MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Performed Realities and Intertextualities:
The Commodification of Everyday Life and the Celebrification of Everyday People
in Modern Televisual and Digital Cultures

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Stars and Stripes

The "reality celebrity" is a relatively recent construction. Indeed, over the past four decades, reality television programming in its various incarnations (docu-soaps, game-docs, and hybrids thereof) has churned out thousands of reality personalities—some more memorable, and more successful, than others. The reality "star," or "reali-celebrity," though, as a stand-alone concept, finds its origins in the turn of the twenty-first century. In the late 1970s, a new kind of celebrity-oriented literature emerged: one that actually located, and explicated, a "star image system." This so-called system, rooted in early twentieth-century American cinema, accounted for the rise (and eventual fall) of a number of Hollywood actors and actresses. In 1979, Richard Dyer, media and film scholar, published one of the seminal academic texts on this hypothesis: *Stars*. In *Stars*, Dyer articulated a star system that would be interpreted, and re-interpreted, in the celebrity-oriented texts that appeared in *Stars*' wake; at the heart of *Stars*, Dyer contended that the star should be viewed as a three-dimensional construction: as a social phenomenon, as an image, and as a sign. Simply put, Dyer viewed the individual star—specifically, the Hollywood star—as a multi-textual, multi-layered entity that subsumed and reflected public (professional) and private (domestic) identities.

Six years prior to *Stars*' publication, however, the very nature of stardom—that is, the idea that only film stars, pop stars, and politicians could be considered celebrities—was challenged by a group of seven individuals living in Santa Barbara, California. Bill, Pat, Lance, Kevin, Grant, Delilah and Michele Loud, members of an average, middle-class American family, allowed their everyday, unscripted lives to be filmed for a show called *An American Family*. Almost overnight, these ordinary individuals found themselves the subjects of public (and the press's) scrutiny, and the recipients of the sort

of attention—fandom—formerly given to film stars, rock stars, athletes and politicians.

The only difference, though, was that the Louds' celebrated "body of work" was located

in the performance of their everyday lives.

At the time of *Stars'* inception, reality programming had yet to establish itself as a

legitimate, or even nameable, televisual format; *An American Family*, despite its

popularity and critical reception, aired for a single season in 1973, and was, perhaps

surprisingly, left un-duplicated for several decades to come. While the then-anomalous

nature of *An American Family* may account for its theoretical occlusion in celebrity-

oriented texts (such as *Stars*) in the 1970s and 1980s, the recent proliferation of reality

programming and the subsequent rise of the "reality celebrity" at the turn of the past

century necessitate a re-evaluation of Dyer's suggested star image system. In this Major

Research Paper, I will attempt to renegotiate Dyer's star system by reading several

histories in conjunction—the history of the cinema and television star, and the history of

the creation and proliferation reality television—and by testing, and bending, the tenets of

the star image system in the context of reality television participants.

This paper, while firmly rooted in Dyer's star image system, will also incorporate

several narrative (of course, non-fiction) "scenes," based on my own experiences

working with a Toronto-based documentary crew. The documentary, *Peep Me*, which

has been produced by Chocolate Box entertainment for CBC Television, focuses,

primarily, on peep culture and reality programming. *Peep Me* also features *The Peep

Diaries'* author and public intellectual Hal Niedzviecki, documenting, among other

events, his attempt at creating a "lifecast," and his three-day reality TV boot camp

adventure in Simi Valley, California. Needless to say, my six-month internship provided

me with invaluable insights into all things "peep," including reality programming, reality performers, and the Internet's answer to the reality star.

While Hal Niedzviecki was working on his latest semi-academic tome, *The Peep Diaries* (published in June, 2009), he encountered two Canadian documentary filmmakers at a reality television convention in Houston, Texas. The three Canadians got to talking, and they soon realized they were there, at the convention, for the same reason: to try to understand—and document—reality TV "fandom." Niedzviecki, a few years away from being a household name (the convention took place in 2007), remained in contact with the filmmakers, and eventually became a part (in fact, the focus) of the documentary. In August of 2009, Niedzviecki began a "peepcasting" project for the purpose of this documentary; the filmmakers, Jeannette Loakman and Sally Blake, rigged Niedzviecki's home with surveillance equipment—ensuring that their subject's every move would be broadcasted live over the Internet. This kind of lifecasting experiment was popular in the early 2000s, when the so-called "Dot Com boom" enabled exhibitionists and entrepreneurs alike to show the world, via the Internet, whatever they so pleased. Niedzviecki's peepcast, a virtual throwback to pre-millennial networked culture, caught the attention of the local media. Being a writer for *Torontoist*, a Toronto-centric city blog, I decided to interview Niedzviecki about his peepcast—and wound up working as a production/research intern with the documentary crew. For six months, I watched the documentary take shape, and I was able to see first hand what *Peep Me* was all about. Having worked as a print and online journalist for a number of years, I found that being exposed to this "new" medium—the documentary—changed the way I thought about film and film stars. Working with Niedzviecki, and seeing his hypotheses being

translated into scenes for the small screen (that is, CBC television), allowed me to dive into "peep culture," as though I was an embedded academic of sorts.

When I first started studying journalism in the early 2000s at the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, I fell into a fairly common, and perhaps predictable, pattern: I would openly criticize "traditional" reporting, while telling the world (well, my friends and family, at least) that there needed to be more creativity, more *storytelling* in journalism. I was told to Google "gonzo" and "narrative nonfiction." My investigation informed me that there had been dozens, hundreds, thousands of writers who had eschewed traditional reporting techniques for more story- or narrative-oriented methods. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s especially, authors like Hunter S. Thompson, Tom Wolfe, and Joan Didion helped to create an alternative approach to journalism: the *new journalism*. What was "new" about this kind of reporting was that the story, the narrative, was the primary focus (as opposed to the facts the story conveyed), and that the narrator—the author—was able to write from a first-person perspective. These authors, by extension, became characters in their own stories, and the line between fact and fiction became all the more muddied. In a narrative nonfiction workshop, I was able to read and emulate a number of these writers, and I began to realize the value of first-person journalism—and the value of *being there*, in the field (or wherever), the value of experience. Indeed, these writers' own experiences coloured their essays in both tangible and intangible ways, and the details they provided invariably gave their articles more depth, and more life. In an attempt to give my own Major Research Paper more depth, and more life, I will juxtapose each chapter of this work with a "scene," written in narrative non-fiction form; each chapter will begin with a narrative pre-amble of sorts

that ties my "real-life" *Peep Me* experiences to the star-oriented theories that have foregrounded my academic research.

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It's 4:30 in the afternoon, mid-September 2009, and I've been doing the same task all day at Chocolate Box Entertainment's head office: reviewing, and transcribing, footage from Hal Niedzviecki's lifecast. Originally, I was in charge of documenting what took place on the KitchenCam. "Hal picks up pancake from plate. Hal wraps said pancake in a napkin, and tucks it in his shirt pocket," was just one of the observations I'd typed into my Word document. Today, though, I was asked to review the CanCam—that is, footage from Niedzviecki's basement bathroom camera. (And, no, nothing—and I mean *nothing*—was censored.) At first, there was very little to report: "Jeannette [one of the documentary's producers] is attempting to re-angle the camera in the bathroom. Hal pops his head around the corner. Jeannette exits bathroom." And then there were long stretches of false starts: "Camera's sensor picks up movement from a moth. Moth flies around room. Nothing else happens." Of course, the camera also captured more intimate moments: "Hal walks into bathroom. Looks at tongue in mirror. Does his business. Washes hands, dries hands, looks up at camera, and exits room." These moments were, for obvious reasons, the strangest to document; in the "real world"—the one that exists outside of Niedzviecki's lifecast—none of these moments is meant to be captured or documented in any way. Within the context of this lifecast and documentary, though, I was invading Niedzviecki's privacy *with his consent*. But what struck me most when I reviewed this footage was how self-conscious Niedzviecki appeared to be; it was

almost as though Niedzviecki was performing his life for the CanCam—instead of just living it. As I sorted through more of the lifecast footage, it became abundantly clear that Niedzviecki's house had become a film set of sorts, and that the actions captured on camera were informed by Niedzviecki's knowledge of being watched. At one point, the lifecaster began "taking requests" from his viewers, via his blog. Indeed, Niedzviecki brought out his guitar, and sang a few songs to his unseen audience. As Niedzviecki admitted to me when I interviewed him for *Torontoist*, the lifecast had made him self-conscious of being "just an average guy." So he countered these thoughts (which were, of course, substantiated by the individuals who left comments on his blog) by attempting to be more entertaining. Niedzviecki felt, somehow, indebted to his lifecast viewers. He felt as though he "owed" them a certain, perhaps more performative, version of his everyday life.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Decades before PBS's producers began filming *An American Family*, and a good century before Niedzviecki joined forces with Chocolate Box Entertainment's documentary crew, the everyday lives of cinematic subjects had already become sites of interest and intrigue for everyday audiences. As cultural studies scholar Richard Dyer notes in both *Stars* (published in 1979) and *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (published in 1986), a celebrity becomes "celebrated" for reasons both related and unrelated to his or her professional endeavours. To flesh out his star system hypothesis, Dyer focuses his gaze on Old Hollywood stars—that is, on famous film actors and actresses from cinema's so-called Golden Age. Dyer explains that the "star" is actually a composite, or amalgam, of identities; he or she comprises both images that stem from his

or her professional, on-screen work, and images that reflect his or her private, off-screen life. Indeed, according to Dyer, the star's image is inherently polysemic: "a film star's image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star's doings and 'private' life" (Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 2-3). Indeed, Dyer acknowledges that cinema's most successful personalities achieve their "star statuses" through a cross-referencing process of sorts; their image is culled from a mélange of media—not simply the single medium from which their professional lives were built.

Lifestyle, fashion, even where an individual chooses to live (e.g. a mansion in the Hollywood Hills, or a small flat in New York City) contribute to each star's composite image, particularly in terms of how each star's personality is perceived by, and presented to, the public at large. Although Dyer does name a number of stars whose images fall into definitively different categories ("The Good Joe," "The Tough Guy," "The Pin-Up," "The Rebel," and "The Independent Woman"), the author suggests that these social types all stem from the same overarching category: that of the *American Dream*. The American Dream, according to Dyer, is a myth of sorts that is organized "around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness" (*Stars*, 35). And the stars upon whom Dyer fixes his gaze are the American Dream incarnate(s); their identities are constructed around their proximity to production and consumption, success and failure, ordinary- and extraordinary-ness.

