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# Making fame ordinary:

## Intimacy, reflexivity, and 'keeping it real'

*You better lose yourself in the music, the moment*
*You own it, you better never let it go*
*You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow*
*This opportunity comes once in a lifetime yo*

In the lyrics to Eminem's *Lose Yourself* fame is not simply something that anyone talented can get if they work hard enough. The moments when it might pay off to strive are few and far between: celebrity is a chance moment, a fleeting conjunction, something necessary to seize because of its rarity. You mess up the moment and you will be back in the place you came from, the place to which you do not wish to return. Fame here is not merely the inevitable outcome of the diligent buffing up of some 'raw talent'. It is not quite the low-risk Protestant celebrity work ethic offered by *Fame Academy*. Eminem's lyrics express a society in which celebrity is more of a random, and potentially cruel, lottery than a birthright for the righteously dedicated. They figure the fragility of fame; they articulate a sense of slim pickings, a place from which there are not many chances, a world in which it becomes all the more important to recognise and to channel intense energy into taking those chances up. In part the intensity comes out of this sense that it is as easy to lose everything as it is difficult to gain it.

Besides aggrandising a singular moment of chance *Lose Yourself* displays many other motifs that are recurrent in our current mode of celebrity culture. It invites us to get very intimate with the emotions of a celebrity, in this case a conflation of the hero of the film *8 Mile*, to which these lyrics are soundtrack, whose character is a semi-fictionalised representation of Eminem, the celebrity who plays him. It is highly reflexive about the business of being a celebrity: it offers a commentary on some of the 'rules' of the game. And it focuses on the moment just before becoming famous, presenting this moment of graft, of striving, of desire, as a moment of raw 'realness'. In this paper I want to consider these three themes, of 'real' pre-fame, of intimacy and reflexivity not in order to 'explain'

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Eminem's *Lose Yourself*, but rather to use them as a starting point, a springboard to explore some of the reasons why all these themes have such cultural currency, and to consider how they contribute to making the desire for fame seem ordinary.

To do this, to begin with, we need to say a little about celebrity culture in relation to wider dynamics and contexts of social and cultural power. One of the most useful ways to begin to think these issues through is to draw on Nick Couldry's work on media power and its relation to 'the ordinary'. Couldry writes that

> By 'media power', I do not mean the power (ideological or otherwise) exercised upon us by specific media texts; I mean more generally media institutions' differential symbolic power, the concentration of symbolic power in media institutions: that is, the fact that we take it for granted that the media have the power to speak 'for us all' – indeed to define the social 'reality' that we share – a power which individuals, corporations, pressure groups, professional bodies and even perhaps the state do not have.[i]

Couldry draws from Bourdieu, from Sennett and Cobb's theories of the hidden injuries of class, and from his own interviews with 'ordinary' people (who indicated that being on television made them feel 'empowered') to argue that there is a constructed symbolic boundary between 'the media world' and 'the ordinary world'. If the former is marked by authority, he argues, the latter is marked by a lack of validation, and it is in the gap between them that the 'hidden injuries of media power' are formed. Clearly, this leaves us with some very useful tools with which to think about the hidden injuries of celebrity as well as media power, and indeed, towards the end of his article Couldry does point us in this direction, arguing that programmes like *Big Brother*, in which 'ordinary' people become celebrities, do not so much transcend the division between worlds as work to reinscribe it. 'To put it crudely', he writes, 'why else would the transition to celebrity (and the games played in celebrity's border zones) matter so much?'[ii] . In Couldry's terms, media celebrity therefore becomes a means of symbolic validation, a way to 'really' exist, to mean something in public and private, to be rich with symbolic as well as material capital. To seek the full glare of celebrity media validation is to strive against

the hidden injuries of disempowerment, of the symbolic disempowerment of the 'ordinary'.

Of course we are not particularly used to thinking of not being a celebrity in the potentially hyperbolic and victimised terms of 'an injury'. But Couldry's schema is extremely useful as it names a phenomenon and a scale that has different levels of intensity. Viewed in this way, it resonates with other academic and critical understandings of the relationship between celebrity, media and society. David Morley for example summarises Suzanne Moore's observation that talk shows can demonstrate 'the simple but powerful capacity of the media to offer these participants some form of recognition, however perverse, of their existence'.[iii] The importance of recognition is not confined to a few; as Chris Rojek writes,

> To some extent, the dynamics of modern society mean that all of us are caught up in the celebrity race. It is axiomatic that only a minority acquire the public acclaim and recognition that we associate with celebrity status. It is also axiomatic that if the majority suffer from feelings of rejection and invalidation, they internalize them in ways that pose no threat to the social order.[iv]

In other words, what Rojek calls rejection and invalidation, what Moore/Morley might term a lack of recognition and what Couldry calls 'injuries' have a lot in common. Whether at the extreme (e.g. Barry George, obsessed since his poverty-ridden childhood with ways of achieving fame, and trying to find it by killing TV presenter Jill Dando) or 'normal' (e.g. feeling not quite as 'successful' as a celebrity but not minding) end of the spectrum, these strategies of cultural coping or non-coping indicate a society and a culture that has developed some extraordinarily unequal ways to validate people's sense of self and collective worth.

