"I feel your pain": cosmopolitan charity and the public fashioning of the celebrity soul

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"I feel your pain": cosmopolitan charity and the public fashioning of the celebrity soul

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Offering support for global charities has become practically part of the contemporary celebrity job description and a hallmark of the established star. Locating the expansion of this phenomenon within the post-Fordist cultural turn, this paper explores how public displays of support for "the afflicted" can be a way for celebrities to appear to raise their profile above the zone of the crudely commercial into the sanctified, quasi-religious realm of altruism and charity, whilst revealing or constructing an added dimension of personality: of compassion and caring. The paper suggests that investigating the communicative cultural flows circulating *between* the celebrity, their impoverished "Others" and the non-destitute, non-celebrity "ordinary" subject can tell us something both about how such power relationships are maintained and how the possibilities of change to global injustices are imagined or disavowed. To theorise these interconnections, the paper links together conceptions of the social power of celebrity with debates around cosmopolitanism, work on the mediation of distant suffering and Nietzsche's conception of "the soul".

Keywords: celebrity; charity; intimacy; cosmpolitanism; celebrity soul

If a wild-child role in *Girl, Interrupted* seemed just the right outlet for Jolie in her twenties, a project like *A Mighty Heart*, about geopolitics and real love, seems perfect for her now. Along with her far-reaching humanitarian work, Jolie, 32, has her own real love (perhaps you've heard), Brad Pitt, who she met while making *Mr & Mrs Smith* in 2005. "I wasn't looking," Jolie says. "I was happy having lovers and being a single mom" (to Maddox, who she'd adopted in March 2002 from a Cambodian orphanage with second husband, Billy Bob Thornton). "The last thing I was looking for was somebody to have a relationship with."

Now, it's Jolie and Pitt, together, visiting sites of deprivation around the globe – touring earthquake-devastated Pakistan in 2005, spending Christmas with Columbian refugees in Costa Rica last December – trying to marshal resources for desperate families as part of her work as the Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. There is also the Jolie-Pitt foundation, through which they donated £500,000 in May to relief efforts in Darfur. (Connelly 2007, 128–131)

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The seven-page spread in the October 2007 UK issue of women's magazine *Marie Claire*, from which the above quote is taken, opens with a close-up of Angelina Jolie's face looking at us, life size and in glossy colour. It is a look of quasi-flirtatious intimacy, one you might give those you want to be close to you – which, in Jolie's case, is *us*. The confessional and intimate nature of the interview with the Hollywood actress is emphasised by the article's title, "Angelina – from the heart". Through look and language, the magazine is promising that the distance between us and the star will shrink through sheer emotional access. It claims that the distance between us and the superstar can be foreshortened through the magazine's mediation of confessional celebrity intimacy.

What partly signifies Angelina Jolie's "heartfelt" intimacy in this article, alongside her attitude to her career and feelings for her partner, is her relationship to her humanitarian and charity work, or to what might be called "celebrity do-gooding". The roles of charity-giver and humanitarian are not just presented as separate or add-on roles, but as profoundly *interwoven* with the roles of mother, carer, actress and celebrity, as imbricated into the story of her life. Humanitarian acts are also associated with a new maturity of character, and her investment in them is made part of her story of extremes: of her "journey so far" from "Hollywood hellraiser to humanitarian aid worker and doting mother of four". "Do-gooding" becomes both a facet of her image *and* one of a range of Angelina Jolie's "real-life roles" that can be discussed. The specific type of charity and humanitarian work is significant here too. Its transnationalism indicates a globalised sensibility and a cosmopolitan caring, an effect augmented by Jolie's high-profile Benetton-style adoption of a range of differently shaded children from a variety of countries. And her engagement with politically sensitive subjects such as refugees, environmentalism and Darfur marks her as a very modern breed of American liberal.[1]

Jolie is not the only celebrity to talk about charity in this issue of *Marie Claire*, a magazine well known for its glossy liberal cosmopolitanism and for its mixture of high-end fashion and beauty alongside educational articles about global female empowerment and "other" cultures (see Gough-Yates 2003, 118–131). The October issue of the magazine also features an article about actress Scarlett Johanssen's trip with the charity Oxfam to India and Sri Lanka (Johanssen can also be seen, earlier in the magazine, reclining in an orange mini-dress advertising Louis Vuitton bags). The Johanssen article is presented as travelogue: a large part is devoted to the actress's reactions to seeing Oxfam's post-tsunami community work with women in Sri Lanka and educational projects in Indian slums – and an equally large part is devoted to covering how the star "looks amazing throughout the trip – her pale, clear skin glowing as if lit from within" (Garrett 2007, 205).