Citing Leo Lowenthal's essay "The Triumph of Mass Idols," a study of magazine biographies that was published in 1943, Dyer identifies a shift in stars' identities: at the

turn of the twentieth century, those who were profiled in popular magazines were, roughly, considered "idols of production," whereas those who were featured in these same kinds of publications forty years later were labeled "idols of consumption" (*Stars*, 39). Simply put, in 1901, there was a demand for "real stories" that centred on the lives of "people who were interesting because they had achieved something in the world, made their own way, worked their way to the top, were useful to society: bankers, politicians, artists, inventors, businessmen" (*Stars*, 39.). When the 1940s rolled around, though, magazine heroes had morphed into idols of consumption; "Almost everyone [featured in these biographies] is directly, or indirectly related to the sphere of leisure time," wrote Lowenthal, explaining that biographies of Hollywood cinema stars had all but eclipsed those of bankers or businessmen (Lowenthal, 135). Lowenthal also notes that there was a "tremendous increase" in the production and consumption of biographies, in general, over the course of the early-to-mid twentieth century; between 1900 and 1940, magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* had quadrupled their biographical content (Lowenthal, 125). Of course, this press coverage also coincided with publicity efforts on the behalf of the film studios. Paul McDonald explains that, during the 1930s and 1940s, "[t]alent development departments cultivated the supply of new stars and the images of stars were circulated through campaigns orchestrated by publicity departments" (McDonald, 103). Simply put, mainstream press agents were taking their queues from the studios' publicity departments, and images of "idols of consumption" were being reproduced at an exponential rate.

Although Hollywood studios underwent significant changes in the early twentieth century, the concept—or "myth"—of success remained steady. Indeed, Dyer posits that

the "general meaning of the myth of success is that American society is sufficiently open

for anyone to get to the top, regardless of rank" (*Stars*, 42). Furthermore, this "myth" is

perpetuated by the belief that "the class system, the old-boy network" does not determine

one's fate in America (*ibid.*) Instead, one's fate is determined by a handful of what Dyer

calls "ambiguous" factors:

> Particularly as developed in the star system, the success myth tries to
>
> orchestrate several contradictory elements: that ordinariness is the
>
> hallmark of the star; that the system rewards talent and 'specialness;' and
>
> that luck, 'breaks,' which may happen to anyone, typify the career of the
>
> star; and that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom.
>
> Some stars reconcile all four elements, while with others only some
>
> aspects are emphasized. Stardom as a whole holds all four things to be
>
> true. (*Stars*, 42)

This seemingly contradictory set of "star" principles speaks to the notion that there is

something almost *democratic* about the process of becoming a star; the Marilyn Monroes

and Marlon Brandos of this world were not predisposed to celebrity—and nor were they

born into stardom. They, once-ordinary Americans, "laboured" for their star statuses.

Adding yet another element seeming incongruity to the star system, it is the "leisurely"

images of these individuals (as identified by Lowenthal) that help sustain the

"hardworking" star's celebrity status.

An offshoot, perhaps, of this success myth is the ordinary/extraordinary

dichotomy subsumed in the individual star's identity. Dyer suggests that stars are

"dissolved" into superlatives, and this dissolution—into one category of greatness or

another—is what ultimately elevates an individual to the realm of the extraordinary. Whether a star is known for being "the most beautiful, the most expensive, [or] the most sexy," the upshot of this renown is that the star in question becomes the superlative with which he or she has been associated; thus, Dyer is able to contend that the star belongs to a different ontological category, and a "different order of being" (*Stars*, 43).

Daniel Boorstin, a contemporary of Dyer's, claims that this "order of being" embodied by celebrities is categorically inferior to that which was, at least historically, bestowed upon heroes. Indeed, in *The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events In America* (1972), Boorstin takes care to differentiate the today's postmodern "celebrity" from yesterday's "hero." A hero, he contends, is a "self-made" individual who is, or was, deserving of his or her title; a celebrity, though, is manufactured by the media, and is thus lower on the proverbial totem pole of idols: "The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media" (Boorstin, 81). This is not to say, however, that the hero—and the hero's image—was not reproduced in a variety of texts: "The hero is made by folklore, sacred texts, and history books," writes Boorstin, "but the celebrity is the creature of gossip, of public opinion, of magazines, newspapers, and the ephemeral images of movie and television screen" (Boorstin, 82). Indeed, from Boorstin's description of the hero we are able to see yet another polysemic figure—an individual whose composite legacy was formed from "folklore" and "sacred texts." While Boorstin's objective may have been to show his readers just how *different* these heroes are from today's media-made celebrities, he also revealed one telling similarity: that of the extra-textual "stories" that sustain a hero's—or celebrity's—image. Simply put, a history book was to the hero what a gossip

magazine is to the celebrity; each text stands to supplement, and further shape, the individual's image.

Media and cultural studies scholar P. David Marshall expands upon this extra-textual notion in *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. First published in 1997, this work maps out the meaning of the "public individual," and provides a re-envisioned version of the star image system. Marshall supports Dyer's thesis (that is, Dyer's assertion that a star's image is inherently polysemic), and suggests that *intertextuality* is what sets today's celebrities apart from the masses:

> The celebrity, in fact, is by definition a fundamentally intertexutual sign. Without the domain of interpretive writing on cultural artifacts, the development of the celebrity personality would be stunted. The descriptions of the connections between celebrities' "real" lives and their working lives as actors, singers, or television news readers are what configure the celebrity status. These secondary sources are primary for deepening the meaning of celebrity signs and thereby providing the connecting fibers to the culture.   (Marshall, 58)

Indeed, these secondary layers of meaning help us, as audiences and consumers, select a "real" identity to accompany a star's on-screen personality. In *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, edited by Marshall and published in 2006, Marshall suggests that there is a "tertiary" factor that influences a star's image: "The meaning of a celebrity is a combination of some primary texts such as a film, secondary texts such as interviews and paparazzi photos, and tertiary audience work on the meaning of these various texts" (Marshall, 179). Simply put, it is up to the audience to decode and negotiate the "layers

and layers of texts" presented before us—to ascribe meaning to texts. This negotiation by the audience ultimately serves to "fossilize or instantiate the celebrity into a particular type of character," or conversely, to "allow for the transformation of the dominant meaning of the public individual" (*ibid.*).

Of course, one also has to take into account the means by which these "star images" can be, and have been, conveyed; the "folklore, sacred texts, and history books" that once propagated Boorstin's heroes' public personas have been replaced with a plethora of modern texts and media. In *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame And Its History* (1986), written by cultural academic and historian Leo Braudy, the author identifies the years that followed World War Two as revolutionary insofar as media technologies (and texts) were concerned. Braudy contends that, post- World War Two, the "increasing number and sophistication of the ways information is brought to us" has expanded "the ways of being known" (Braudy, 3). Furthermore, Braudy suggests that these augmented "ways of being known" have also led to the intensification of the star image that is being projected, and the increase of the "number of individuals celebrated" (Braudy, 4). Indeed, Braudy underscores the intertextual reality of those who find "fame" in their endeavours: "[f]amous people glow, it's often said, and it's a glow that comes from the number of times we have seen the images of their faces, now superimposed on the living flesh before us—not a radiation of divinity but the feverish effect of repeated impacts of a face upon our eyes" (Braudy, 6). In an "afterward," added by Braudy nearly a decade after the *The Frenzy of Renown* was initially published, the author likens this "glow" to Walter Benjamin's theory of textual aura. Aura, as Benjamin explicates in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," "withers" when a work of art is

copied or reproduced (Benjamin, 19). Indeed, Benjamin sees aura (which he also describes as the "here and now" of an object) as inextricably tied to the authenticity of a work, and decrees that *"[t]he whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction"* (Benjamin, 20). Braudy, however, claims postmodernity—specifically, reproducibility in the age of postmodern fame—has actually created "new" kind of aura: "In the 1920s Walter Benjamin argued that the mechanical reproduction of art had destroyed its "aura" of separateness and singularity. But now it seems that those early movies and magazines—and the consumer world generally that Benjamin criticized—were actually creating a new kind of aura. In it intimacy and distance became bizarrely mingled" (Braudy, 605). Whereas a work of art's "here and now" withers upon reproduction, a star's aura—or "glow"—is actually augmented in the process of propagation.

Another star-related phenomenon that emerged in the early twentieth century is what Jackie Stacey, author of "Feminine Fascinations: A Question of Identification," calls "extra-cinematic identificatory practices." Writing in 1994, Stacey claims that, in the early-to-mid twentieth century, individuals—especially young women—began to mimic the lifestyles and leisure practices of screen stars; instead of mimicking scenes from a movie, or pretending to be popular characters on radio or television shows, some children incorporated approximations of stars' private lives and preferences into their childhood games. Stacey, who interviewed several hundred women who had been keen cinema-goers in the 1940s and 1950s, includes a telling anecdote, recited by Mary E. Wilson (one of these (now-) grown children):

> [There] was a massive open-cast coal site just at the tip of our estate—
>
> there were nine of us girls—and we would go to the site after school, and
>
> play on the mounds of soil removed from the site. The mounds were
>
> known to us as 'Beverly Hills' and we all had lots of fun there. Each of us
>
> had our own spot where the soil was made into a round—and that was our
>
> mansion. We played there for hours—visiting one mansion after another
>
> and each being our own favourite film star.   (Stacey, 273)

Here, in Wilson's recollection (which, unfortunately, is not accompanied by any

biographical information save for her name and confirmation that she was an adolescent

during the nineteen-forties), one of the extra-textual effects of the star's reproduced

image can be glimpsed: secondary star texts become interwoven with the autobiographies

and memories of "average folk." Stars' personal lives become sites of mimicry and

exploration in our own narratives.

As Paul McDonald notes in the introduction to *The Star System: Hollywood's*

Production of Popular Identities, Dyer and his cultural contemporaries are largely

concerned with the semiotic impact of the star image, and privilege iconic considerations

over industrial ones. The star system, as McDonald sees it, subsumes the "effect of

image and industry" (McDonald, 2). By borrowing some of the methodologies sampled

in *Stars* and *Heavenly Bodies*, McDonald provides a complimentary examination of the

economic impact of "stardom" as such. Like Dyer, McDonald supports his assertions

with a handful of Old Hollywood case studies. And, like Dyer, McDonald roots his

analyses in history; the "star" is positioned as a product of industrial evolution within the

film and, to a lesser extent, the theatre business.

In this industry-oriented examination of stardom, the star's image is still the primary site of inquiry; what McDonald underscores, though, is the *utility* of the star's polysemic identity. Indeed, including—and subsequently promoting—an established star in one's film can help mitigate production and distribution risks:

> Distributors use the presence of stars to sell films to exhibitors in domestic and overseas markets. Exhibitors, who own and run the theatres showing films, are attracted to films with stars because it is believed the presence of stars help to draw audiences to films. In this circuit of commercial exchange, the star therefore becomes a form of capital, that is to say a form of asset deployed with the intention of gaining advantage in the entertainment market and making profits.   (McDonald, 5)

Thus, the star is not simply a labourer; he or she becomes a commodity whose "value" is extended into the promotion and distribution processes long after his or her lines have been recited and captured on film. McDonald also notes that audiences do not have access to the "real person" behind the star's image; what is offered to mass markets via films, promotional appearances and even fan magazines is "a collection of images, words and sounds which are taken to stand in for the person" (McDonald, 6). This sentiment is also echoed in *Stars*, of course: Dyer suggests that the star's image is a "complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs... [which are] manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media text" (*Stars*, 38).