If celebrity culture can be understood in terms of symbolic disempowerment, it also needs to be understood in terms of economic and social disempowerment: in terms of inequality of access to material resources and social mobility. Here we need to consider the character of the political conjuncture we inhabit in terms of the Blairite *vision* of Britain as a 'meritocracy'. A 'meritocracy' is nowadays understood as 'a social system

which allows people to achieve success proportionate to their talents and abilities, as opposed to one in which social class or wealth is the controlling factor'.[v] This is part of the wider frame of post-Fordist late capitalism in which relatively rigid class identity distinctions have to some extent fractured and multiplied. Whilst the routes between class stratifications have become marginally more porous - generating some high profile examples - substantial class mobility remains out of reach for the majority. Divisions between wealth have become exacerbated over the last few decades in particular, to the extent that in London 43% of children are now living in poverty.[vi]

Crucially, the Blairite vision is not of an equality of wealth (as under 'old' Labour) but rather to facilitate the ability to strive for it. As with the logic of late capitalism more broadly, this implicitly rests on the proposition that it is only possible for a few people to be really 'successful'. At the same time, however, the structural drive of Blairite policies, as with other neo-liberal governments like the US, has been to increase competition and to further the dismantling and marketisation of the welfare state, resulting in the attempted destruction of collective and collaborative provision and the erosion of basic quality provision for the poor. This has exacerbated the inequalities of opportunity from which 'talent'(in itself a problematic enough concept) can be healthy enough, culturally equipped enough or even well-fed enough to 'rise' through the cultural and social pool. In other words, even taken within its own terms, this discourse of meritocracy fails. That people do not surface at the top through 'merit' alone is easily illustrated in the US context by the nepotistic rise of the current president. As the supportive structures of social welfare institutions become impoverished, people shoulder the burden and threats of social insecurity on an increasingly individualised basis, what Ulrich Beck describes as 'the risk society'.[vii] The lottery becomes a core motif for our times.

The increasing disparity between rich and poor, the risky lottery of social opportunity and the lack of cultural validation for many people in our society goes some good way to explaining the expansion of interest in celebrity culture and the eagerness with which opportunities to become one are taken up and consumed. These are some of the wider contexts in which Eminen's hymn to the fleeting moment of potential for fame is

produced, in which it is bought by the truckload, in which it clearly resonates with broader structures of feeling. *Lose Yourself* offers the image of immersion in the moment of opportunity for fame. Risk everything to lose your old self and your lack of validation; gamble your identity to acquire wealth, to become acknowledged, to become somebody.

### *Keeping it real: Cinderella and the celebrity work ethic*

Getting to know 'the real' or 'inner' person behind or inside the celebrity has for a long time been an integral means of generating interest in them. As Richard Dyer pointed out in *Heavenly Bodies*,

> Stars are obviously a case of appearance – all we know of them is what we see and hear before us. Yet the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of 'really' – what is Crawford really like? Which biography, which word-of-mouth story, which moment in which film discloses her as she really was? The star phenomenom gathers these aspects of contemporary human existence together, laced up with the question of 'really'.[viii]

The question, the enigma of 'really' is partly what generates the cultural and economic turnover of our fascination with celebrities. It sells them, products about them and products tenuously connected to them. It informs the way we connect to celebrities, whether as abstract friends, as offering us glimpses of what we would like to be; of lifestyles we wish to inhabit, spaces of impossible longing, characteristics against which we measure ourselves, or mechanisms through which we bond with other people.[ix]

However, this question, of what celebrities are 'really' like, can matter in a range of different ways. From psychoanalytic perspectives, asking the question of what a celebrity might 'really' be like might indicate needs or desires felt to be lacking from our own lives or psyches. From post-structuralist perspectives, it could indicate an unhealthily essentialist fetishisation symptomatic of Western logocentrism, rather than tracing multiple, interrelated developments, intensities or 'realities'. In terms of cultural history, the search to find out what celebrities are 'really' like could be understood in the context of the rise of romanticism, possessive individualism and capitalist modernity. Such a search to find out who and how celebrities 'really' are has been an integral motor of the

celebrity machine for a long time. The leaking of celebrity secrets has been a long-standing promotional tactic used in order to produce 'authentic' information that, as Dyer points out, is 'often taken to give a privileged access to the real person of the star'.[x]