These examples in themselves indicate something of the different forms of connection that can exist between celebrity media coverage and charitable causes. Whereas the Jolie article is an instance in which charity work is but a component of a narrative about the actress's "real" and "intimate" life, the Johanssen article is an example of a celebrity being deployed to promote a specific campaign for a charity (here, Oxfam) in a place where, arguably, the charity's activities would otherwise not feature so prominently (at considerable length in a glossy women's magazine).

Whilst specific to the magazine genre that is *Marie Claire*, these articles also gesture towards how offering support for global charities has become both practically part of the contemporary celebrity job description and a hallmark of the established

star. For celebrity involvement in charity can be clearly seen across a broad range of contexts. On the Beckhams' recent move to the United States, for example, they were advised by one British newspaper that, if they wanted to be A-listers in Los Angeles, they should pull back on promoting consumer goods like jeans and sunglasses, and instead "try to confine their public appearances to award shows and 'disease parties' (charity fundraisers)" (Young and McLean 2006). In such terms, public displays of support for "the afflicted" are a way for celebrities to appear to raise their profile above the zone of the crudely commercial into the sanctified, quasi-religious realm of altruism and charity, whilst revealing or constructing an added dimension of personality: of compassion and caring. Such confessions of caring frequently take place on a transnational terrain. From star-studded pop concerts aiming to heal the wounds of global poverty, to the obligatory charity photo-shoot, from the adoption of "deprived" African children to the adoption of the role of United Nations "ambassador", contemporary celebrities today use a variety of different routes and roles and emotions to confess that they do, really, truly and intimately care about global social injustice.

If such actions are almost obligatory and par for the celebrity course, they are also routinely and publicly mocked. It is commonplace, as I discuss below, for fun to be poked towards such "charidee" stunts; and such public or media satire acts in part as a kind of critical recognition of the explicitly implicit promotional role such charity work provides for the celebrity. Yet despite (or indeed, perhaps because of) the commonplace nature of such public discourse, there has been relatively little academic exploration of such confessions of celebrity caring. In this article, I contend that the subject of cosmopolitan celebrity caring is itself worthy of further exploration. Whilst the subject might be approached in a number of different ways, this paper attempts to open it up a little further by considering some of the broader contexts for, and mediated negotiations with, celebrity confessions and protestations of charitable caring. To do so, it begins by linking together, in interdisciplinary fashion, theories of the social power of celebrity (Couldry 2000; Holmes and Redmond 2006; Rojek 2001) with those of the post-Fordist cultural turn (Hall 1997; Harvey 1989; Slater and Tonkiss 2000) to provide a context for the perceived exploitations and benefits of celebrity charity. Next it considers popular negotiations with the subject, and connecting these themes to emergent work on the mediation of distant suffering (Boltanski 1999; Chouliarki 2006) and recent debates around cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006; Cheah and Robbins 1998). By discussing the historical rise of celebrity charity, public media parodies of the phenomenon and arguments as to its validity and worth, the paper attempts to explore what we might term as the public fashioning of the globalised "celebrity soul".

The historical rise of celebrity charity

"It is true that the total amount raised by Live Aid and Band Aid was less than five per cent of the government overseas aid budget for that year," said Eamonn Salt.
Everyone stared at him, taking it all in.
"But Live Aid did a lot of good, didn't it?" said Julian, looking hurt.
"Yeah," said Dave Rufford expansively.
"Of course, Live Aid was a tremendous help," said Edwina Roper. "It completely changed the face of giving. It was tremendous fun. It opened up a new sector of young donors which didn't exist before. It did tremendous things for all the agencies."

"Yeah. It was like this rebellion. We were telling the Tories, "Look, cunts, we're not 'avin this," said Dave.

"Oh yes, it had its moment." Corinna was yawning through her nose, "but the moment has passed. Now every two-bit model in the business is gushing around the world doing photo-shoots with the starving. It's gross." (Fielding 1994)

