all, this book describes the structured formation of an area of investigation that in this stage of its development is beginning to produce clear differentiations in research and study, possibly specifically because of these intersections of intellectual traditions that have informed its analysis.

How celebrity studies has developed beyond these individual scholars is worthy of an explanation because it really defines how this book came into being. From the emergence of collections of works by Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (Holmes and Redmond 2006 and Redmond and Holmes 2007), Thomas Austin and Martin Barker (2003), Christine Gledhill (1991), and David Marshall (2006), among others, it became clear that there was a need to build better exchange and intellectual communication channels among scholars of related research. Many of these collections included new work as much as they identified the kinds of writing and scholarship on stardom and public personalities that had accumulated through other journals, sections of books, and research in the related disciplines. At the same time, serious levels of scholarship were building through series devoted to particular stars, celebrities and public individuals, as well as emerging collections that related to the work by celebrities in areas defined as “celebrity activism” and politics (for example, Corner and Pels 2003). Single-authored works had been expanding since Gamson’s *Claims to Fame* (1994) and Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power* in 1997 (Marshall 2014), with Graeme Turner’s *Understanding Celebrity* in 2004 (Turner 2013) and Rojek’s *Celebrity* (2001) in particular impacting the expansion of the teaching of celebrity culture in universities.

The burgeoning field of celebrity studies required a real forum for debate and a place for a more developed exchange of ideas across media forms and professional and cultural practices, as well as an arena where the idea of the audience and the fan and their relationship to stardom and celebrity could be explored with greater depth and consistency. In the first decade of the twenty-first century a series of conferences on celebrity appeared internationally that further identified that a critical level of scholarship was already engaged with the study of public personalities.

In 2010, the journal *Celebrity Studies* was launched and quickly fulfilled the needed role of intellectual exchange in the investigation of celebrity. My co-author, Sean Redmond, along with Su Holmes and James Bennett laid the groundwork to produce what has generally been regarded as one of the most influential and successful new journals of the last decade by its press, Taylor & Francis. Its forum section allowed the journal to nimbly relate to new debates around celebrity that had emerged in popular culture, while its articles attracted the best celebrity scholarship.



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One of its successes has been its capacity to explore new directions in its study and, like the prehistory of celebrity scholarship, allow the streams of intellectual discourse from a range of disciplines to intersect and interplay within and between its articles. There is no question that the two major international conferences sponsored by the journal in 2012 and 2014 derived their influence and value from the journal itself. The cumulative impact of both the journal and the conferences has been substantial.

This book has tried to address some of the major conceptual themes that have driven the intellectual vitality of celebrity studies and made it now an essential part of the intellectual environment of many universities, countless courses, and a variety of disciplines. Celebrity in all its guises, from a form of promotion and an elemental component of the attention economy to a burgeoning channel to investigate political, economic, mediated and popular culture, is a complicated phenomenon. The themes of the eight parts we have chosen to organize this complexity are an attempt to capture the rich density of the research and thinking related to public personalities.

### **How the Companion Makes Sense of Celebrity: The Parts and Their Intellectual Roots**

It is useful to summarize the logics of these constellations of thought defined by our eight part-titles and how they relate to key cultural theories in the contemporary academy. For instance, research that relates to affect and emotion has been grouped around the idea of “Emotional Celebrity,” although these concepts float in and out of other parts such as “Celebrity Identification.” In a similar vein, we labeled our first part “Genealogy of Celebrity” in its capacity to identify the historical presuppositions that informed the expansion of celebrity culture. But the continuities and discontinuities of historically engaged research are at play in many other essays that can serve as intellectual responses to those approaches in the Genealogy section. Another area of inquiry relates to the political economy of celebrity and this is conveyed most directly in the part entitled “Celebrity Value”; however, political economy also informs some of the research in “The Publics of Celebrity” and is an evident element in “Celebrity Screens/Technologies of Celebrity.” The implications of technological transformations of cultural forms of celebrity are best looked for in this Screens/Technologies part, as you would expect, but also figure prominently in at least some of the chapters in “Celebrity Value.” One of the most complex cultural themes we try to address is globalization and we have grouped four fascinating case study articles in the part entitled “Global Celebrity.” Like other key concepts, globalization is certainly not contained within this part: it is clearly a central concern in two of the essays in the Identification part and is identified in a transnational way in two further articles in “Celebrity Embodiment.” We tried to address constitutions of collective identity such as audience, ethnicity and gender in the part on Embodiment, and the one on Identification operated as the site where these characterizations were put into both fan contexts and individual forms of public expression.