Dyer's elegant and lucid analyses of film stars such as Judy Garland, Paul Robeson and Marilyn Monroe spawned a whole generation of film studies students who wrote essays on the construction of a particular star's image and fame. In his earlier book, *Stars*, Dyer influentially wrote that 'what is interesting about them is not the characters they have constructed […] but rather the business of constructing/performing/being (depending on the particular star involved) a "character"'.[xi] Reading this today, and thinking about this in a wider context from that of solely film stars, it is clear that it is not only academic and journalistic commentators who find the business of constructing celebrity fascinating. Celebrity reflexivity, or mulling over the business of being or becoming a star, has become a conspicuous preoccupation of stars themselves, as *Lose Yourself/8 Mile* indicated. Take for example Craig David singing with older 'star' Sting on a recent track about the *Rise and Fall* of celebrity. Partly presented as autobiographical triumph ('I always said that I was gonna make it / Now it's plain for everyone to see') the lyrics also function as a parable on the vagaries of the star system which 'naturally' entail the 'rise and fall' of the star.[xii] Its dollop of self-criticism is foregrounded:

> Started believing that I was the greatest
> My life was never gonna be the same
> 'cos with the money came a different status
> That's when things changed
> Now I'm too concerned with all the things I own
> Blinded by all the pretty girls I see
> I'm beginning to loose my integrity.

What is interesting to note is the combination of reflexivity about the business of being a celebrity, emotional interiority and self-criticism on offer: this is a celebrity confessional. To examine such productions of celebrity 'normality', such messages of how they, once, inhabited the position of wanting to be a celebrity *too*, and why they hold such purchase in our culture, might work not so much to explore how celebrities are 'just like us'

through the way they magnify 'everyday' mannerisms or characteristics (that is, what Couldry terms elsewhere their 'extraordinary ordinariness') but rather to think about how they are presented as being like us *in wanting to be celebrities*. For the idea that 'to be ordinary' in our culture will probably entail 'wanting to be a celebrity' in part gets reproduced and naturalised from such positions.

The markers of what makes a celebrity authentic here are the presentation of emotional intimacy with the audience, alongside a degree of reflexivity about being in the position of a celebrity, and an ability to reference the legitimate 'moment before' fame. Similarly, in *American Life* Madonna sings of how she lost herself in the process of becoming a star, forgetting the 'original' motivation, offering another self-critical narrative about how the role of celebrity is being managed (although, suiting her more established stature, unlike Craig David the self-criticism is placed at one remove by using the past tense):

> I tried to stay ahead,
> I tried to stay on top
> I tried to play the part,
> But somehow I forgot
> Just what I did it for
> And why I wanted more […]

Again, the moment *before* becoming a celebrity is positioned as the 'authentic' moment, as the lyrics cut between such retrospective comment and the experience of trying to become a celebrity. It is marked as a moment quavering with instabilites:

> Do I have to change my name?
> Will it get me far?
> Should I lose some weight?
> Am I gonna be a star?

Both sets of lyrics, as with *Lose Yourself,* present a subjectivity that is aspiring to be a star. They are presenting themselves as being in the same position as their listeners, and this is the position that is coded as being 'real'.

Clearly, referencing 'the moment before' fame is in part about money, work and class, and nowhere, perhaps has this been more blatantly dramatised than in the lyrics, video and reception of *Jenny from the Block*. In the video, Jennifer Lopez and her 'real-life' fiance Ben Affleck are shown going about their everyday lives, caught on a montage of different types of film. The way the images are framed codes the relationship between 'the lovers', and between J-Lo and the viewers, as playful and intimate. We get a glimpse both of what happens beyond the 'official' definition of the frame and we witness the moment of the framing itself. We are invited into J-Lo's line of vision, her subjectivity. We are offered a peek into the celebrity world. Again, the idea of 'intimacy' is being sold to us. The world of press and photography is depicted as being unreal, as external to the relationship us as viewers have with J-Lo . And yet it also offers us up another type of 'real' apart from intimacy. 'Keeping it real' means remembering what it was like *before* being wealthy.

Her name changed to the homely 'Jenny', the artist formerly known as J-Lo tells us that despite her enormous wealth, she's still the same old down-to-earth girl from round the corner in the hard streets of the Bronx that she always was. It mobilises one of the most common celebrity stories: the celebrity who worked his or her way up from the bottom of the social pile. The rags-to-riches tale is an age-old narrative. It is the story of Cinderella, whose basic plot elements, as Angela Carter said, 'occur everywhere from China to Northern England', wherever there is social inequality[xiii]; but with different meanings according to the time and place, whether they be amusing pastimes for the Viennese bourgeoisie or expressions of wish-fufilment for the Irish poor. That this currency has become prominent today is not particularly surprising considering that we live in a world in which rags have become more prevalent and riches more opulent. At the same time the narrative is inflected in some very modern ways. Instead of merely luxuriating in her palatial excess, Cinderella now has to show that she can still remember that she started out in the kitchen. This knowledge or awareness structures her character; it stops her 'getting above herself', it keeps her 'real'.