Whilst they have a long history (one often-cited example being Audrey Hepburn's work for UNICEF), celebrity involvements with charitable and "humanitarian" causes have become more widespread over the past two decades in the West. Helen Fielding's (pre-*Bridget Jones*) novel *Cause Celeb* dramatises this moment of expansion and transition. As one of its characters tells the heroine, "Celebrities have been promoting causes since the First World War, but you watch: this will become huge. In five year's time no cause will be complete without an accompanying star to promote it" (Fielding 1994, 29). The novel, whose dramatic tension hinges on the discrepancies between life in famine-strewn areas of Africa and champagne-strewn zones of celebrity London, voices a number of sentiments about celebrity and charity that have a much wider currency – as can be seen in the scene above, in which celebrities debate the purpose and merit of working for charitable causes. Here we have the concept that celebrity do-gooding generates a lot of hype and PR but is relatively insignificant in relation to international and governmental policy. We have the idea that celebrity campaigns have the potential to change public discourse on humanitarian issues; that they have the capacity to refresh the parts of the body politic that "conventional" politics simply cannot reach. And we have the sense that celebrity charity endorsements have become only too common: that they are already so widespread and conventional in their use as to undercut their promotional and social potential.

The expansion of celebrity charity involvement in the 1990s can partly be understood in terms of both the changing natures of the domain of celebrity culture and of those happening to the "third" (or voluntary, or charity) sector. From the 1980s in particular, the third sector began to expend much more time, money and energy on marketing and branding (Kotler and Andreasan 1991). This often involved, for non-governmental organisations and charities, the outsourcing of brand identity and marketing campaigns to separate agencies, a rising general interest in more "sophisticated" and calibrated marketing techniques, and an engagement with the field that came to be known as "social marketing". It was possible to view social marketing in a variety of ways – as the voluntary sector at last waking up to the need to more effectively communicate and promote its agendas, as the opportunistic expansion of business marketing into colonising new areas, or some third-way marriage of the two.

Whichever interpretation, as the expanding range of books on the subject made clear (Bruce 2005; Landry et al. 1985; Sergeant 1999), the engagement with marketing, branding and PR techniques in order to sell social causes had become, for this sector, a seriously significant practice, augmented in the United Kingdom by the shake-up of charity legislation that made charities more competitive (see Moor 2007, 77–82). It is against this backdrop – of the expansion of marketing practice in the voluntary and third sector – that the expanding and more divergent use of celebrity involvement in charity can, in one important way, be understood.

From another angle, the shifting sands of celebrity culture have also contributed to shaping the contemporary character of celebrity charity involvement. The expansion of celebrity-based media entertainment in the 1990s, in particular through forms such as celebrity reality television (Andrejevic 2004; Biressi and Nunn 2005) and the growth in celebrity-oriented magazines (Feasey 2006; Holmes 2005), provided more outlets for the public fashioning of stars and wannabe stars. For the celebrity, a close association with charity acts, in marketing terms, as a kind of "brand extension". As Grant McCracken says of celebrity endorsements more generally, they work through a process of "image meaning transfer" (McCracken 1983, 310–321), through which the brand is associated with the attributes of the celebrity, and *vice versa*. Charity endorsement can clearly emphasise facets of a celebrity's persona or character: Scarlett Johanssen's image as an empowered actress is strengthened by being seen to be involved with global feminism, and Angelina Jolie's chosen charities imbue her with a contemporary kind of transnational concern (their topical and mildly controversial nature adding to her image of a mainstream actress with a risk-taking edge). In addition, via charity endorsements, celebrities get wider exposure through an array of different media platforms, as celebrity charity involvement usually generates "through-the-line" forms of promotion (i.e. associated media coverage via incremental rather than paid-for promotion; see Brierley 1995), such as the feature article about Scarlett Johanssen in India. Put crudely, then, if the celebrity is a brand that requires wide exposure through a number of different media in order to maintain its profile and topical currency, then one extremely cost-effective way is to provide endorsements for a humanitarian cause.

Both of these themes – the expansion of social marketing and the expansion of the public fashioning of celebrities – can clearly be viewed in the context of post-Fordism and the "cultural turn". The widening disparities between rich and poor; the expanding power of corporations in relation to that of the public sector; the increasingly marketing-led agendas of all organisations; and the emphasis on selling through synergistic communication strategies characteristic of the post-Fordist economies and the "cultural turn" (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Hall 1997; Harvey 1989; Slater and Tonkiss 2000) – all clearly create a very fertile climate for celebrity charity endorsement. An understanding of the emphasis on selling through cultural forms and the "need" for celebrities to articulate their intimate emotions might also be thought with reference to Eva Illouz's recent suggestive twist on theories of the cultural turn: that, throughout the twentieth century, "communication" itself became (in Foucault's terms) a new "episteme", a shift indicated by such factors as the rise in the perceived importance of emotional literacy and the increasing primacy given to "corporate communications" (Illouz 2007, 18). Together, these contexts can be used as explanatory frameworks against which the rise of celebrity charity involvement can be understood.