Just from this brief summarizing of the ideas coursing through the “veins” of our 26 following chapters in their eight parts, one can see that this Companion to the study of celebrity engages with most of the key social, political and economic issues that envelope the arts, social sciences and humanities disciplines in the academy. It is a valuable primer in understanding how the public form of individuality is constituted and evaluated. It will serve equally as an interesting pathway to many other disciplines even as it represents the definitive volume on the study of celebrity. The academy has now benefited from these scholars and scholarship in a way that I can only hope outweighs their use of celebrities for honorary doctorates. Like the discovered piece of sea-glass that is collected by the beachcomber, celebrity continues to both fascinate and be revalued. This Companion with its many insights by its contributors adds a quite different value to the enduring luster of celebrity.

*P. David Marshall*

## CELEBRITY COMPANIONS

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains

Alfred North Whitehead

Su Holmes and I first introduced to our writing the idea of the academic celebrity in our edited collection *Framing Celebrity* (2006). We used a keynote delivery by Richard Dyer to illustrate how and why the stardust of the age fell heavily on gifted academics presenting their work on great stages in front of adoring delegates. At this year’s 2014 Celebrity Studies Conference, held at Royal Holloway University in London, Su and I had our own uneasy sense of the minority fame that academia can bring.

We were asked by one of the delegates to sign or autograph a copy of our *Framing Celebrity* collection. The autograph has a long tradition in stardom and celebrity; it personalizes and memorializes the copy, postcard, letter, or photograph; and in being asked to sign it one is been given recognition and renown. It also humanizes the encounter, and in this context suggested the work had import and impact for the person holding the copy. Our book was their celebrity companion.

We appreciated the gesture very much so when I say Su and I were uneasy about being asked to sign the copy, I do so out of a sense of our own humility; the self-doubt we have about our work; our own imperfect identity positions; and because the work isn’t just ours but belongs also to the great writers who fill its pages with insight and texture. Nonetheless, the request got me thinking about companions and companionship and about the idea of the celebrity companion, a set of related themes and instances I would now like to take up within the context of liquid modernity and its aching, lonely neoliberal form of individualism. I will ultimately suggest that we live in the vexing age of the *culture of the companion*, within which this volume will sit.



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Su and I are not just professional colleagues but close friends. During our friendship we have faced many trials and tribulations together; anorexia nervosa, break-ups, divorce, bouts of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. We have shared many moments of joy and celebration; births, love affairs, and clubbing, where we would wildly dance to 1970s retro pop in seedy clubs on the wrong side of town. Professionally, we have now worked together in the area of stardom and celebrity through two edited collections, co-authored articles, and in the work we do as editors and co-founders of the journal *Celebrity Studies*. We are companions, then, in the many senses of the word: through these shared experiences, good and bad, foul weather and sunshine, we have stayed the course of true friendship. Truth be told though, we have used stardom and celebrity to maintain and sustain that relationship, particularly because we live and work thousands of miles apart. To make a play on words, Su and I are celebrity companions; it is the talk, chatter, discussion and fandom about fame that has enabled us to keep in touch, and to share with each other the more intimate parts of our lives. We are able to hold each other close because of celebrity companionship. This, I will suggest, is one of the great overarching stories of the contemporary age.

Many relationships and bonds are forged in similar ways: stars and celebrities can provide the interest “glue” that can bring people together in the first place; ongoing fandom can provide the social setting for a range of shared (subcultural) activities to take place and it can provide a rationale or logic for life choices that can be made; and one’s memories, spectacle events, and rituals can be marked by the inclusion or incorporation of celebrity texts and contexts. Celebrities are our common companions; they are a key “narrative” in the intimacies we make, and in the stories we tell and share. As I have argued, we story the world through celebrity (Redmond 2014).