Why this is such a motif in contemporary culture can be understood in relation to the neo-liberal discourse of meritocracy. Of course, just as there is plenty right in wanting people to move beyond experiences of deprivation, there is nothing wrong with not wanting to be arrogant or socially snobby, (and such sentiments have become common sense in a way they weren't even fifty years ago). But as Stuart Hall pointed out many years ago, celebrations of 'the popular' can take many different political forms.[xiv] And this is not a populism which, in it's appreciation of 'working class' people and forms, wants to hold this up and celebrate it in order to try and give them more opportunities and resources. Instead, it uses this appreciation for entirely individualistic purposes. J-Lo's ditty and image is not about what she gives back: it's what she has extracted from the street – her 'realness', her supposed urban 'groundedness' – and has *taken away with her* that's important. It is a structure of feeling that uses this to justify enormous wealth and divest itself of any guilt, rather than to enter into a reciprocal relationship. It sustains, furthers and deepens inequality rather than tackles it. And as such it is entirely congruent with what has been called 'corporate populism'.[xv] What more perfect image could there be for a company to use to sell, what more potent dream to buy than glamour which pretends to be democratic through-and-through?

In J-Lo's case there are of course important explanatory reasons we can bring in here in terms of gender and 'race'. It has long been recognised that cultures of ostentatious wealth are ways for disenfranchised people to stick two fingers up to those who held them down and back. Nowhere perhaps is this more apparent than in the thick heavy gold chains of black rappers, sported also by young white working class boys who share their material and cultural disempowerment (and who often want to borrow what is perceived as being their hyper-masculinity).[xvi] It is apparent in one feminist discourse that, since the shoulder-padded working girls of the 1980s at least, has trumpeted ostentatious wealth as a signifier of female liberation. J-Lo offers a similar celebration of a materialist young feminism as the Destiny's Child anthem *Independent Women*, which celebrates 'all the honeys / that make the money'. On these collective grounds it is not surprising that a Latino singer from the Bronx might be attracted to *bling*.

But acknowledging these moves as resistant does not mean that they are progressive or emancipatory. As Don Slater has pointed out, there is a fine but deeply significant line between acknowledging that a consumer or a culture is 'active', and assuming that it is 'oppositional'. To trace the story of the confusion between them is to trace one of the stories of cultural studies, and in between these positions there is 'the most powerful insight of the whole tradition, that cultural studies is part of a social process of making social sense.'[xvii] This example like many others offers one type of liberation (e.g. gender equality) only by annexing or connecting it to a celebratory endorsement of the profit motive of consumer capitalism. Whereas some used to think that black struggles and gender struggles were by themselves opposed to capitalism (and they often were, as the people on the top of the pile were wholly, instead of mainly, dominated by the white, the male and the upper class) today it is clear that they are not. As Sheila Rowbotham, the campaigner for women's liberation from the 1960s, poignantly puts it, 'our hopes have been appropriated, our aspirations twisted.' Identity politics became articulated to the corporate search for profit as well as the search for co-operation:

> Ironically, openings created by social movements were to present market opportunities – the slogans transmogrified into designer labels and some quick-footed 'alternative' capitalists emerged from the melee. Yet the radical dream of the sixties was to be stillborn, for we were not to move towards the cooperative egalitarian society we had imagined. Instead the sixties ushered in an order which was more competitive and less equal than the one we had protested against. [xviii]

Paul Gilroy talks of a similar process as 'filleting', a process by which corporate interests gut a progressive discourse 'for what they want and adapt it to the rhythms of their own complicity with consumerism'. This highlights the importance of linkages, or articulation: of how discourses can be linked, re-appropriated or co-opted for progressive or negative ends (in other words, to promote equality, co-operation and the sharing of power and resources, or to promote inequality, individualism, and the waste and uneven distribution of power and resources) and how discourses build their power through alliances. If we are looking for what Williams called 'resources of hope', or, in a more contemporary sense, meanings that can be rearticulated to more progressive ends, one might be in the public response to J-Lo's sentiments of being able to 'keep it real' despite

her wealth, which have been widely ridiculed. She clearly is not the same as she was when she was much poorer, and, to many, the inability to recognise this is insulting to both those who do live in conditions of material poverty and to the intelligence of her audience. It appears disingenuous. As Dorien Lynskey put it in a review in *The Big Issue*, 'she claims on Jenny from the Block that she's just the same girl she always was, which either means (a) she was demanding all-white dressing rooms with matching flowers as a 12-year old in the Bronx, or (b) she's taking bollocks.'[xix] Or as a student, Feben Iyassu, said to me in a seminar, how can she really still be 'Jenny from the Block' when she doesn't give anything back? In part it is because the song and video goes out of its way to highlight this contradiction, that it makes the faultline in the logic only too transparent. But it also offends because it offers little affective sense of the *difficulty* of moving out of such social circumstances. She offers a very similar narrative, in effect, to Eminem – who is more rarely decried such individualism[xx] - but without brooding sense of the riskiness and precariousness of material and social advancement, or the downside to living on the block.