For and against

What are the problems and possibilities of the fruits of this alliance between charity and celebrity? The plus points are perhaps easiest to see, as these tend to be loudly championed. Perhaps the most obvious is that celebrity involvement can raise the profile of a campaign, bringing extra media coverage and attracting new audiences. The involvement of a rash of celebrities in the *Make Poverty History* campaign in

2005 (a coalition launched to change global trade rules, reduce the debt of so-called "developing" countries and thereby narrow the gap between global rich and poor), such as Chris Martin, Minnie Driver, Jamelia, Colin Firth, Bono and Bob Geldof, was widely perceived to have helped galvanise the campaign's popularity and attracted wider audiences to the issue. Similar arguments were made about and used as a rationale for *Live Aid*, *Live Earth* and *Band Aid*.[2]

For smaller campaigns, the involvement of a single celebrity can work to ensure that they do not become so insular that they simply preach to the converted, or participate in a narrow form of what Laclau and Mouffe term "enclave politics" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Celebrity involvement can also work by "demystifying campaign issues, raising funds by encouraging sponsorship and contributions, mobilising public opinion and involvement, contributing to the repositioning an organisation in the public's perception, [and] reinvigorating a long running campaign", in the words of Mediatrust, a UK organisation that works on communication skills for the third sector (Mediatrust 2007).

In these terms, the marriage between celebrity and charity is a happy one. The problems with celebrity charity are, however, less commonly discussed at length, and so it is worth spending some time excavating them in a little more detail. One key problem is the inequality of financial benefit. Such alliances do not necessarily result, relatively speaking, in significantly more money for the needy beneficiaries, particularly in contrast to the money gained by celebrities and corporations, and concerns are sometimes raised that the amount of charity budget devoted to celebrity-related promotions siphons off money from the work of aid. This problem of the inequality of financial benefit is perhaps particularly apparent in cause-related marketing, a strategy through which corporate brand identities link with non-profit organisations for "good causes" on a particular campaign and often to produce a specific product. One example here (others include the pink Sony Walkmans marketed in aid of Breast Cancer Research, or the Tesco "Books for Schools" campaign) is *Product RED*, an initiative set up by U2's Bono and businessman Bobby Shriver, through which companies such as Armani, Apple, the GAP and American Express produce "red" versions of their wares from which a proportion of the sale is donated to The Global Fund, a charity to combat AIDS in Africa. The American Express RED card campaign, to take one subset of the campaign, is promoted by supermodels Elle McPherson and Gisele Bundchen (as well as Bono). One of the 30 corporations that is used to comprise the Dow Jones Industrial Average, American Express is ranked by Interbrand as the 14th most valuable brand in the world (and by business magazine *Fortune* as the 174th largest corporation).[3] Against this, its 1% donation through *Product RED* looks particularly paltry given the amount of added value it reaps through related kudos and media publicity. Indeed, it could be said that both American Express and its associated celebrity endorsers gain out of all proportion through brand association to what they "give back".

Second, celebrity charity endorsement can also impact on agenda-setting. For instance, in 2005 the Hollywood actress Sharon Stone attended the World Economic Forum at Davos and, on hearing the Tanzanian president explain how people were dying from malaria because they lacked basic amenities, stood up and pledged $10,000 and then challenged business leaders in the room to match her. Very quickly – within 10 minutes – $1 million had been pledged; but only a minority of the pledges

were honoured, and the United Nations stepped in to make up the shortfall. As many asked at the time: is Sharon Stone really the person to decide what the United Nations should be spending its money on? (Weber 2006; Sala-i-Martin 2006). The problem here is that the power of celebrity interest can pull aid towards a particular cause that appeals to them and away from others. This is similar to the problems with cause-related marketing, or corporate involvement in charity campaigns; as Inger Stole puts it, causes are selected in terms of how they will provide added value to the brand, which means that non-profit causes that do not appeal to the corporation's target market "are ignored, even if they do vital work, while groups that provide good marketing vehicles receive a disproportional amount of interest" (Stole 2006).[4] Celebrity and corporate cleaving to areas that are deemed to be "safe" topics for their fanbase or consumer constituencies mean that crucial issues are not tackled early enough, and their aid usually tends to focus on symptoms rather than core problems, providing, for example, tools for illiteracy rather than addressing the problem of core funding in schools or economic inequality (Stole 2006; see also Ambramson 2007).