McDonald's industrial concerns are echoed, and historicized, in Kimbrew McLeod's article "The Private Ownership of People." McLeod provides a genealogy of the ownership of individual stars' images, and traces the extra-textual reproduction of

stars'—and heroes'—images back to the rise of the Roman Empire. Caesar, Augustus, and Alexander, claims McLeod, were all able to take "advantage of the publicity" value of having their likenesses reproduced on coins and sculptures (McLeod, 650). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the "sale and distribution of the likenesses of celebrities had become big business," and creative individuals—like Josiah Wedgwood—were profiting from artistic reproductions of stars' images. Indeed, even Ben Franklin's image saw its fair share of reincarnations: his face appeared on fans and perfume bottles, and his features were reproduced in engravings, sculptures, and busts (McLeod, 651). By the early twentieth century, some celebrities began to protest the reproduction of their likenesses (for which they, themselves, saw no compensation). Shirley Temple, for example, managed to obtain the rights to her personal image: "At the height of her fame in the 1930s, Shirley Temple was able to secure merchandising arrangements that were disconnected from the studio she worked for in order to personally profit from the sale and distribution of her image (McLeod, 653). Two decades later, this legal "right" was extended to all celebrities: they could, thanks to the U.S. Court of Appeals, invoke "the right of publicity" in the face of "unauthorized commercial appropriation" (*ibid.*). Subsequently, celebrity singer Bette Middler brought—and won—suit against Ford Motors for using a "deliberate imitation" of the artist. Similar lawsuits were won by Ed Sullivan, Johnny Carson, Vanna White and Tom Waits (McLeod, 654).

In interpreting this data, McLeod suggests that the "right of publicity" gives celebrities the *legal right* to manage their own images; the right of publicity "centralizes the celebrity's decision-making power in determining what he or she 'means' to an audience by allowing that celebrity the ability to decide what parts of his or her image to

magnify, what parts to distort, and what parts to delete" (McLeod, 654). Thus, McLeod

contends that an audience's active engagement with star texts is curtailed by this

"contemporary legal climate." In a sea of semiotic readings of star images, McLeod's

data-based hypothesis serves as a refreshing reminder that there are tangible, and

actionable, repercussions when a star's image is (at least unlawfully) reproduced. True,

this kind of image policing might reduce some of the "tertiary audience work" that P.

David Marshall acknowledges in his anthology of celebrity-related essays, but it also

helps the individual star maintain at least a semblance of image autonomy.

A hero, a star, a celebrity. All of these titles coincide with multiple images, and

multiple texts that accumulate over a "public individual's" lifetime. A hero is not simply

the product of his or her political feats, nor is the star the sum of his or her professional

engagements; gossip, slander, rumours, authorized and unauthorized biographies,

interviews, and otherwise "personal" confessions also serve to shape a star's image,

allowing us, as private individuals, the opportunity to select and dismiss certain texts in

our own, tertiary evaluation of a star's image. While this first chapter of my Major

Research Project has focused, primarily, on the history of the star image system—and on

the evolution of the celebrity in the twentieth century—the following two chapters will

attempt to reconcile this polysemic theory with the emergence of the reality star and the

"cewebrity[1]."

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[1] "Cewebrity" is a neologism that has been adopted by academics, journalists and
bloggers alike. A "cewebrity" is, simply, a web celebrity: someone who has achieved
fame (or infamy) through networked, online activity.

Performing the Real

It is a slushy December day, and I am dodging half-frozen puddles on my way to the home of one of Chocolate Box Entertainment's producers. The reason for this chilly trek? I have been charged with the task of picking up Sally Blake's DVR, which contains hundreds of hours of reality-related programming. Today, once the DVR has been retrieved, my field placement tasks will be twofold: I have to "pre-interview"—via telephone—a handful of bloggers and YouTube users, and I also have to watch segments from two weeks' worth of *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood* (hence, the DVR).

The most memorable pre-interview (an off-camera interview conducted with potential documentary subjects which is used to determine their suitability to the project) of the morning involves a prominent Canadian blogger. Her blog, created in the early 1990s, receives approximately ten-thousand "hits" per day. Her one and only topic of discussion? Herself. Hundreds upon hundreds of photos of this woman can be found on her blog, augmenting posts that read like personal diary entries. Indeed, this blogger has, over the past decade, built a small online empire around her own self-obsession, and she was more than obliging when I contacted her regarding an interview. She was so accustomed to having her image reproduced for mass consumption (on her blog, that is), that she was not at all skeptical of Chocolate Box Entertainment's motivations. She answered my questions openly and honestly, and appeared to be unphased by any of the questions I asked of her. "Why do you blog?" I inquire. "Is there anything you won't post about yourself online?" I ask. "What sorts of posts get the most views?" I wonder, aloud. At the end of our considerable phone conversation, though, the blogger said something that took me by surprise: "I'll say whatever you want me to say to be in the

documentary. Let me know—I just want to be in it." While her blog entries made it

fairly clear that "fame" was something to which this woman aspired, I did not expect to

hear such a plea for selection. As I explained to the blogger, her potential inclusion or

exclusion really had little to do with me; the producers would review my notes, scroll

through the blog or YouTube account in question, and select subjects based on a variety

of criteria (including, but not limited to, their pre-interview answers). "Well, do what

you can," she said, again. "Because I really like this kind of stuff." And so our

conversation came to an end. What I had, initially, found most interesting about this

particular blogger was how she had managed to carve out a niche for herself in the

blogosphere—simply by writing about her personal life, and posting pictures of herself

online. What was revealed to me in our conversation, though, was that fame was a major

(if not the only) motivating factor for her; she was even willing to change her own

story—that is, to lie on camera—to further her media exposure.

An hour or two after hearing this blogger's disconcerting confession, I found

myself in the production company's recreation room, fast-forwarding through hours upon

hours of entertainment "news." I had been asked to find locate particularly compelling

segments that could be vetted, by the producers, for use in the documentary. While

arguably both *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood* subsist off of stories that

pertain to celebrities' everyday lives, I was trolling the airwaves for stories that featured

so-called *reality* celebrities. What I found surprised me: segments that focused on reality

celebrities had nearly eclipsed those that featured film or music stars. I encountered

several updates on the Jon and Kate debacle (Jon and Kate Gosselin had been the "stars"

of their own reality show, *Jon and Kate + 8*, but had put an end to filming when it was

revealed that Jon had been having an extramarital affair); several incarnations of the

White House gatecrashers story (one reality TV hopeful, Michelle, and her husband,

Tareq Salahi, somehow evaded White House security and attended a presidential

function—uninvited, of course); and endless reprisals of the balloon boy hoax (a family

had falsely reported their son had disappeared while playing with a giant helium balloon;

it was later determined that this was a publicity stunt related to family's involvement with

the *Wife Swap* reality show). All of these stories centred around everyday people

attempting to either steal, or extend, their fifteen minutes of fame. Walking home that

evening, I began re-hashing the day's events in my mind. I realized that Daniel

Boorstin's paraphrased prophecy had just about come true: today, people are famous for

being famous (Boorstin, 191); the broken meritocracy that once churned out Hollywood

celebrities has collapsed into something different entirely. And it seems as though the

blogger I had interviewed that very morning was attempting to profit from this new

reality. In spite of having *done* nothing to warrant being featured in the documentary,

this blogger was willing to *say anything*—true or false, presumably—just to see her

image reproduced, again, on national television.

<div align="center">***</div>

When did "reality stardom" become something one could aspire to? While my

hours-long *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood* "viewing marathon" confirmed

the prevalence of the reality star in today's (that is, twenty-first century) popular media

landscape, my conversation with a local blogger (the very one I mentioned on page 21 of

this paper) demonstrated something that I had, until that point, excluded from my

consideration: like movie stars of centuries past, reality stars have actually become sites

of envy and emulation. In a short essay titled "Surveillance as Cold War Entertainment,"

though, media scholar Fred Nadis reminds the reader of reality television's humble

origins: as something primarily carried out with hidden technologies, with the "aid" of

unsuspecting subjects. The implication of this surreptitious-surveillance-as-entertainment,

of course, was that the subject was not "in" on the so-called joke; he or she would only be

advised of the presence of a recording device once the surveilled scene had already

unfolded. When *Candid Camera* was first introduced to American audiences in the

1940s, the show's creator, Alan Funt, would purposely provoke his unsuspecting subject.

Not just an entertainer, Funt thought himself a "researcher, conducting experiments in

human nature" (Nadis, 11). And one might even argue that Funt's assessment of his role

on *Candid Camera* was not far—or, at least, not too far—from the role that he did,

indeed, fill. Funt's subjects, however manipulated or duped, were not performing for the

cameras; they were reacting to situations that they believed to be real-life scenarios.

They were average, middle-class or working-class Americans, who, unlike the majority

of today's reality subjects, had not *sought out* reality stardom; they were simply at the

right place, at the right time (or, perhaps, the wrong place, at the wrong time). In this

sense, *Candid Camera* captured a kind of "reality" that has, for the most part, become

unfashionable (or perhaps just unsustainable) in the television industry. Indeed, Funt's

sole mission was to "provoke unrehearsed behaviour" in his unwitting subjects (Nadis,

11). Today's airwaves, in contrast, are saturated with performed realities: real scenerios

wherein the subject of the scene is aware, and mindful, of the presence of the camera—

and wherein the subject can be transformed into a star.

Funt's candid realities, while gobbled up by mainstream audiences, did not satisfy all viewers; as Nadis relays, *New Yorker* writer Philip Hamburger was one of Funt's staunchest critics. Writing in 1957, Hamburger claimed, "Funt had 'succeeded...in reducing the art, the purpose and the ethics of the 'documentary' idea to the level of the obscene'" (Nadis, 22). Decades later, Funt was still producing *Candid Camera*—and a host of sister segments, on the side. While the gimmick of capturing unwitting subjects (responding to contrived situations, that is) on camera was enough to sustain a loyal television audience, Funt explored the limits of his *Candid* format in several short films as well. As Nadis reveals, Funt's cinematic contributions included the X-rated *What Do You Say To A Naked Lady* (1970), *Money Talks* (1972), and *Smile When You Say I Do* (1973). In these films, as in *Candid Camera*, Funt attempts to reveal certain "candid" truths about human nature. While Funt's format was, by network standards, a successful one (it ran in various incarnations from the nineteen-forties until the late nineteen-nineties), it was, by no means, a "star"-making one. Indeed, for the subjects whose real-life foibles were featured in Funt's films and television show, their fifteen minutes of fame ended as soon as the credits rolled. Funt's subjects were utterly disposable. The audience was invested in the televisual format—the promise of a good laugh at someone else's expense—and not in the human beings involved; a steady cast of nameable characters (save for Funt himself) would ruin the "real" fun.

Funt's format did not, and would not, become a star-making mechanism. The individuals who appeared on his show did not retain any celebrity currency after their starring scene concluded. In this sense, *Candid Camera* remains a reality programming anomaly. Even subsequent shows modeled on *Candid Camera* produced "knowable"

personalities whose stay in the spotlight was less finite than Funt's subjects'. *Meet Joe Schmo* (2003) and *Punk'd* (2003 through 2007) are two examples of re-tweaked reality shows based on Funt's format. *Joe Schmo*, a show that boasted the same cast of characters for an entire season, operated on the premise (or gimmick) that all of the contestants were actors, save for the unwitting "Joe Schmo." Not only were all subjects aware (and consenting of) the cameras that flanked the *Joe Schmo* set, but the individuals involved enjoyed a season's worth of media "buzz." Indeed, even after the show's finale—wherein the great gimmick of *Joe Schmo* was revealed to the sole "genuine" contestant—the reality show's cast members, especially the contestant who was duped, became fleeting fixtures of morning talk shows, tabloids, and gossip magazines. To borrow Dyer's terminology, these individuals went from being one-dimensional, everyday people, to polysemic "stars" of sorts—even if only for a few months of their lives.