That said, we are supposedly living in the age of loneliness, in which we have fewer companions, and where networks are broken down or rendered virtual and ephemeral. In the age of loneliness we are supposedly self-driven isolates, caught in the self-reflexive glare of narcissism, and we suffer, suffer terribly as a consequence. In his article “The age of loneliness is killing us” (2014), George Monbiot writes:

Three months ago we read that loneliness has become an epidemic among young adults. Now we learn that it is just as great an affliction of older people. A study by Independent Age shows that severe loneliness in England blights the lives of 700,000 men and 1.1m women over 50, and is rising with astonishing speed ... Social isolation is as potent a cause of early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day; loneliness, research suggests, is twice as deadly as obesity. Dementia, high blood pressure, alcoholism and accidents – all these, like depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicide, become more prevalent when connections are cut. We cannot cope alone. Yes, factories have closed, people travel by car instead of buses, use YouTube rather than the cinema. But these shifts alone fail to explain the speed of our social collapse. These structural changes have been accompanied by a life-denying ideology, which enforces and celebrates our social isolation. The war of every man against every man – competition and individualism, in other words – is the religion of our time, justified by a mythology of lone rangers, sole traders, self-starters, self-made men and women, going it alone. For the most social of creatures,

who cannot prosper without love, there is no such thing as society, only heroic individualism. What counts is to win. The rest is collateral damage.

Zygmunt Bauman takes a similar position where he outlines how late modernity has stripped away a range of solid connections to be replaced with floating networks, neo-tribes without emancipation, and just-in-time consumption demands that govern all aspects of our lives, including love and intimacy (2000).

It is not that I would like to simply contest these observations – in previous writing I have made similar claims – but I do think that loneliness and companionship operate in a dialectic relationship. They are the systolic and diastolic forces of the beating heart of contemporary culture. They are hegemonic intensities that play out against one another, competing for supremacy or dominance but ever reliant upon one another. And celebrity culture sits at the center of this contest over companionship and loneliness; it helps dynamize this companion culture, even if – as I have also argued – it can create the conditions for intimacy and isn't simply a "room" where lonely people go to belong and to find meaning (Redmond 2014). One can find meaningful companionship in and through celebrity, a point I will take up at the end of this introduction.

Through a range of popular, artistic, scientific and academic representations and discourses we are repeatedly told and shown that we live lonely lives. Report after report informs us that the crisis of the age is loneliness. Films, songs, novels, chat shows, dramas, television reports, and documentaries provide an intertextual narrative about isolation and anomie in today's fast-paced and disconnected world. We have been asked for decades now,

*So many lonely people, where did they all come from?*

The 2013 film *Under the Skin*, directed by Jonathan Glazer, would be a perfect metaphoric exploration of this epidemic and epidermis of loneliness. An unnamed, alien seducer (Scarlett Johansson) lures single, isolated men back to her house where they are submerged in a liquid tar and where their bodies are then slowly consumed by an unknown force. The film's cruising scenes are set in the industrial and urban wastelands of Scotland, Glasgow in particular. The seducer drives a van around the city estates and its empty roads, but also through the teeming metropolis where movement seems both accelerated and dead slow, as if time is out of kilter. The film's architecture, its somber materiality and its oppressive mise-en-scène help create the spatial conditions of brute and fragmented loneliness. The liquid tomb in which the men drown captures perfectly the sense that modern life is permeable, boundaryless even as the opportunity to connect and expand connections is never really there. The men drown in the isolated and isolating conditions of liquid modernity just at the moment they dreamed of, and were close to getting, sexual intimacy.

Scarlett Johansson's character is also eventually caught in this cauldron of anomie. She stares blankly at herself in a mirror, misrecognizing who she really is. She examines her body as if it doesn't belong to her (which it doesn't, it has been lifted off a corpse), capturing the sense that the self is a project that can be made, reengineered,

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in an age of consumer products and surgical transformations. She tries to have an intimate relationship with a man in the film but they cannot consummate their feelings – one has forgotten simply how to connect; and she is alien, Other, but so is everyone in the film. The Other is the specter of loneliness.