Third, celebrity charity can become part of the problem rather than the solution — or can elide the ways in which they are part of the problem in the first place. For instance, many aid workers argued at the end of 2005 that celebrities had hijacked the *Make Poverty History* campaign. Bob Geldof, for example, glowingly praised the work of the UK's New Labour Government at the G8 summit in July (giving Blair "10 out of 10" on debt relief progress). But the non-governmental organisation the World Development Movement argued that, as the UK Government's target was reached by other countries some time ago, and it had only brought its level of spending back to what it was in the 1960s, such celebrity approval actively worked to *obscure* how little progress had been made. As spokesman Dave Timms put it, "Bob Geldof's comments after the G8 were very unhelpful, because they made people think everything had been achieved" (Frith 2005). The *keenness* of celebrities to make it appear that their campaign has worked – to no small degree so that they can reap the benefits of "success" – can backfire for the cause.

Even more fundamentally, charity causes are often about, or the product of, grinding poverty, whereas celebrities are the embodiments of personalised wealth: a contradiction that makes this relationship, to say the least, problematic. One particularly graphic example here was the outcry by senior UNICEF staff in South Asia over the organisation's involvement in celebrity campaigns and corporate tie-ins. In 2006, UNICEF launched an "exclusive" Christmas gift collection together with Gucci, an initiative for which Hollywood actress Jennifer Connelly supplied the "face". Furious UNICEF staff in Pakistan and India pointed out that the owners of Gucci have strong links with sweatshops in Mumbai and Karachi. The anti-sweatshop pressure group Look Behind the Label argued that, therefore, the association between UNICEF and Gucci was "like a soldier shooting someone, then giving them a bandage and taking credit for their survival" (see McDougall 2006). UNICEF's New Delhi employees took this opportunity to argue that such celebrity and corporate involvement was diverting their organisation from the job in hand, damaging UNICEF's integrity, as well as re-shaping the discursive meaning and public understanding of the organisation and its work. As they put it:

[i]t's bad enough having to accommodate celebrities and their entourage in the aftermath of every major humanitarian disaster. But when most people think of the UN now they think of Angelina Jolie on a crusade, not the work that goes on in the field after humanitarian disasters or on a long-term preventative level. Celebrity is at the heart of every UNICEF campaign these days and the association is being sold incredibly cheaply. (McDougall 2006, 227)

Interestingly, the association between celebrity and corporate endorsement is here read as of a piece: both are sites of fabulous wealth that appear to "aid" humanitarian and charitable work, but by using such activity and working to accrue more power for their own interests they are understood as distorting the agenda towards their own ends.

Doing it for themselves

However, the idea that celebrities might be involved in charity causes as a means of strengthening their own image and furthering their own careers is in many ways common knowledge. "Smashie and Nicey", for instance, Paul Whitehouse and Harry Enfield's 1990s comic parody of washed-up Radio 1 DJs, featured the bland and self-important stars constantly dropping their "many works of charidee" into conversation while loudly protesting that they "don't like to talk about it" (BBC 1994). The sketch lampooned the double standard, or hypocrisy, around celebrity charity: that it is presented as a selfless, modest act but is obviously being used to help the celebrity persona – and, in Smashie and Nicey's case, is part of their wider continual attempt to boost their flagging careers. In this case, however, it is clearly an *unsuccessful* attempt: in one sketch, Nicey begs the BBC to be allowed to work on any show or station, even the fictitious "digital Radio 8".[5] In some ways, however – and this of course fits well with the joke – Enfield and Whitehouse's characters look like a version of celebrity charity involvement from an earlier era. For Smashie and Nicey do not talk about what type of charity it is, or how it relates to their personal lives to any significant degree. They do not do the charity celebrity confessional in the same intricately detailed way as celebrities like Angelina Jolie.[6]

What was being lampooned by the Smashie and Nicey sketch was the performance of false modesty and the unspoken motives of celebrity in conducting charity work. More recently, the *specificities* of what celebrities gain, and the intertwined promotional complex that celebrity charity is part of, has also become roundly mocked.[7] The second series of Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's BBC sitcom *Extras*, for example, featured a cameo appearance by Chris Martin from the band Coldplay playing himself. (Outside the programme, Martin has been involved with a wide variety of charities, including War on Want, Amnesty, Oxfam and War Child.[8]) In the episode, Martin breezes onto the set of a charity advert, without having a clue what particular charity it is for:

Chris Martin: What is it today?
TV producer: It's for people in the Third World who don't have clean drinking water.
Chris Martin: This screen: are you going to put anything on it?
Producer: We don't know yet.
Chris Martin: Because we have an album coming out. *Greatest Hits*. You could just put a picture of the album cover on it. Simple.