Clearly, what Lopez offers is not the only form the rags-to-riches narrative can have, nor the only type of relationship that celebrities can articulate to their materially poorer 'roots'. In the video for *It takes more*, for example, Ms Dynamite is depicted rejecting a glossy video set and driving off to go to an estate. Unlike Jenny who uses 'the street' as a vehicle to show off her individualised success and beauty, Ms Dynamite sings with the local people. There are many other people in the frame; the narrative is not only about her, but about other people, like the little boy watching hard gangsta rap on video. Her words are singing about more people than just herself; they point out broader social circumstances and materialisms and issues. There are a lot of messages that are less individualistic and more co-operative, analytical and progressive at work here. It is still the case of course that Ms Dynamite's is still represented as an *individualised* achievement. She is still separate – she has to be by virtue of being 'a celebrity', as that is its structure. Whilst there are aspects of some celebrities that can be used or articulated in less unequal ways, structurally, celebrity is by definition hyper-individualistic. Within the constraints of that framework, this example offers many much less individualistic

messages. Although there is still the gap between the ordinary and celebrity worlds, and this disjunction in power is attempted on some level to be compensated for by the emphasis on the moment before fame through returning to it as the 'real' moment of emotional grounding. [xxi]

### *Up close and personal: emotional intimacy*

Anchoring the celebrity's image in relation to a 'real moment before fame' invites us to feel closer to celebrities and to suggest our proximity to their emotions. This also needs to be understood in relation to a broader context of the rise of celebrities emotional literacy and the intensification of the intimacy we are invited to feel with the feelings of celebrities. Perhaps nowhere is the rise of celebrity intimacy demonstrated more baldly, or literally, than through the title of the British weekly glossy magazine, *Closer*. Launched by EMAP in late 2002, *Closer* aimed to rival the other main celebrity weekly *Now* and to build on the sales success of EMAP's celebrity magazine *Heat,* aimed at a younger target audience by pitching *Closer* at women from their late twenties to early fifties.[xxii] The plan was to revitalise an older and 'more traditional' women's magazine market with a shot of youthful celebrity culture. Its subtitle '[*Closer*] to the people making the news THIS WEEK' does not, unsurprisingly, feature newspaper editors or politicians, but showbusiness celebrities together with the quasi-sensational true-life stories of 'ordinary' people.

*Closer* is just one title within what has become termed the 'celebrity magazine market'. Whilst magazines obviously used celebrity coverage before, the scale and title given to this market is indicative of the noticeable expansion of celebrity culture more generally, and its title is indicative of one of the key forms this is currently taking: a suggestion that we are getting more intimate with or 'closer to' celebrity lives than ever before. Such a premium placed on emotional intimacy might be thought about in relation to broader social and cultural changes. Here I am thinking in particular about changes in business and organisational cultures and to the rise of 'soft capitalism'. Nikolas Rose has persuasively outlined how, whereas previously organisations had been environments with 'defensive norms such as mistrust, conformity, and power-centred competition', from the

1970s they were encouraged to emphasise 'striving for information, collaboration, facilitation, openness, trust, risk-taking, shared responsibility, choice, learning, open competition'. The 'emotional, more primitive side of human nature' could be harnessed in order to create individuals have been taught to manage, self-actualise and govern their own success.[xxiii] Business began to use the power of 1960s self- and collective help.

Gesturing towards 'holistic' models, this business model relies on a greater degree of closeness – or intimacy - between colleagues than the atomised hierarchies of yore. What has come to be called 'soft capitalism'[xxiv] harnesses informality, emotion, relationships, cultural bonds, culture and creativity to produce economic success. This works both on the level of the workplace, whether by paying attention to organisational cultures, to the cultural bonds between staff or by introducing forms of leisure and 'play'. At the weaker edge of soft capitalism, this might mean dress-down Fridays and office parties; at the more extreme (and softer) end, it can mean the lack of hierarchies and collectivist hedonism epitomised by the St Lukes advertising agency, working together in creative ways for private profit. There is clearly a close connection here between intimacy and informality, and the rise of both might also be interpreted in relation to what is commonly understood as the 'decline of deference' in the post-war (WW2) period.