This is very much an anti-star performance by Johansson: she appears with little glamour, and draws upon a range of authentic performance codes that suggest a hyperrealist embodiment is being presented. This is a performance that seems to out the artifice of stardom and what stardom can do to the actor who is caught in its glare. Through her performance, Johansson seems to be addressing the loneliness of stardom itself.

Such loneliness compels us to seek companionship, and here is the critical, “circular” turn I would now like to make. The more discourses of loneliness operate, the more we hear about the forces of companionship. What emerges, promotes and energizes companionship is the rhetoric of loneliness. Self-help groups, hobby and interest groups, companion literature, local and national initiatives around making and sustaining connections emerge. We are told to be less lonely, to seek and make more contacts; and we are offered texts, settings and portals which enable us to enter, to take part, in this culture of companionship. At the same time as we are told loneliness is rife, we are shown where and how companionship can be made real. Companionship becomes the new myth of the “center,” and to reiterate, celebrity culture sits at its regal core.

Celebrity culture offers us companionship; it is the regenerating plasma that will end our loneliness. Celebrities are often *anything but lonely*, their consumption lifestyles and networks suggest a life of rich connectivity. Their companionship is inviting and seductive, and it offers forms of intimacy through the way it communicates in sensuous forms of expression. We don't have to be lonely. We can find real and meaningful companionship in, with and through our celebrities. In a postsecular age perhaps it is only in and through celebrities that we can find solace and tactility.

Even when celebrities are signified as lonely, sufferers of depression, addiction, or other mental health problems, they offer us the space to collectively share so that we are not isolated sufferers. They are higher order healers and soothsayers whose wonderment lifts us up and out of ourselves so that we can be productive citizens and workers. The neoliberal sleight of hand here is quite remarkable. Our individualist lives can be maintained, we can develop selfhood that is goal driven, but we can connect with celebrities, who also propagate the neoliberal will to produce and consume. We can be terribly lonely and deliriously connected *at the same time*. Or can we?

There is another way to understand this paradoxical together-but-all-alone narrative, one connected to self-agency and the senses, to embodiment and productive selfhood. This is the age of the culture of companionship because ethically as human beings we gather around matter that socializes us, that draws us into affective realms of connectivity. This socializing celebrity (Holmes and Redmond 2014) is not slave or master to loneliness, it is never simply in the employ of neoliberalism, and neither is it the river through which liquid modernity singularly runs. It offers transgressive and liberating possibilities since in the social space of celebrity companionship there

are multiple, divergent stories being told and spoken. Celebrities also enchant the world, offering us images and explorations that counter and contradict the rhythm of neoliberalism. In drawing attention away from the poetics of loneliness they actually enable us to see it for what it really is – the product of a nasty age of competition and scarcity, of winners and losers, haves and have-nots ...

One can think of the architecture of this book, the parts it contains, and the chapters within them, as speaking – even if obliquely – to this dialectic of companionship and loneliness. In different and divergent ways celebrity is understood as that which limits self and selfhood, or creates the conditions for new affective economies to emerge. Global verses national, core verses periphery, care verses competition, ambassadors verses activists, achieved versus attributed, ideology verses intimacy, virtual versus the real, commodity versus authenticity, all operate along an axis where what is at stake is the meaning and quality of contemporary life itself. This book is an ethical companion to celebrity.

However, structurally speaking, I think of the collection not in terms of its discrete parts, neatly packaged and assembled in a linear fashion, but as a rich tapestry, woven and matted together. Its patterns and relations work on their own terms but they are always in consort and communication with one another; ideas found in one chapter are born again in another; theoretical ideas and illustration flow in and between the various parts, their entanglements beautifully arranged and crafted. The book should be read as a beautiful mosaic. This book is an aesthetic companion to celebrity.

This is a political and poetic companion to celebrity, inviting into its home the very best friends and colleagues who bring with them the best travelers' tales, stories of curiosity, and incandescent intellectual wonder.

*The study of celebrity begins in wonder. And, at the end, when critical thought has done its best, the wonder remains...*

*Sean Redmond*

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