Producer:	I think if we show anything we'll show pictures of people dying because of a lack of clean water.
Chris Martin:	Could they be holding the album? (BBC 2006, episode 4)

Clearly, the joke here revolves around Martin's inappropriate self-absorption and – above all – his use of any available promotional medium to increase the visibility of himself as celebrity and the album he is selling. This joke is extended throughout his cameo appearance. As the scene continues, he opens his jacket to reveal a *Coldplay: Greatest Hits* t-shirt. Sizing up charity ad co-star Andy Millman as a mid-range celebrity from a television sitcom with five million or so viewers, Martin announces off-hand that he could do a star turn on the show, to the glee of the producer and the incredulity of Millman (who cannot see how on earth Chris Martin could appear on a sitcom set in Wigan about factory work). *Extras* presents Chris Martin the celebrity as a single-minded promotional machine, using any available source to extend himself in the public eye and imagination; and a star for whom charity is just another interchangeable springboard or lever (and is not of any particular interest or importance other than that). The scene plays on this notion of celebrity self-promotion's relationship to an insular narcissism by showing Martin as almost autistically unworldly in his consciousness of anything outside the mechanics of self-promotion: "can we get on with this? I've got AIDS and Alzheimers and landmines this afternoon and I wanna get back to *Deal or No Deal*. Plus Gwyneth's making drumsticks".

Like *The Office*, which might be thought of as dramatising the potential failure of post-Fordist discourses of business empowerment through the sheer embarrassing awfulness of David Brent (Gilroy 2004, 150; Couldry and Littler 2008), *Extras* holds up another seminal contemporary discourse – celebrity – and finds it to be both ludicrous and problematic. It hones in on the spaces where celebrity cultures, in the broadest sense of the term (for they target both achieved and wannabe celebrity), can been seen not as emancipatory cultures to aspire to, but rather as, up close, distinctively unglamorous and fairly pathetic.

By appearing in *Extras* as himself, in performing Gervais and Merchant's pastiche of his celebrity self and his celebrity involvement in charity, Chris Martin also demonstrates his reflexivity and his self-depreciating sense of humour. From David Bowie to Orlando Bloom to Keith Chegwin, celebrities have keenly signed up to appear on this show that more often than not pokes fun at their own image and zones in on their weak spots. As Adrienne Lai argues (whilst discussing how Winona Ryder mined her "flaws" by becoming involved in fashion adverts that made jokes about her shoplifting), celebrities' openness and willingness to appear vulnerable can

> be interpreted as honesty or bravery. The positive effects of gaining the public's sympathy and estimation may well more than compensate for the negative effects of an embarrassing or unattractive depiction [...] along with the dictum "there is no such thing as bad publicity". (Lai 2006, 225)

Whilst *Extras* undeniably uses and participates in celebrity cultures, it is noteworthy for the extent to which it critiques these cultures from a number of different angles. The programme dwells on the gaps between hot-shot celebrities and "unknowns", and in doing so hones in on the boundaries and faultlines of what Nick Couldry has called "the place of media power" (Couldry 2000). In many respects, the celebrity

willingness to engage in self-depreciation that it depicts and produces involves a return to the role of "celebrity modesty" so beloved of Smashie and Nicey. But it is also a different kind of critique in that it details the sheer *scale* of celebrity charity activity (represented by Martin flitting between causes) and in that it more astringently satirises the tighter *weave* of cross-promotional synergies being fashioned than in the past. The satire is more cutting, and so the degree to which the celebrity involves themselves entails both greater "debasements" and greater rewards for being a good sport. In other words: the stakes have become higher. This zone of celebrity do-gooding is heightened; it becomes a faultline, an area drawn to both in terms of increased activity within it and commentary about it. Even to those who disparage it, it matters.

Zones of contestation and the celebrity soul

As both *Extras* and the *Marie Claire* interviews also indicate, conversations or discourses about celebrity charity are important because they deal with some of the most harshly discrepant zones of global power and tend to express dominant currencies of thought about such global inequalities and about how they are and might be reproduced and combated. Three key figures are often present in discussion around this issue: the celebrity (mainly belonging to the global West/ North); their impoverished Others (often belonging to either "the rest" of the world, or to the zones Manuel Castells terms "fourth worlds"); and the "neutral" position of the non-destitute, non-celebrity "ordinary" subject (Castells 1998, 164–165). The communicative cultural flows circulating *between* them tell us something of how these relationships of power are maintained and how the possibilities of change to global injustices are both imagined and disavowed.