Punk'd, the knock-off brainchild of Hollywood film star Ashton Kutcher, is perhaps a little more faithful to *Candid Camera*'s original *modus operandi*. Using hidden cameras, Kutcher and his team of pranksters create outrageous diversions, and film unsuspecting celebrities as they react to these fabricated situations. Like *Candid Camera*, each episode of *Punk'd* contains several short segments. No prank lasts (at least, on screen) for more than five minutes, and each "punk'd" celebrity, save for Kutcher himself, makes a brief, one-time appearance. And each pranked subject is unaware— apparently—of being filmed. The subjects of *Punk'd* are all household names, though: Britney Spears, Tyra Banks, Halle Berry, and NBA superstar Shaquille O'Neal are just a few of the celebrities who have appeared on the show. The appeal of *Punk'd* is thus

inextricably tied to these "star" subjects. The objective is no longer simply to record—

and televise—what happens when ordinary people fall prey to practical jokes; the aim is

to show home audiences how "extraordinary" individuals react to Kutcher's pranks.

Thus, *Punk'd* adds to *Candid Camera*'s decades-old formula the value of celebrity (that

is, names and faces that mainstream audiences will already recognize). Funt capitalizes

on his subjects' "everydayness" while Kutcher cashes in on his participants' pre-

established celebrity. Thus, *Candid Camera* remains a rare example of a reality show

that operates without the promise (or use) of celebrity; the star image system simply does

not apply to Funt's pioneering—albeit utterly unique—reality television format.

While *Candid Camera* is widely considered the first reality show to reach a

mainstream audience, it did not, as I have shown, have the same "side effect" that the

majority of today's reality programs boast: it did not turn its subjects into stars. The first

reality program to do just that was, of course, PBS's 1973 prime-time televisual

experiment: *An American Family*. Produced by a team of documentary filmmakers, *An

American Family* gave American audiences the opportunity to watch "real life"—the

lives of the Loud family—unfold from the comfort of their living rooms. As Mark

Andrejevic writes in *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, this show was "the first

manifestation of a 'reality' TV format that provided comprehensive documentation of the

rhythm of proximal daily life" (Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 66). Indeed, as Andrejevic so

aptly asserts, PBS was responsible for the first televised conflation of spheres. The

Louds, who were paid wages for appearing on *An American Family*, were, in a sense,

"working" while going about their daily lives. Although what the Louds were doing in

front of the camera did not resemble what most people consider to be "work," they were

still doing *something* (consenting to surveillance) in exchange for wages; they were still

creating a commodity that could be packaged and sold. For the first time in television

history, individuals—and networks—were not only profiting from the *real*

commodification of the everyday, but also toying with the notion of what could be made

public and what should remain private. In sum, PBS's producers were responsible, at

least to a certain extent, for bringing "work," at least the "work" of being watched, into

the private sphere. And they also, over the course of the reality series' season, created

pseudo-celebrities from everyday people.

Although *An American Family* was considered a network success by no-names

(i.e., everyday audiences) and big names (i.e., Andy Warhol and Margaret Mead) alike,

PBS did not attempt to repeat its reality programming experiment. In fact, no one did—

until the 1990s. In the 1980s, of course, other types of reality formats emerged: *Cops,*

America's Funniest Home Videos, and *Rescue 911* found success with prime-time

audiences (Andrejevic, 71). As Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette explain in *Reality TV:*

Remaking Television Culture, the reality programming of the 1980s emerged, in part,

because of widespread industry woes: "In the late 1980s, a shifting regulatory climate,

network financial troubles, and labour unrest forced the television industry to reconsider

its programming strategies" (Murray and Ouellette, 7). No longer doling out

considerable salaries to unionized actors or unionized writers (real life writes itself,

right?), and finding reality television "cheap to produce and easy to sell abroad,"

networks in Europe and North America started producing shows like *Unsolved Mysteries*

and *America's Most Wanted (ibid.).* These programs, however, did not showcase the

"ordinary" or "everyday," as was seen in *An American Family.* Instead, they captured

the "extraordinary" and "exceptional," and sold this budget-friendly, sensational footage to reality-hungry audiences.

It took another pair of documentary filmmakers to revive PBS's untouched, but not forgotten, format. In 1990, Jon Murray and Mary-Ellis Bunim pitched *The Real World* to MTV producers; as Andrejevic notes, Murray's "stated goal" was, in fact, to "remake *An American Family* for the MTV generation" (Andrejevic, 71). Yet again, the private sphere (a "home") would become the site of reality labour: Murray and Bunim selected a group of twenty- and thirty-somethings to live in a house that was rigged with surveillance equipment and haunted (proverbially speaking), day and night, by a camera crew. In the shadow of *An American Family*, *The Real World* presented a new, and loaded, televisual paradigm: one that revealed the conflation of the public and private spheres, and one that revealed the money- and amusement-making potential of the "real." For the following two decades, audiences would witness the further proliferation of reality programming; from docu-soaps to game-docs, all "reality" genres experienced prime-time growth. And, of course, a number of these "reality" workers experienced prime-time (albeit short-lived) stardom.

As Dyer suggests, prominence in one's primary medium does not, necessarily, mean that one will be absorbed into the celebrity system at large. Indeed, even "reality stars" need new sites of image reproduction to sustain their pseudo-star statuses. In "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Disposable Celebrity," new media scholar Sue Collins claims that the reality star exists within a new stratum of celebrity. The traditional media star—especially the film or (non-reality-) television star—will remain unaffected by the emergence of these "everyday" public figures. Collins, while

concerned more with the political-economical implications of reality programming and less with the semiotic significance of the individual reality celebrity, still manages to underscore the polysemic possibilities that stem from reality work:

> *The Real World* cast members left the first season in 1992 to be greeted by the 'immediate buzz' of the celebrity infrastructure: talk show guest appearances, profile articles, commercial endorsements, mall openings appearances, lectures, and the like. After the first *Survivor* finale, which attracted 51.7 million viewers, reality TV veterans were 'showered with interview requests, sitcom cameos, and managers and agents pleading to represent them' (Wolk 2002, 33).   (Collins, 88)

Ultimately, though, Collins claims that after this "immediate buzz" dies down, reality television stars' "celebrity currency runs out," and they are, thus, "channeled back into obscurity" (Collins, 89).

The Rise of the Reali-Celebrity

Previously in this paper, I have recounted two histories: that of that of the creation of what Dyer has dubbed the "star image system," and the rise of reality television. In my re-telling of these events and processes, I have touched upon—albeit not in great detail—the notion of commodification. Indeed, in the context of reality television, I have suggested that "everyday life" is commodified, whereas in the context of the Hollywood star system, the star's multi-layered image becomes the subject of this process. But the question I posed at the outset of this essay still remains to be further explored: where, and how, does the reality television subject/participant fit into the star system?

If one reduces Dyer's star formula to its essential parts, it is possible to interpret the "star image" as a simple, ideological binary: part public/part private. Herein lies the difficulty, though, when one attempts to explain the rise of the reality celebrity in light of Dyer's claim: the reality star's public self *is* the reality star's private self, and *vice versa*. In order to expand upon this symbiosis, I will look at the lives (that is, the lives as portrayed in media texts) of two reality workers who remained in the public eye long after their respective reality shows had concluded. These "reality celebrities" are Lance Loud (of *An American Family*) and Jade Goody (of *Big Brother UK*).

While Loud and Goody participated in reality productions nearly three decades apart, the roles they fulfilled in their reality work were mutually controversial. *An American Family*, filmed just a few years after the Stonewall riots[2], saw Lance Loud "come out" to an audience of 10 million viewers (Dannatt, 1). Indeed, in Loud's obituary (he passed away in 2002), he is heralded as the first individual to "out" himself on national television. According to Laurie Rupert and Sayanti Ganguly Puckett, co-authors of "*An American Family* and the Rise of Reality TV," the Loud siblings were all "rebellious teenagers who listened to rock music and used drugs and alcohol," but Lance's homosexuality provided PBS's producers with a more "timely theme" to exploit (Rupert and Puckett, 87). Goody, who appeared on Great Britain's version of *Big Brother* in 2002, became the subject of both public and household debate on account of her seemingly "ignorant" relation to reality. On one occasion, for example, Goody asked her *Big Brother* housemates what asparagus was and, on another, wondered aloud if Rio

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[2] Stonewall, according to *Stonewall* author Martin Duberman, was the "site of a series of riots in late June-early July 1969 that resulted from a police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar, 'Stonewall' has become synonymous over the years with gay resistance to oppression" (Duberman, xv).

de Janeiro was a person (BBC, 1). While these particular remarks, in retrospect, seem quite benign, they nevertheless pushed Goody beyond the brink of anonymity and into the spotlight of British tabloids. Goody, like Loud, became the subject of a variety of media texts; and both Loud and Goody found infamy through the reproduction of their image(s) beyond the reality "text" that first brought their lives to the attention of the masses. In this sense, Loud and Goody personify the "star" qualities outlined by Neal Gabler and Richard Dyer. Loud's and Goody's post-reality-show notoriety speaks to Gabler's assertion that celebrities are simply individuals who have been "sprung from the anonymous masses" (Gabler, 7). Furthermore, the multi-textual reproduction of Loud's and Goody's image(s), in tabloids, magazines, and talk shows, reinforces Dyer's claim that the star image is a "complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs" derived from a variety of media texts (*Stars*, 38).

In "Making the Most Out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity," Sue Collins suggests that the reality celebrity exists *outside* of the traditional star system. She claims that reality fame is fleeting, and therefore not comparable to that which is achieved by the "true" media star. Indeed, Collins writes that the reality star will reap the benefits of pseudo-celebritydom for fifteen minutes—and fifteen minutes only: "Most of these reality TV vets find that in the sixteenth minute, they are not absorbed into the celebrity system; rather, their celebrity currency runs out and they are channeled back into obscurity" (Collins, 89). Thus Collins asserts that a new category of celebrity had been created: the "dispensable celebrity" (*ibid.*). While Collins' argument may apply to a number of reality television stars, Lance Loud and Jade Goody represent two very

obvious exceptions to the author's rule: both of these reality workers were, as I will show, successfully absorbed into the celebrity system.