Such an emphasis on intimacy and on emotional organisational cultures is also part of soft-capitalism in terms of the relationship between an organisation and its customers. Getting to know your post-Fordist niche market has bred an intense emphasis about knowing intimate details about your customers in the Anglo-American world in particular. As the best-selling business book *Customer Intimacy: Pick Your Partners, Shape your Culture, Win Together* puts it

> Like scores of today's like-minded market leaders around the world, they are on the cutting edge of the most important strategic transfomation of the decade: the shift to customer intimacy. They've abandoned the old us-versus-them mind-set to embrace a single common insight: The largest source of growth, advantage and profit resides in the design and development of intimacy with customers.[xxv]

Again, the language of sixties and seventies co-operativism is co-opted to produce big bucks for private business. It is in this context that the premium placed on intimacy and emotional literacy might be considered. Seeing celebrities outside of the traditionally acceptable places and spaces in which it is acceptable to inhabit celebrityhood - in either ordinary or extraordinary contexts – has been a key part of the appeal of the spate of many recent celebrity reality TV programmes. Displacing the organic celebrity from its natural habitat became a way to foreground their emotional responses (and 'real' behaviour), whether in the Australian jungle (*I'm a celebrity - get me out of here!*) or the big house in east London (*Celebrity Big Brother*). It is a way to generate interest in 'other sides' of their characters, to  present us with new ways of getting intimate with them.

What this engenders is a kind of premature celebrity confessionalism. There have always been gossip and scandals, interviews and confessions around celebrities. But unlike the 'heavenly bodies', perhaps, about whom nuggets of information are revealed through interviews,  and who are subject to the usual barrage of scandalous gossip, we now have many stars who appear only to keen to tell us *very early on* in their careers about how they are unheavenly and how they have dirty emotional closets to clean out. Good examples are the rush to bring out early celebrity autobiographies at increasingly young ages (Geri Haliwell, David Beckham for example) and Eminem's 'Cleaning out my closet', which contains more characteristically coruscating reflections on his personal history ('I got some skeletons in my closet and I don't know if no one knows it. So before they thrown me inside my coffin and close it, / I' ma expose it.'). Whereas the Madonna and Craig David examples appear to mull over the precariousness of celebrity and their occasional inability to always *manage* it in the best possible way, Eminem's lyrics and presentation tend to foreground the performance of celebrity (for example, through the title of his album, *The Eminem Show*). To whatever the degree, such reflexivity indicates a celebrity-system in which the stars have to be more attuned to an audience that is assumed to be increasingly media-savvy and more aware of the rules of the celebrity game.

We might connect these productions of 'closeness' and intimacy with stars to a variety of media genres. Surveying the history of DIY shows on television, for example, Charlotte Brunsdon noted the recent move towards close-ups and jokey, high camp melodrama.[xxvi] Such images can attempt to narrow the visual and emotional distance from the audience. Whilst predictably such productions of this kind of visual /emotional intimacy is often most pronounced in traditionally 'feminine' areas, it can also be seen in more male-dominated realms, with for example the rise of less deferent and aggressive TV interviewing styles that are more intimate by being more 'invasive'. We might locate such moments of intimacy in relation to what David Morley, drawing on Raymond Williams, terms 'the relationship between distance, familiarity and alienation'.[xxvii] The apparent rise in intimacy, whether coded through visual close-ups, lack of linguistic deference, or the presentation of 'private secrets' can in many ways clearly act as compensation for that simultaneously old-fashioned and hideously modern condition of alienation.

Intimacy and emotional literacy in our culture might be thought in relation to the similar position to the double-edged gains and losses of the feminisation of industry. They are both issues around which it sometimes becomes easy to scapegoat 'feminisation' rather than to disentangle the relations between gender, identity politics and late capitalism. Emotional literacy has become a way not only to improve relationships but to feed commercial profit. Obviously emotional literacy doesn't have to be articulated to the search for private profit. For example, the campaigning organisation for emotional literacy, Antidote, has an economic policy stating that 'societies marked by sharp inequality cannot thrive' and stating that it wants to work towards seeing money 'flowing through society in ways that can improve the quality of life for everybody within it'.[xxviii]

### *Reflexivity and irony*
The rise of reflexivity in general has been taken as a key characteristic of our culture for some time now; as Lash and Urry put it in *Economies of Signs and Space*, '...it is only in late modernity (or postmodernity) that aesthetic reflexivity comes to pervade social processes' (p.54). In the mid-1990s, reflexivity seemed to hold for some commentators

like Anthony Giddens the promise of liberation from the shackles of oppressively hierarchical traditions. In more circumspect and ambivalent vein, Scott Lash, John Urry and to a certain extent Ulrich Beck considered how reflexive subjects could entail either potentially more liberatory possibilities or they could be articulated to new regimes of capital accumulation (or both).[xxix]

Being reflexive is important both for the interpellated celebrity audience, and, if we think back to the lyrics above, for many celebrities 'themselves' (or, in other words, their celebrity personas). Other points on the celebrity spectrum of reflexivity might include 'ironic' celebrity consumption marketed to an audience who is interpellated as extremely 'wised-up' to the rules of the celebrity game. The magazine *Heat*, for example, is often sold through this premise. It is marked by less reverence towards celebrities in general (a strategy designed to appeal to its young UK audience and which has in sales terms succeeded, resulting in the creation of a US variant).