In a global context, the rise of the phenomenon of celebrity charity can be situated in a broader, and predominantly Western, neoliberal culture of individualisation (Bauman 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). The "hyperindividualism" of celebrity in general, as a number of commentators have made clear, is structurally antithetical to democracy (Dyer 1998, 2004; Gilbert 2004), and celebrity charity's positioning as a potential solution to social inequalities tends to both exacerbate and highlight this division. For example, in an extremely insightful article comparing Mother Theresa and Princess Diana (one of the few pieces of existing critical academic work to discuss celebrity and charity) Arvind Rajagopal notes that Diana's successful public profile was enabled by the context of an entrepreneurial neoliberal culture in which the individual was increasingly being positioned as the solution to social ills whilst state welfare was being scaled back. Fascinatingly, he argues that Mother Theresa never achieved anything like the levels of celebrity in India that she did in Europe and the USA, and that she mainly functioned as a neo-colonial figure of compassion and caring for the West: as an exported model of individualised solutions to social problems, as a figure through which India could be patronised and imperial dynamics negated (Rajagopal 1999, 126–141). Such examples highlight celebrity charity's participation in an economy of hyperindividualised solutions to broader social and cultural problems. Interestingly, Rajagopal's argument also raises the question of how these celebrity positions are gendered. For the longstanding historical associations between femininity, empathy and emotions is clearly mobilised in Angelina Jolie's, Mother Theresa's and Princess Diana's performances

of benevolence, and shapes the force and impact of their confessions of caring. If such an association between femininity, celebrity and compassion can also work to be pitted against a more coercive, masculine and public conception of state power, as Rajagopal points out (1999, 127), it can also be used to pillory female stars for intervening in global affairs or lead them to not be taken as seriously as male celebrities (as with the opprobrium heaped on Geri Halliwell for her charity work, for example).

At the same time as it heightens processes of neo-liberal individualisation, however, celebrity do-gooding is a response to suffering, and this should not be underestimated. Its affective resonance can be strong and palpable. As Sean Redmond has discussed, the damaged star or celebrity often mirrors or resonates with the socially and culturally impoverished, and so different ends of the equation of the anomie of late capitalism can create stories that end up relating to one another (Redmond 2006, 41). Similarly, the empathetic suffering performed by the celebrity star who "feels the pain" of the person in need can spread this feeling with any number of consequences, from sarcasm to the jolt that makes someone engage more thoroughly with the possibilities for justice. But as Luc Boltanski puts it, to create the ground for a more progressive cosmopolitanism, media forms need to show people "not only in the passivity of suffering, but also in the action they take to confront and escape it" (Boltanski 1999, 190).[9]

In *Distant Suffering*, drawing on and extending theories developed by Hannah Arendt, Boltanski suggests that we live in a culture that is primarily dominated by a politics of pity rather than a politics of justice. Boltanski is keen not to dismiss the politics of pity entirely, as there are strands of it he thinks may act as potential conduits for social change, and because a politics of pity is better than ignoring suffering (Boltanski 1999, 180–181), but he is nonetheless fairly elegantly scathing of its historical ineffectivity. For Boltanski, a politics of pity has characterised European culture since the time of the French Revolution, building on strains of thought forged in the Enlightenment. A politics of pity, Boltanski writes, is guided by the sense that inequalities are primarily about *luck*, and its responses are predicated on the *urgency* of action, with questions of social justice primarily being left outside of the equation (Boltanski 1999).[10]

This idea of charity being primarily about luck and fortune, rather than social politics and justice, is a very useful one. Boltanski is not discussing celebrities, but rather the wider sites of cultural response to "distant suffering". But if we apply his analysis to celebrity charity it resonates as a familiar register. Pity is often used as a discursive mode to mediate between celebrity and suffering: the extremities involved foreground the starkness of the opposition between fabulous celebrity wealth and grinding poverty. The fantasy that these things *are not* connected, sustained by the wish not to have to wish away privilege, often works through the register of pity rather than engagement with political questions of cause, effect and social justice.

However, some forms of recent celebrity involvement in charity might seem to question the idea that a politics of pity is predominant. The language of justice is very much to the fore of campaigns such as *Make Poverty History*, for example (just as it was with *Live Aid*), where passionate demands to change the system and a recurrence of the word "justice" is unmistakable. Philip Drake and Michael Higgins point out in their analysis of Bono's celebrity politics that justice is often foregrounded in his speeches about changing the system (Drake and Higgins 2006,

92); and, to return to the *Marie Claire* interview with Angelina Jolie, the article includes a report that she "can't hide her annoyance" when talking about those in charge of the clean-up in New Orleans and argues that "big decisions aren't being made on a higher level" (Connelly 2007, 131).