Perhaps now is the time to mention that Goody, like Loud, passed away relatively recently, and that the two reality workers were noted for their reality achievements in their obituaries (both of which appeared in Great Britain's *The Independent*). Goody, for instance, was portrayed as an individual who managed to "cash in" on her celebrity status long after her *Big Brother* series aired: "Goody's post-*Big Brother* years were lived in the glare of publicity. She provided the media with unparalleled access to her life, with each development providing material for documentaries, autobiographies and newspaper and magazine heart-to-hearts" (*The Independent*, 1). The unnamed author of this obituary also mentions Goody's post-*Big Brother* reality work; indeed, Goody's subsequent TV appearances "included *Celebrity Wife Swap, Celebrity Driving School, Celebrity Stars In Their Eyes, The Weakest Link, Jade's Salon* and *What Jade Goody Did Next*" (*ibid.*). Loud, too, managed to extend his "fifteen minutes," and began his post-*An American Family* career on the cover of *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Moving to Manhattan, Loud befriended Andy Warhol (who had been a pen-pall of sorts of Loud's after the filming of *An American Family*), and "became a downtown local legend in that avant-garde scene between Warhol's Factory and the punk rockers of CBGB" (Dannatt, 1). Loud's own band, the Mumps, opened for acts like Van Halen, the Ramones, and Blondie. As the punk scene faded, though, Loud "shifted to the new disco-celebrity culture embodied by Studio 54, where he managed to maintain his VIP status..." (*ibid.*). In the 1980s and 1990s, Loud starred in a variety of cult films, and eventually established himself as a successful journalist and gossip columnist, writing for *Details, The Advocate* and

Interview Magazine (ibid.). Loud, like Goody, even allowed camera crews to film his funeral, extending his celebrity currency posthumously.

How then does the reality star differ from the Marlon Brandos, Judy Garlands, and even Jane Fondas—the "traditional" celebrities—that Richard Dyer examines in *Stars*? I have already shown that the reality star image, like the traditional star image, can be reproduced in a variety of texts. And I have also demonstrated that these polysemic re-presentations can persist throughout (and even outlast) a reality star's life. A reality worker's celebrity currency does not, necessarily, run out after fifteen minutes. Perhaps, though, the most obvious difference can be located in the source of the individual's notoriety: what he or she has actually *done* to be "sprung" from the anonymous masses. Whereas Judy Garland had to subsume the identity of a fictional character, Dorothy, to be celebrated for her performance in *The Wizard of Oz*, Jade Goody had the option of simply being herself whilst *Big Brother*'s camera crew filmed her every move. While I will maintain that there is something essentially different between "acting" and "being one's self" in front of a camera, I will also suggest that there is an inextricable element of performativity that informs reality workers' on-screen appearances. Instead of performing scripted—fictional—roles, a reality-show participant must perform the unscripted "real." In short, the Jade Goodys and Lance Louds of the world are charged with the task of not simply living, but performing, their everyday lives.

Erving Goffman, Canadian sociologist and author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, would, perhaps, contend that everyday life is already—and necessarily—performed, regardless of the camera's presence or absence. Writing in 1959, Goffman presented his readers with a set of hypotheses that hinged on the notion that human

interactions are, essentially, "dramaturgical" in nature. While staged, theatrical performances involve three parties (the actor, the actor's on-stage foils, and the audience), Goffman posits that, in the performance of real life, these factors converge: "In real life, the three parties are compressed into two; the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience" (Goffman, xi). Goffman further explains that an individual's "personal front" (an amalgam of one's appearance and "manner") is simply that which has been chosen from a roster of pre-established fronts. Thus, like an actor involved in a theatrical production, the everyday individual must select "fronts" that will enable him or her to convey advantageous (and strategic) sentiments and emotions, while addressing his or her peers (who also double as the individual's audience). With reality television participants, of course, the dramaturgical aspects of their interactions are all the more overt; they must "perform" for their immediate peers (their reality co-stars), and appease their unseen audience.

As Mark Andrejevic writes in *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, the perception of "authenticity" and "spontaneity" is what separates reality TV from other television genres and, accordingly, what distances the reality worker from other television stars: "[c]ontent becomes liberated from the inbred coterie of scriptwriters and directors, to be replaced by the rhythms of real conflict and real romance" (Andrejevic, 105). Although not all producers approach reality programming from the same methodological standpoint, the creators of *The Real World*, who modeled their particular reality format on PBS's *An American Family*, insist that their influence on the "reality" they capture is minimal. Indeed, *The Real World*'s co-producer John Murray claims in an

interview with Andrejevic that: "[The producers are] very strict about not influencing the action. If you only bring cameras in when something exciting happens, then you affect the cast. We don't want them to know what we think is important and not important. We don't want to turn these people into actors" (Andrejevic, 104).

Supporting her co-producer's sentiments, Mary Ellis-Bunim suggests that the pervasive surveillance technologies employed in the production process help to ensure the "candid" nature of participants' interactions: "[y]ou can't sustain a character that isn't true to yourself, day and night, for thirteen weeks. It's just not possible. It would drive you mad" (*ibid.*). Thus, through the constant monitoring of participants, semblances of "real" selves emerge. According to those who participate in these programs, though—not those who create them—reality show subjects find it difficult to ignore the camera's gaze. As one *Big Brother* contestant, Cassandra, revealed in a radio interview after she left the *Big Brother* house, her actions were "real," yet they were informed, if not influenced, by the knowledge that other people would, one day, watch and judge her interactions: "I was always aware of the camera presence, but I always was concerned about if I were on the outside... and if my mother could see me, would she be upset with what I'm doing. So the camera was like my mom's eye" (109). While many reality stars' performed realities suggest that the "maternal gaze" is not always at the forefront of reality subjects' minds, Cassandra's confession still demonstrates that Bunim and Murray's fly-on-the-wall intentions fall short in practice—or, rather, in production. Indeed, the everyday-life-of-Cassandra that was captured on *The Real World* was, in actuality, the everyday-life-of-Cassandra-as-performed-to-her-mother.

Paul McDonald suggests that audiences can never access the "real" self that is lurking behind the star's composite image, because that self, or personality, is inescapably mediated (McDonald, 6). Indeed, the process of reproduction—of re-presentation—necessarily entails mediation; the "real" self attached to the reality star's image remains out of reach. So long as reality show participants are aware of the technology that enables their digital reproduction, their "real" selves cannot be documented. However authentic their performance, and however spontaneous their interactions may seem, the reality with which they engage is still a heavily, and explicitly, mediated one. Reality workers, insofar as their celebrity currency is concerned, operate *within* a star system as facsimiles of film stars: they are performers of the real, and their celebrity images, like all others', are formed through their intertextual engagements.

Jade Goody's intertextual engagements, however, were categorically different from Lance Loud's. Goody managed to sustain a career based (almost) solely on different reality program performances, whereas Loud was able to parlay his reality fame into several "traditional" professional pursuits that had little, or nothing, to do with reality TV. Perhaps, though, these two divergent career paths reveal a change in the very nature—and shelf-life—of a reality television star. As I have shown with Jade Goody, one-time reality stars now have the opportunity to appear on subsequent reality shows—thus creating "reality" careers, however short-lived, from multiple performances of the real. When Lance Loud's *An American Family* days drew to a close, though, the option to extend his stay in the "reality" limelight simply did not exist, and instead, Loud used his reality celebrity currency to promote his band (which he formed post- *An American*

Family) and, later, to kick-start his career as a pop-culture journalist. What America lacked at the time of Loud's reality television debut was the infrastructure to support this (then-) new breed of celebrity. Until *An American Family*'s star-making reality format was re-introduced to the nation via *The Real World*—and until dozens of copy-cat programs appeared in *The Real World*'s wake—"reality stardom," as such, was seen as something unsustainable. And reality subjects, like Lance Loud, were considered televisual novelties, whose celebrity statuses could only be preserved through absorption into the star stratum(s) of traditional media.

The attention-seeking blogger whom I had pre-interviewed on behalf of Chocolate Box Entertainment presents yet another "reality" personality for consideration. Unlike Loud, and unlike Goody, this blogger has yet to capitalize on her pseudo-notoriety. She is, as she unabashedly admitted to me, "still really, really broke." Indeed, the vast majority of today's bloggers, video-bloggers and lifecasters only reap the intangible rewards of living—or writing about—their lives online: they build fan bases, they connect with like-minded individuals, and they maintain complete control over the content they produce. But they do not earn large sums of money in the process. While this particular chapter of my Major Research Paper has further explored the notion of the "reality star," and has positioned the reality performer *within* Dyer's intertextual celebrity sphere, the following (and final) portion of this essay will focus on the online reality performer.

Let's Get Digital

Today, Monday, the office is deserted. Phones continue to ring, e-mails continue

to pour in, but business at Chocolate Box Entertainment will not resume until Tuesday.

That is, business will not resume until Chocolate Box's producers return home from

reality TV boot camp. The past Thursday had involved last-minute packing, re-packing,

Zip Car rentals, cramming of cameras into cars, Google-Maps-checking, frantic text-

messaging, airplane ticket retrievals, and a barrage of "goodbyes." After flying to Los

Angeles, California, the documentary crew would somehow make their way to Simi

Valley, where Niedzviecki would join fourteen other reality TV hopefuls for a three-day

crash-course in reality TV performance. As Niedzviecki had written on *Peep Me*'s blog[3]

just a few days prior to the crew's departure, the "boot camp" would include workshops

on "extreme emotional endurance" and "maintaining your poker face," and would even

offer a master class taught by reality TV guru (and star of documentary *We Live In*

Public) Josh Harris[4]. For $995 U.S., Niedzviecki would receive lodging, food, course

materials, and, yes, boot-camp-style reality television training. Noticing that Niedzviecki

had updated the production blog over the weekend, I read the following:

> [A]lright i [sic] made it to boot camp, which is happening about an hour
>
> from Los Angeles in an area known as simi valley [sic]. got there just in
>
> time for dinner and opening remarks. it's 12:30 pst [sic] time, 3:30 est

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[3] When *Peep Me* was conceived, Chocolate Box Entertainment created a website wherein members of the public could watch Niedzviecki's lifecast (when it aired), read Niedzviecki's production blog (which he updated on a semi-regular basis), and keep up-to-date with the progress of the documentary.

[4] Josh Harris is known for his numerous "online reality" ventures, the earliest of which (Pseudo.com) he began in the early 1990s. Harris, the focus/star of Ondi Timoner's documentary, *We Live In Public*, once created a "human terrarium" in New York City, and used surveillance technologies to keep his human subjects in check—and to allow them to keep each other in check. Harris is also credited with being one of America's most successful lifecasters.

[sic] so i'm too tired to go into details right now, but i [sic] will tell you

that the participants include a former crack dealer, an ex police chief, an

alcoholic bartender who's been sober for 5 years, and a dairy farmer.

(Niedzviecki, *Peep Me*)

Scrolling back to Wednesday's blog post, I begin to understand the crew's decision to

channel a good portion of their funding (from CBC, no less) into this particular trip; as

Niezviecki writes, his goal is to "stand out, to learn what it takes to get into reality TV,

and talk to the other folks who are paying one thousand big ones to attend—why are they

here? What is it about reality TV that's so damn captivating?" (Niedzviecki, *Peep Me*).

What Chocolate Box Entertainment was, and still is, looking for is that *human*

motivation; they want to document the wannabe documentees—and figure out, in a way

that translates on film, what it is that these reality TV aspirants see, and desire, in a future

with reality TV stardom on the proverbial horizon. The very existence of this boot camp

seemed to signal that reality participants were beginning to be seen as performers of

sorts—not just "subjects," who simply went about their lives as though the cameras,

documenting their every moves, did not exist. Indeed, the creation of this training camp

signaled a shift in the attitude toward a reality performer's skillset: it was clear that

specific "qualities" or "attributes" had been identified in successful reality candidates,

and that this collection of identifiable, reproducible traits could be taught—and sold—in

a weekend's worth of workshops.