*Heat* is marked by not wanting to keep its celebrities on the pedestals installed by *Hello!* or *OK!* and to demonstrate irreverence towards the position of celebrities. (Such irreverence is more widespread, palpable in other media such as the commentaries of *The Mirror*'s 3am girls). It also offers a subject position based around 'ironic' distance from the whole celebrity game. To some extent it shares this with the BBC game *Celebdaq* in which the audience bets on the stocks and shares of celebrity currency, offering us a similar meta-commentary on celebrity as a game with rules. *Heat*'s advertising campaigns ironise the social rules of the celebrity 'game' and our interactions with it. They ironise desire for celebrity gossip; they poke fun at its social role as a channel for discussion in a work context; they even highlight and laugh at the connection between female gossip about celebrities and emotional intelligence. In this respect it might be compared to the kind of hyper-reflexivity used in the advertising industry, where ironic youth advertising became a staple of the campaigns for Diesel and Benetton, although in this case the strategies are being deployed with a less 'high art' and more overtly populist, at times even bawdy, touch. Ironically, even when articulated through ironic distance, these practices are enabling an audience to feel 'closer to' the secret lives of

celebrities. It is what might be called, after Foucault, an 'incitement to discourse' around celebrity intimacy.[xxx] It is a discourse of critical and cynical distance about the celebrity-machine, but this critical discourse is channelled straight back into feeding it. It is articulated to the selling of celebrity rather than away from it.

At the same time, such reflexivity over the 'game' of celebrity can also be interpreted in terms of the changes in hierarchies of cultural value. Previously, for professional middle-class taste-makers, engaging with the gossip and tittle-tattle around celebrity culture was positioned as downmarket, flashy, sensationalist and trashy: as 'common'. Now, to know about it is important, even if this is accompanied by a vestigial sense of distance through irony. Knowing about celebrity culture is sold to us as a way of appear democratic and populist, to appear disengaged from social snobbery, to appear socially and culturally fluid: to have the potential to engage with a wide range of people across different social layers and backgrounds. Such skills are deemed important ones for the professional middle classes to have in our network society.

Of course audiences interpret such texts in a variety of ways. As so many cultural studies texts from the 1980s worked hard to tell us - and as, importantly, and not coincidentally, *Heat* is keen on telling us too - the audience is not made up of a bunch of passive dupes. Clearly the ways these texts, these products, these messages about celebrities intersect with a myriad of different daily lives is phenomenally multiple and diverse. They can offer us points of reference for our own lives. Celebrities offer us not only 'role models' (or the lack of them) but examples of lives and responses lived in a culture that has some similarities to ours, even if the similarities are only in terms of temporality, gender or a shared status as 'individuals'. As Dyer pointed out '..what makes them [stars] interesting is the way in which they articulate the business of being an individual, something that is, paradoxically, typical, common, since we all in Western society have to cope with that particular idea of what we are. Stars are also embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives'.[xxxi] They offer us ways to be ourselves and to of connecting us to other people.

These are some of the ways such narratives, such discourses operate, how they engage us. In one way it is not useful to cut ourselves off from celebrity culture. It saturates so much of cultural life that to not know what is going on or how it works is not particularly possible and neither is it desirable if we want to learn about how our culture works or to connect to other people. But at the same time it is important to interrogate what is going on and in whose interests. Is it really 'ours'? To what ends are we putting our interests, our money and our energies? Is the celebrity dream really equal? And, more difficultly, where do we invest our energies when we know it's not an equal dream? *Heat* plays on the possibilities of such knowledges. After all, there are few obvious places to put your energy in our culture if you know a celebrity culture is an unfair culture, but reading *Heat* provides one outlet in which by reading it you can register your criticism, your cynical awareness and your knowledge of how the celebrity system works. Unfortunately, its neo-liberal postmodern reflexivity does channel such potential back to the realm of inequalities rather than to the redistribution of some of its concentrations of power.

Sometimes those relations of power are more explicit than others. The TV advert for *Closer* depicted a female office worker miniaturised and sitting on a shelf in a cupboard, where she witnesses a scandal unfolding. She is a metonym for the magazine and its readers. *Closer*, the advert says, will offer the reader a much more intimate relationship to what is going on in public. She is presented as canny, obtaining knowledge, finding out what's really going on. But it does not bring the reader 'closer' in order to interact with these events that are deemed as important. It is not an intimacy that is reciprocated in any meaningful sense. In terms of emotional intimacy, this is a *one-way* relationship, and it is a one-way relationship in which continual disempowerment is embodied through the woman's size.

Intimacy, reflexivity and dramatising the 'grounded' moment of pre-fame are key motifs in contemporary celebrity cultures. Intimacy is offered to the audience or fan as a possible way of legitimating themselves by investing in the celebrity world. For celebrities, it can be a way of connecting and persuading people that they have something in common and divesting themselves of their role in creating that disjunction in power.