But as Priyamvada Gopal points out in her insightful article on *Make Poverty History*, narratives of "justice" can be at one and the same time both a constructive step and destructively shallow in their use. (Notably, this also chimes with the openness of Boltanski's analysis of the twisted contortions of justice and pity in contemporary culture.) As Gopal argues, whilst *Make Poverty History*:

> brought tens of thousands of young people to at least a minimal awareness of "Third World debt" and so-called free trade as issues [...] there is also no doubt that the very success of th[e] mobilization has relied on a discursive enactment of concern accompanied by a insistent and comforting disavowal of material implication. (Gopal 2006, 97)

Make Poverty History utilised the myth of economic growth as a solution to grinding poverty, she writes, which was imagined as being able to be accessed once a few reforms were out of the way. In doing so, the campaign often, although not uniformly, deployed a discourse of corporate globalisation and neoimperalism (Gopal 2006, 91–97).

We might extend and draw some conclusions from these points by understanding celebrity confessions of caring, as manifest through media articles about charity work or interviews in which the star discloses how they really care deeply for global injustice, with recourse to Nietzsche's conception of the soul. For Nietzsche, "the soul" was a dogma, a means by which the weak deceive themselves into power by turning their deficiencies inwards, and interpreting this as merit (Nietszche 1887, 26). If we read the aristocracy-loving Nietzsche against the grain of himself, as it were, the construction of the celebrity as having a caring, compassionate soul might similarly be read as a means to compensate for and legitimate weakness: a weakness in a wider system. For whilst the hyperindividualism of celebrity is structurally antithetical to democracy, then there is also, to an extent, as we have seen in the pastiche of celebrity caring, widespread *understanding* of this social weakness. In these terms, the *performance* of celebrity soul, or the performance of the internalisation of social anguish, becomes a necessary part of contemporary celebrity, acting as an attempt to *gesturally* redress the insecurities of the system it is part of. Such a performance can be enacted, as here, in terms of *fortune* and pity rather than acting to confront a system of wealth and power they are part of. But it can also be done, as Gopal shows, in terms that mobilise the language of *justice*, which can acknowledge the structural inequalities in global social systems whilst simultaneously denying the material implications of the wealth of the star and how they contribute to the spaces where suffering takes place. In either way, the intimacy, the confession of *truly* caring, the performance of a celebrity "soul", attempts to present itself as plugging the gap.

Notes

1. The article also discusses how, "[r]eflecting the degree to which the personal and political are, for them, inextricable, Jolie and Pitt purchased a home at yet another site of

unimaginable devastation, New Orleans, where Pitt has been labouring to put his love of green architecture and construction to good use'' (Connelly 2007, 131).

2. See, for example, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4234811.stm

3. "The Most Powerful Brands 2006", Business Week/Interbrand. http://bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2006/ (accessed March 2007).

4. Stole points out that this means causes that might frighten the target market can be ignored: for example, in the early 1990s, AIDs-related charities were completely ignored because the link to homosexuality was thought to frighten too many consumers.

5. There is also a good summary of the show on Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smashie_and_Niceyhttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smashie_and_Nicey (accessed November 2007).

6. Smashie and Nicey are kind of oppositional blood brothers to another seminal Harry Enfield character from that time, *Loadsamoney!* – the shell-suit wearing, wads-of-cash waving beneficiary of Thatcherite deregulation. *Loadsamoney!* was killed off whilst presenting Comic Relief with their "largest cheque of the night" – a physically enormous oversized cheque for 10 p.

7. An early example of this is the anarcho-punk band Chumbawumba's 1986 single *Pictures of Starving Children Sell Records*, a pastiche and rejoinder to the collection of pop stars on *Band Aid's* single.

8. See http://www.looktothestars.org/celebrity/486-chris-martin. "Look to the Stars" describes itself as a site that was set up "to publicize the many wonderful things that celebrities are doing to help the world. We hope to help charities by inspiring their celebrity supporters' fans to follow their heroes' example".

9. The Fairtrade Foundation's recent shift from featuring different celebrities each month on the cover of its magazine to featuring Fairtrade farmers is one example of moving in this direction (Fairtrade Foundation 2007).

10. Boltanski also draws on Charles Taylor to discuss the dominance of contemporary attempts to present an "authentic" version of the self, which also resonates with demonstrations of celebrity caring.

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