Still curious about the creators of this boot camp, I went in search of the

company's website. The company, New York Reality TV School, was founded in June,

2008, by Robert Galinsky, a former television network executive. Liberally peppered

with soundbite-sized endorsements from a handful of reality television producers, journalists and casting agents, the webpage advertising the boot camp offered a "hard sell" on the workshops. Barbara Barna, casting director for *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Extreme Makeover* and *What Not to Wear* had, ostensibly, said the following about the boot camp: "You have a lot of talented people who would benefit from that coaching to understand that you need to focus, you need to think about what your brand or hook is, [and] you have to always be on when you're going through the audition process" (Reality School). And a journalist from the *Wall Street Journal* had also been quoted on the webpage: "The moral they convey: be yourself, to the max, only more so!" (*ibid.*). Indeed, the so-called ineffable qualities that once made "stars" of the Lance Louds and Jade Goodys of the word had been, to a certain extent, uncovered by a handful of workshop organizers. If you were not born with the natural ability to live, and tell, your life's story on national television, you could shell out a little under a thousand dollars, and be *taught* how to do so. In a sense, Galinsky and his colleagues were selling what Erving Goffman would have called "fronts." They were helping everyday people edit their personalities—their "fronts"—to suit the production needs of reality programmers.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Audience interest in the everyday lives of movie stars gained momentum in the mid-twentieth century; it was only a matter of time, really, before profit would be gained—through the creation of fan magazines, talk shows, and other celebrity-centric products—from this budding curiosity. Indeed, as Paul McDonald writes, this "new realm of knowledge introduced readers to life behind the screen, so that the star was

known not only through his or her roles but also as a character in a narrative quite separable from his or her work in any film" (McDonald, 30). In the early-to-mid nineteen-hundreds, though, the discourse concerning a star's personal life was pre-edited, or groomed, by heavy-handed film producers; believing that "immoral stories" concerning their companies' actors would somehow taint the image of the industry as a whole, these individuals sought to control what was made public about their stars' "private existences" (McDonald, 31). By the early nineteen-twenties, newspapers began printing stories that contradicted the industry's—and the industry's public personalities'—squeaky-clean images. Indeed, the "moral closure between the star's on-screen and off-screen images" was disrupted by a series of newspaper reports that linked well-known film stars (like Fatty Arbuckle) to high-profile scandals. As Richard DeCordova reiterates in *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*, "[e]xposés on the real lives of the stars would no longer be limited to stories of success, security, and marital bliss; transgression, betrayal, restlessness, and loss entered into the dramatic formula" (DeCordova, 121). And so Hollywood stars' public personas evolved; no longer merely the product of spin-doctored press materials, a performer's "celebrity image" was one that necessarily subsumed a star's personal exploits—scandals, divorces, criminal charges *et al.*

The rise of these so-called scandalous newspaper reports lent another dimension to the star image system: that which cast stars in a more human, even fallible, light. Indeed, the immortalized gossip of the Sunday papers served as a reminder—however erroneous as that may have been—that celebrity status was somehow within the reach of ordinary people. Writing in 1962, Orrin Edgar Klapp recognized this trend, this

widespread desire for fame, as a "dream," not a reality:

> The chance of becoming famous might be called the great American
>
> jackpot. To be a celebrity, to appear on television, to be applauded, to
>
> have necks crane when you enter a room—that is the warm and not-so
>
> secret dream of countless Americans in a society that is becoming more
>
> and more an audience directed by mass communication. And, looking at
>
> the American favorites of past decades, the Buffalo Bills, Annie Oakleys,
>
> Billy the Kids, Rudolph Valentinos, Huey Longs, and Babe Ruths, it may
>
> be hard to avoid the impression that almost any kind of person can be a
>
> celebrity in America.   (Klapp, 1)

Klapp's words, while nearly a half-century old, seem oddly prophetic. Today, though,

this "dream" that Klapp identifies is coupled with a new sense of attainability; reality

television has, for a growing number of individuals, made this dream, literally, "reality."

Reality television has both affirmed, and broken from, the patterns established by the

mainstream or tabloid press' treatment of celebrities' lives and images. As John Langer

writes in *Tabloid Television: Popular Television and the 'Other News,'* tabloid stories

tend to focus on "somebodies" (e.g. film stars) going about their everyday lives, or

"nobodies" (e.g. ordinary people) who find themselves in extraordinary situations

(Langer, 48). The very existence of reality celebrities, however, and their prevalence on

tabloid television (like *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood*), seems to signify

another trend in mass-mediated storytelling: the prominence of narratives that feature

ordinary, everyday people going about their ordinary, everyday lives.

According to Graeme Turner, author of *Ordinary People and the Media: The Democratic Turn*, the proliferation of reality television has increased the desirability of this "ordinary celebritydom:" "[t]he explosion of reality TV, confessional talk formats, docu-soaps and so-called reality-based game shows over the last decade has significantly enhanced television's demand for ordinary people desiring 'celebrification'" (Turner, 13). Turner maintains that this "demotic turn"—that is, the increasing visibility of the ordinary individual in a variety of media—has actually caused a shift in the common notion of celebrity: "In relation to the broader culture within which the consumption of celebrity occurs, these trends have resulted in the idea of celebrity itself mutating: no longer a magical condition, research suggests that it is fast becoming an almost reasonable expectation for us to have of our everyday lives. The opportunity of becoming a celebrity has spread beyond the various elites and entered into the expectations of the population in general" (Turner, 14).

This "mutation" to which Turner refers might also be viewed as a simple addition to Richard Dyer's celebrity formula; the very etymology of "polysemy" indicates that *multiple* images of a given celebrity are necessarily, always, in play. Turner, however, seems to be relying on a more static, even brittle, definition of celebrity. While Dyer may have referred, explicitly, to well-known film stars in *Stars'* case studies, his star image system is far more, albeit implicitly, inclusive than the one Turner sets forth. Turner, acknowledging his colleague Chris Rojek's work (and inadvertently echoing Sue Collins' words), also makes reference to the "disposable" condition of today's "mutated" celebrity. Using a decidedly unscientific calculation, Turner deduces that, "[i]f performing on *Big Brother* can generate celebrity within a matter of days, this same

celebrity can also disappear just as quickly" (Turner, 13). Jade Goody and Lance Loud,

however, serve as tangible testaments to just the opposite of what Turner suggests: as I

have shown in the previous chapter of this paper, both Goody and Loud were able to

channel their reality fame into sustainable, lasting celebrity. Without actually referencing

Dyer's polysemic image theory, Turner does recognize the relationship between a

traditional (that is, non-reality-) star's celebrity currency and image reproduction. Citing

Big Brother and *Survivor* as shows that typify the production practices of the reality

industry, Turner claims that reality celebrities, "unlike other kinds of celebrities such as

actors who play fictional characters is multiple vehicles, derive all their public visibility

from this one vehicle" (Turner, 36). Or, as Turner states in an earlier publication,

Understanding Celebrity (2004), reality celebrities are "especially dependent upon the

program that made them visible in the first place; they have virtually no other platform

from which to address their audience" (Turner, 54).

Turner, however, neglects to mention the many reality subjects who have

managed to maintain their "public visibility" either though subsequent reality television

appearances (in the tradition of Jade Goody), or through mainstream media pursuits (as

Lance Loud was able to do). A brief survey of some of the reality shows—and reality

subjects—that have graced the airwaves in the past decade or so indicates that some of

these "disposable celebrities" have more staying power than Turner would have the

reader believe. In fact, I would argue that MTV continues to churn out reality shows that

produce sustainable reality celebrities. Look, for example, at MTV's popular reality

program, *Laguna Beach*. The show, which first aired in 2004, lasted not for one, but for

three seasons. Indeed, cameras followed *the same cast* of characters for three years,

necessarily extending each cast member's public visibility well past that fifteen-minute mark. Due to *Laguna Beach*'s popularity, MTV's producers decided to create a spin-off show; they followed one of *Laguna*'s characters, Lauren Conrad, to an arts college in Los Angeles, California. This spin-off show, *The Hills*, is currently in its sixth season, with its own spin-off show, *The City* (a reality program that follows Conrad's friend, Whitney Port, as she navigates the fashion design industry in New York City) now in its third season—filming concurrently. Not only have the stars of *Laguna Beach*, *The Hills*, and *The City* created sustainable reality careers for themselves (or, rather, have had these sustainable careers secured for them), but many have also been able to use this notoriety to their intertextual advantage: Audrina Partrige (*The Hills*) now has three feature film acting credits to her name, Heidi Montag (*The Hills*) has successfully launched a singing career, and Lauren Conrad (*Laguna Beach*, *The Hills*) has published a book, debuted several fashion lines, and has even become a spokesperson for cosmetic company, Avon. Montag also became a tabloid fixture in the Fall of 2009, when the twenty-three year old underwent numerous plastic surgeries. Indeed, these three women capitalized on, and continue to capitalize on, the attention that their initial reality endeavours awarded them. They are, to once again borrow Daniel Boorstin's words, true "creature[s] of gossip, of public opinion, of magazines, newspapers, and the ephemeral images of movie and television screens" (Boorstin, 82).

Though these women's accomplishments—coupled, conveniently, with a number of tabloid headline-nabbing "personal life" scandals —may seem trivial, they indubitably speak to the polysemic potential of reality workers. While Turner may see reality subjects as mere pawns in the union-dodging game of low-brow—and low-budget—

television production, there are countless examples of reality subjects who have extended their celebrity currency well beyond the fifteen-minute mark. At the risk of "moralizing" this phenomenon, though, I will suggest that there are a few troubling factors that emerge when shows like *Laguna Beach* spawn (seemingly) endless spin-offs. Reality shows like *Candid Camera*, *An American Family*, and even MTV's first season of *The Real World*, were created with two motivations in mind: entertainment and experimentation. That is, these programs were conceived with the dual intent of piquing and maintaining audience interest, and documenting (and thus further understanding) the effect that "televisation," or pervasive surveillance, might have on the human psyche. This latter intent, it seems, has been all but weaned out popular reality formats; "entertainment"—not exploration—has become the driving force of today's reality programming. In this sense, the vast majority of post-millennial docu-dramas have become mere pastiches of PBS's and MTV's pioneering formats; *Laguna Beach*, *The Hills*, and *The City* represent half-formed reality facsimiles that privilege entertainment over experimentation, and emphasize drama over documentation.

From Reality TV Stars to 'Cewebrities'

Hierarchically speaking—from a production perspective—*The Real World*, MTV's first docu-drama reality show, still "looked" like any other television show being filmed at the turn of the twenty-first century: the guys at the top (MTV's producers and executives) were still calling the shots. Beginning in the early nineteen-nineties, technology was changing—and improving; Handicams, webcams, personal computers and Internet connections were fast becoming staple "home" items for individuals with disposable incomes. Given the success of *The Real World* and its imitators, what

happened next seems almost inevitable: everyday people began experimenting with everyday reality programming. Online. Simply put, the individuals at the bottom of the totem pole (reality TV wannabes) were just beginning to realize the potential of these new home technologies.