Reflexivity is a way for celebrities to reach a more media-savvy audience and for audiences to attempt to disengage themselves from the sphere of celebritydom even whilst they may be reinforcing it. And being 'grounded', or holding on to the symbolic rags, can be used to articulate both the decline of snobbery and the attempt to assuage guilt over the social inequalities of our lottery culture. All three are currently in widespread circulation. All three are ways of making fame seem ordinary, when of course, unless we are all receiving the same material and symbolic recognition, it is no such thing.

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[i] Nick Couldry, 'The hidden injuries of media power' in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol 1 No 2 November 2001 pp155-177

[ii] ibid, p172

[iii] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, Routledge 2000 p111

[iv] Chris Rojek *Celebrity,* Reaktion Books 2001 p147

[v] Michael Young coined the word 'meritocracy' in 1958 in his book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* and claimed Blair was woefully misusing it. See http://www.quinion.com/words/topicalwords/tw-mer1.htm for a discussion of the changing meanings of the word 'meritocracy'.

[vi] Greater London Authority, *London Divided: Income Inequality and Poverty in the Capital*, GLA 2002

[vii] Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society,* Sage 1992

[viii] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Macmillan Press 1986 p2

[ix] See for example David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, Routledge 2002 or Matt Hills *Fan Cultures*, Routledge 2002

[x] Dyer, *Stars* (New edition; British Film Institute, 1998) chapter 6 p2 **– FIND SPECIFIC PAGE NO**.

[xi] Ibid.

[xii] My discussion of these lyrics is considering them in relation to wider discourses; if it were considering them in relation to music cultures, then issues of sound would have to be taken into account.

[xiii] Angela Carter 'Introduction' to Angela Carter (ed) *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Virago 1990

[xiv] Stuart Hall 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular' in Raphael Samuel (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981

[xv] For a discussion of Anthony Barnett's use of this term and related themes see Michael Rustin, 'The New Labour ethic and the spirit of capitalism' in *Soundings*, Issue 14 Spring 2000 p116

[xvi] For more discussion of this see Tricia Rose *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America,* Wesleyan University Press 1994

[xvii] Don Slater *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Polity Press 1997 p171

[xviii] Sheila Rowbotham *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties*, Penguin 2000 ppxiv-xv

[xix] Dorien Lynskey, 'How Lo can you go?' *The Big Issue* December 2-8th 2002 p.29

[xx] But a good example is Johann Hari 'Eminem: the president's friend', *Independent on Sunday*, 12th January 2003

[xxi] For alternative models of 'democratic' celebrity we might look over to the celebrity of the 'leader' of the Zapatistas in Mexico celebrity of Subcommandante Marcos. A masked, anonymous celebrity who everyone and anyone can claim to be, as no-one knows who he 'really' is, this is a self-consciously dissolved model of celebrity in which Marcos is everyone, sharing the fame like that other model of celebrity where celebrity is dissolved into the populace, *Spartacus*. Stanley Kubrick's well-known1960 epic about slave emancipation (penned by a blacklisted screenwriter) in which in the other male slaves take in solidarity the identity of condemned revolutionary Roman slave-turned-hero. Of course this altenative model of celebrity might also be taken as not being a model of celebrity, but rather its antethesis. It is far closer to what

Delueze terms as the being 'the opposite of celebrity', as set of liberated singularities, opening a 'self' up to the multiplicities within:

'Individuals find a real name for themselves, rather, only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them. A name as the direct awareness of such intensive multiplicity is the opposite of the depersonalization effected by the history of philosophy: it's depersonalization through love rather than subjection. What one says comes from the depths of one's ignorance, the depths of one's own underdevelopment. One becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events: quite the reverse of a celebrity.' - Gilles Deleuze, 'Letter to a Harsh Critic' in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, Columbia University Press 1995, pp6-7

[xxii] Ciar Byrne, 'Emap brings celebrity title Closer' *Media Guardian* 12th September 2002

[xxiii] Nikolas Rose *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self* Second edition, Free Association Books 1999 pp114-116

[xxiv] Paul Heelas 'Work ethics, soft capitalism and the 'turn to life' in Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke (eds) *Cultural Economy*, Sage, 2002 pp 78-96

[xxv] Fred Wiersema *Customer Intimacy: Pick Your Partners, Shape Your Culture, Win Together*, Harper Collins, 1998

[xxvi] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Taste and time on television' *Media times/historical times* symposium, Goldsmiths College 25th May 2003

[xxvii] Morley, op. cit p179

[xxviii] http://www.antidote.org.uk/html/economy.htm accessed 20th April 2003

[xxix] Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*, Polity 1994

[xxx] This phrase is used in terms of the 'incitement to discourse' around sexuality – i.e. that the Victorians didn't so much clamp down on thinking and talking about sexuality as much as multiply it. Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, Penguin, 1978

[xxxi] Dyer, 1986 op cit. p.18