In 1996, a young female college student turned on her webcam, and let the networked world watch as she went about her daily life. Jennifer Ringley became, in effect, both the producer and star of her own online reality show. Like *An American Family*, and like *The Real World*, Ringley's pseudo-eponymous *JenniCam* was a hit with consumers. With nearly five million views per day at the height of its popularity, Ringley's webcast's ratings "approach[ed] those generated by cable television programs" (Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 61). But what was Ringley's motivation? Why did she feel compelled to make, and to continue to make, the private, mundane details of her everyday life part of the public domain? In Hal Niedzviecki's *The Peep Diaries*, the author finds the answer to this question buried within a simple radio interview. Niedzviecki writes: "When NPR's Ira Glass asked Jennifer Ringley why she decided to continue with the webcam experiment in her new apartment after she graduated from college, she replied, 'I felt lonely without the camera'" (Niedzviecki, 38).

While Mark Andrejevic emphasizes the "alternative" or counter-culture aspects of Ringley's media model, "one that had haunted the imagination of media critics for decades: an ordinary person seizing control of the means of media production," perhaps Ringley's *motivation*—her loneliness—should also be taken into consideration (Andrejevic, 37). Although Ringley had, in the tradition of Lance Loud and Jade Goody, subjected herself to pervasive surveillance in the name of entertainment (or social

experiment, perhaps), she did not have large television networks providing wages, food, or lodging in return for her surveilled labour. While *JenniCam* subscriptions did, eventually, provide Ringley with an income of sorts (enough to "survive," or so writes Andrejevic), Ringley refused financial compensation from outside sources:

> Ringley said she was approached by a soft drink company with an offer of $10,000 a month to leave bottles of its product around her house. She turned down the offer to protect the authenticity of the site, because, 'it would… make the site about as real as the *Real World* or any of the other cheesy productions mainstream society produces. Once I start fabricating the content, especially for the sake of money, it's not worth even doing anymore.' (Andrejevic, 86)

Herein we find two different (and still relevant) "networked" scenarios at play: a large corporation realizing the money-making potential of online reality entertainment, and an individual refusing to see—or treat—her "content," her everyday life, as a corporate commodity. (It should be mentioned, though, that Ringley *did* receive direct funding through viewer subscriptions). Although the product of her labour was akin to that of Goody's or Loud's, Ringley's relationship to her reality lifecasts was utterly unique; while Goody and Loud were charged with the sole task of living/performing the real, Ringley was also responsible for *producing* the real. Thus it was imperative for Ringley, for her online "reality" brand, to maintain the appearance of an authentic, product-placement-free, lifecast.

For every Jennifer Ringley, though, there is a DotComGuy. That is, for every individual who refuses to harness the revenue-generating power of user-generated online content, there is always someone who, at least initially, seeks to do nothing *but* that.

During what Andrejevic calls the "halcyon days of the high-tech economy," Mitch

Maddox, a former AirTouch employee, changed his name to "DotComGuy"

(Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 75). For the following year, in 2000, DotComGuy vowed to

live his life solely online; he claimed the Internet could provide him with everything he

could possibly need or want—and to prove this, he would set up cameras (twenty-four in

total) around his house, and *not leave* his "DotCompound" until three-hundred and sixty-

five days had passed. For DotComGuy, though, there was a significant financial

incentive: "DotComGuy hoped to turn his website into a for-profit corporation that would

generate enough money to support his handlers and to earn him a $98,000 paycheck in

the DotCompound" (Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 75). For DotComGuy, his domestic domain

was, at once, his home and his office; leisure became labour, and the man formerly

known as Mitch Maddox produced, starred in, and profited from his very own online

reality production.

While DotComGuy's lifecasting experiment was indubitably fueled by the

promise of tangible, financial reward, he also recognized the intangible appeal of living a

life where the concepts of leisure and labour, and public and private, were inextricably

intertwined: "DotComGuy viewed his compound... as a space that harkens back to the

integration of work space and home: 'It's all cyclical.... In the past when you worked,

when you were a farmer or you were a blacksmith, it was attached to your house. You're

also seeing the same thing with the Internet and e-commerce'" (Andrejevic, *Reality TV*,

81). Part money-grubbing exhibitionist, part technological determinist, and part

webcasting pioneer, DotComGuy, like Ringley, did not resemble the typical "labourer" of

decades past; instead, DotComGuy created his own, new "alternative" business model that, as he proclaimed, resembled something almost feudalistic.

But blacksmiths crafted horseshoes, and farmers produced food: these workers created commodities that were, in no way, connected to the conflation of labour and leisure. True, the farm was "attached" to the home, but farm work was still distinct from domestic activity. Simply put, while DotComGuy's business model may have had Medieval resemblances, what DotComGuy sought to package and sell (the digitized version of his "real life" in real time) had decidedly different origins. In the end, too, DotComGuy's compensatory scheme collapsed; not because no one was watching or supporting his webcast (they were), but because he decided to pull the proverbial plug on his own experiment. Oddly enough, DotComGuy, like Ringley, had located the antidote to "loneliness" online. Unlike Ringley, though, DotComGuy did not extract this comfort from the cameras that captured his every move. Instead, he found a fiancée in one of his fans; he left the DotCompound to propose—in person—to his new online companion. And he forfeited monetary reward. DotComGuy, who changed his name *back* to Mitch Maddox, chose emotional compensation over financial gain; for Maddox, this newfound companionship was enough. Indeed, with his public persona indistinguishable from his private self, DotComGuy made a decision that seemed to suggest that cold, hard, cash would not be the only driving—or compensatory—force behind this emerging online economy.

The promise of emotional gratification, via online participation or reality work, seems enough to sustain a number of digital reality performers. But reading about *JenniCam* and DotComGuy today feels a little like reading yesterday's news; the concept

of oversharing—showcasing, for an unknown albeit almost always unseen audience, your

innermost thoughts—is now neither novel nor shocking. Most computers now come

already equipped with webcams (it should be noted that this was not the case when

Ringley first started broadcasting *JenniCam*), and high-speed Internet connections are

ubiquitous in Western countries. Of course, our soapbox capabilities have also

drastically improved: social networking sites, what Andrew Keen calls the "shrines for

the cult of self-broadcasting... [the] tabula rasas of our individual desires and identities,"

have made it almost *too* easy to broadcast the everyday (Keen, 22).

Today, in 2010, broadcasting the mundane details of our everyday lives involves

little more than signing into Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, and filling in the blanks

provided by the platform we have selected. While Ringley and Maddox had to create

their websites from scratch, their twenty-first century successors are able to access a host

of readymade, user-friendly templates. Of course, in return for this access (and ease of

use), we, the "content creator," must also consent to certain terms of use; Facebook, for

instance, states upfront that the information one broadcasts to one's your friends might—

might—be seen by third parties. Simply put, there is a price to pay for participation. As

P. David Marshall writes in "New Media—New Self: The Changing Power of Celebrity,"

social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace transform "public privacy into a new

form of narcissism" (Marshall, 640). This "public privacy," to which Marshall refers,

can be linked back to Ringley and Maddox: in essence, "public privacy" is that which

underscores all transmissions of otherwise private moments in public contexts or forums.

Furthermore, Marshall contends that the narcissism attached to pubic privacy is

"actualized through new media and it is specifically modalized around a mediatized

version of the self: the representations of celebrity have now been liberated to become the basis for the potential public presentation of the self" (*ibid.*). Simply put, as everyday individuals begin to realize their own intertextual potentials, and as they begin to "actualize" this potential through new-media means, the line between "reality celebrity" and "new media self" becomes increasingly obscured.

But what does this really mean? Clearly, the implications of these new, everyday technologies, and these new, readymade platforms, are infinite. It is easier than ever to create "content," and it is now possible to broadcast the everyday from virtually anywhere (or, perhaps, anywhere virtual). Simply put, digital technologies have made it nearly impossible to tell where the digital enclosure begins and where—if at all—it ends. In *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era*, Mark Andrejevic defines this digital enclosure as the "interactive realm wherein every action and transaction generates information about itself" (*iSpy*, 2). Indeed, according to Andrejevic, pervasive surveillance is precisely what keeps this virtual "enclosure" enclosed:

> We can go into a bookstore and make a cash purchase without generating information about the transaction. But when we go online, we generate increasingly detailed forms of transactional information that become secondary information commodities: information that may eventually be sold to third parties or used by marketers for targeted advertising campaigns. (*ibid.*)

While Jennifer Ringley and Mitch Maddox had the opportunity to earn wages in return for their online labour, the vast majority of today's "digitally enclosed" reality performers have no such option. Whereas Ringley was *asked* by a soda company if she

would allow them to piggyback on her website's success (in exchange for a sizeable cash reward), we have now entered an age where the piggybacking happens with or (as is most often the case) without our explicit consent. And without the promise of monetary compensation. And why—and how—is this possible? In short, because our personal, everyday information has become a valuable, third-party, commodity. For marketers and advertisers, our seemingly insatiable impulse to overshare has been great for business: they know exactly what we want because, well, we inadvertently tell them exactly what we want. Perhaps, though, this is an overly simplified interpretation of post-millennial, post-*JenniCam* e-commerce. Just as Ringley and DotComGuy's online efforts straddled the line between labour and leisure pursuits, so too our Tweets, Facebook status updates, and Myspace posts seem to defy—or at least challenge—categorization. If, as Andrejevic writes, our personal information is being surreptitiously used by marketers and sold to third parties, then, clearly, this "information" is undergoing the process of commodification as it invisibly changes hands: "domestic activities that didn't used to generate value can be captured, recorded, and commodified, thanks to the extended reach of the monitoring gaze facilitated by the digital enclosure" (Andrejevic, 81). In other words, the content that we produce in our "free time"—the products of our so-called leisure pursuits—becomes third-party currency. In the digital enclosure, what strikes us as fun, or even inane, reflections on the everyday, becomes inherently valuable to others.

Reg Whitaker, writing in 1999, likens this digital enclosure to Michel Foucault's virtual Panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (re-)introduced his audience to the notion of Panopticism—now, one of the ideological darlings of

surveillance studies. Drawing from Jeremy Bentham's seventeenth-century penitentiary design, Foucault described this "ideal" site of surveillance-contingent social control:

> [A]t the periphery, an annular building; at the centre a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. (Foucault, 3-4)

This Foucaultian-Benthamite construction is predicated, of course, on the docility—and visibility—of each inhabitant. And, as Whitaker notes, "[e]laborate artifice was required to trick the prisoners into believing in the Inspector's omniscience" (Whitaker, 140). Today, however, in the digital enclosure, less trickery is required: "new information technologies offer the potential for real, rather than faked, omniscience, while at the same time displacing *The* Inspector with multiple inspectors who may act sometimes in concert and sometimes in competition with one another" (*ibid.*). In this new, pseudo-Panopticon, Foucault's madmen, patients, condemned men, workers and schoolboys are not simply being presented with the *possibility* of being surveyed, they *are* being surveyed; every time they interact online, they leave behind their digital footprints. Thus the political-economical function of the digital enclosure is not so much to control or placate its inhabitants; it is, rather, to make the interactions of this virtual space's "inmates" visible—and commodifiable.

The creators of *Big Brother*—the very show that saw the reality debut of Jade Goody—were well aware of the Panopticon-like features of their televisual format. Indeed, the very name "Big Brother" was an homage to, or acknowledgment of, George Orwell's dystopian (and fictionalized) account of a pervasively surveilled society. The all-seeing dictator in the novel *1984* was simply known as Big Brother. Lee Barron, author of "*Big Brother* and the Progressive Construction of Celebrity," asserts that this overtly Orwellian reality show actually represents a "three-step [P]anopticon" (Barron, 31). Barron claims that, initially, "the contestants are subject to the gaze of the media and related professionals—from the producers, presenters and psychologists to the newspapers and magazines that constantly discuss, dissect, and speculate on the various housemates" (Barron, 31-2). Then, "the contestants are subject to the scrutiny of the viewing public, and they must subsequently strive to project favourable and entertaining impressions of themselves if they are to forestall premature eviction" (Barron, 32). Finally, "the housemates constantly observe each other, forming alliances, trying to second-guess other contestants, analyzing, and developing appraisals on which they will ultimately base their decisions to nominate or not nominate others for eviction" (*ibid.*). As Barron demonstrates, *Big Brother* was, and remains, a reality show predicated on intertextual—and interpersonal—surveillance.

While the Internet has undoubtedly enabled both the surveillance of a greater number of reality performers (or "wannabes"), and the creation of an inestimable number of Big Brother-types, the success of the parties involved is difficult to assess. As I have shown in chapters one and two of this research paper, the reality television star is, metaphorically speaking, a close cousin of film and traditional television stars; they

operate within the same star image system, and they maintain their celebrity currency in the same manner: through intertextual engagements. A reality television star's success can be measured through simple arithmetic: (each reality appearance) x (the success of each show + the public reaction to each appearance) + (each tabloid or fan magazine article in which he or she is featured) + (each subsequent intertextual engagement). Insofar as digital reality stars are concerned, though, this formula falls short.

Turning again to Jennifer Ringley and Mitch Maddox, one sees not the digitized mirror-images of Jade Goody and Lance Loud. In truth, unlike Goody and Loud, who managed to remain in the public eye long after their initial forays into reality programming, Ringley and Maddox have both disappeared from view altogether. Indeed, when I was interning with Chocolate Box Entertainment, I was one of three individuals who had been assigned the task of locating, and contacting, these two veteran lifecasters for on-camera interviews. Along with a senior producer, and a professional visual researcher, we failed to find any "clues" as to Ringley's or Maddox's whereabouts; both former "oversharers" had kept their current post-lifecast lives so private, so under-wraps, that, according to their original medium of communication, the Internet, they no longer existed. This finding (or, rather, lack thereof) seemed to indicate that there was something inherently "other" about the surveillant nature—or the Panoptic gaze, perhaps—of online reality productions. While Ringley and Maddox had, both, successfully subverted the production model that supported the majority of *televised* reality shows (they were the creators, producers, stars and distributors of their own shows—or, simply, what new media theorist Axel Bruns calls "prod-users"—after all) they may have tinkered with their own star image potential in the process. True, Ringley

and Maddox were *bona fide* online sensations for a year or two and, true, both of these

lifecasters attracted thousands upon thousands—at times, millions—of viewers when

their respective lifecasts went live, but it is also appears to be the case (as was further

evidenced by Chocolate Box Entertainment's fruitless search) that Ringley's and

Maddox's celebrity currencies ran out as soon they took their personal lives offline.

While they may, now, be fixtures in scholarly texts—and thus perennial subjects of

academic debate—Ringley's and Maddox's *post*-lifecast selves have yet to enter the

intertextual zone of celebrity. Indeed, I will concede that one could argue that their

polysemic selves increase in depth and scope with every article, essay, or book (or Major

Research Paper) that makes reference to Ringley's and Maddox's lifecasting

accomplishments. However, what is captured in these accounts are snapshots, and

subsequent analyses of these individuals at *specific points in time*; Ringley's and

Maddox's current, offline selves remain unknowable and irreproducible.

CODA

When Richard Dyer published *Stars* in the late nineteen-seventies, he established, among other hypotheses, that mainstream North American film audiences were interested not only in film stars' professional work but also in their private lives. This "interest," of course, was one of the predicating factors for Dyer's now-infamous star image system: it was Dyer, after all, who first pointed to the polysemic necessity of successful film stars. Indeed, Dyer argued that reproducible images—gleaned from a star's private and public lives—helped sustain the "celebrity currency" of any given star. This proven (and profitable) mass fascination with film stars' private lives soon gave way to a new, mediated phenomenon: "real life" packaged as experimental entertainment. What PBS's film crew in Santa Barbara, California, did, though, was balance out this equation; instead of capitalizing on the personal lives of pre-established public figures, this public broadcaster attempted to commodify the real lives of everyday people.

Although PBS's docu-drama reality format was left to languish for several decades, a few of *An American Family*'s "stars" continued to reap the benefits of their once-televised lives. Lance Loud, in particular, managed to parlay his reality programming fame into a lifetime of mainstream celebrity success. First as a punk band frontman and later, as a pop culture columnist, Loud managed to extend his stay in the spotlight—and secure his intertexual reproducibility—long after the initial "buzz" from his *An American Family* debut had died down. Jade Goody, however, managed to carve out a career for herself based solely on reality-programming related endeavours; even on her deathbed, Goody was flanked by cameras and boom mics—ensuring not only the future financial security of her two young children, but also, perhaps, her intertextual

immortality. Loud was the "pioneer," and Goody the "prototype." And both reality

performers mirrored, almost perfectly, the traditional stars subsumed within Dyer's star

image system. Perhaps, though, this near-alignment should not have come as a surprise.

While reality television production remains unconventional in a number of ways (e.g.

professional, unionized actors are left out of the equation, and scenes are, at least

supposedly, unscripted), traditional techniques of the trade are still in use. In fact, the

very close-up camera shots and heavy-handed scene editing that reality programmers

now seem to favour have their origins in the televised soap operas and sit-coms that pre-

dated *An American Family*. These techniques, aimed at highlighting certain expressions,

features, and personality traits of particular reality subjects have, indubitably, helped to

boost—and preserve—the images of these individuals in audiences' minds. Simply put,

reality performers rely on the same star-making and career-sustaining mechanisms as

mainstream celebrities. But while film stars and traditional television stars have the

luxury of performing scripted fictions, reality stars are charged with the task of

performing themselves—performing the *real*.

As Leo Braudy writes in *The Frenzy of Renown*, "Next to television… films are a

sanctuary of privacy. Television brings the absent performer into every home. Similarly,

while everything on television seems to be immediately present, it is actually made up of

pieces and snippets from various points in time and space" (Braudy, 606). And, perhaps,

next to one's computer screen, *television* becomes that sanctuary of privacy. Indeed, in

the case(s) of Maddox's and Ringley's lifecasts, the sheer intimacy of these broadcasts

was cultivated through both content and context—through the lifecasters' messages *and*

their chosen medium. While Goody's and Loud's images were framed (at least initially)

by television sets, and consumed from the comfort of viewers' living rooms, Maddox's and Ringley's original texts, their lifecasts, were framed by personal computers, and consumed, most likely, from viewers' bedrooms and home offices (more intimate, or private spaces). Of course, these live-streaming lifecasts also impart a sense of immediacy—what Walter Benjamin once called "the here and now." There is little (if any) delay between the lifecast's performance/transmission and the audiences' reception thereof. Braudy also contended (as discussed in the second chapter of this paper), that the co-mingling of "intimacy and distance" in a given screen star's image was what helped to sustain this polysemic individual's so-called "aura." In discussing Goody and Loud, I hope to have shown that this Benjaminian construction applies to reality performers, too. Indeed, the medium through which these reality stars' images were initially reproduced, coupled with heavy-handed scene editing (and further augmented by the delay between performance and consumption), necessarily ensures that some element of "distance" will cast its shadow on these performers' otherwise intimate images. With lifecasts, though, this "distance" is more difficult to detect; intimacy and immediacy seem to subsume all signs of distance. Thus, the intimacy of their primary medium (the Internet) necessarily occludes the lifecaster from the celebrity sphere that the reality television performer was able to transcend. Even with Hal Niedzviecki's peepcast, the intimacy of the broadcast was further enhanced by Niedzviecki's contact with his viewers. From taking song requests, to engaging in "live chats" with his audience via his blog's instant messaging function, Niedzviecki ensured that his product—his image— was utterly accessible.

In the opening of Mark Andrejevic's *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, the author suggests that reality TV fans seek "not an escape from reality, but an escape *into* reality" (Andrejevic, 8). While Goody and Loud both experienced this "escape" in edited, episodic intervals, Ringley and Maddox immersed themselves in this reality, completely. What Ringley and Maddox offered their subscribers was categorically different from what PBS or MTV presented to their home-viewers; these lifecasters broadcasted the most mundane, trivial details of their everyday lives, alongside the odd narrative climax or pitfall. There were no close-up shots, no recaps, no voiceovers, no "confessional room" breakdowns, and no plot-twisting narratives cobbled together by professional film editors. In short, Ringley and Maddox's performed realities were too close to the "real thing." And while they continue to be heralded in academic texts as self-made heroes and digital pioneers, neither Ringley nor Maddox—at least by Dyer's specifications—will ever be considered "stars." In this sense, reality TV, and reality TV stars, still occupy a unique space in cultural (and commercial) industries. This televisual format, and the stars it creates, straddles the line between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the real and the seemingly surreal, and the everyday and the utterly bizarre. Scripted approximations of the real (daytime dramas and sit-coms alike) are not "real" enough to satiate the appetite of Andrejevic's armchair escapees, and live-streaming lifecasts, as seen with Maddox and Ringley, provide, perhaps, an over-abundance of intimate, everyday minutia. But reality TV shows like *An American Family*, *Big Brother* and *The Real World* showcase *just enough* of the everyday, ensuring their performers' polysemic potential in the process.

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My internship with Chocolate Box Entertainment concluded mid-February. I had logged close to three-hundred hours' worth of work with the production company, and I knew it was time to move on (to paying gigs—or so I hoped). When I said my goodbyes, the documentary was still in the process of being pieced together. Chocolate Box Entertainment had amassed hundreds of hours of footage, and it was now up to the producers (who were also the film's editors and directors) to splice-and-dice this collection of data into a cohesive, coherent (and preferably sixty-minute) documentary. Sally Blake, my field placement supervisor, was still spending the majority of her waking hours in the office's dimly-lit editing booth, attempting to locate the most compelling and succinct sound-bites in a murky sea of relevant, semi-relevant, and entertaining-albeit-not-quite-relevant information. Jeannette Loakman, Blake's production partner, was splitting her time and attention between tying up loose ends with *Peep Me* (i.e., ensuring Chocolate Box Entertainment was in possession of all of the film's participants' waivers—mine included—and submitting the necessary paperwork to ensure the film's inclusion in future documentary festivals), and securing funding for her next documentary endeavour. And Hal? Hal Niedzviecki had done his part. He had spent two weeks of his life under constant surveillance; he had traveled to Simi Valley, California, to learn tricks of the reality TV trade from the so-called "pros;" he had interviewed, on camera, a dozen of the world's leading peep academics (Mark Andrejevic, included); and he had "performed the real" for Chocolate Box Entertainment's producers on countless film shoots. Taking one last look at Niedzviecki's *Peep Me* blog, I encountered a familiar (if proverbial) motif: Niedzviecki

was attempting, via anecdotal evidence, to demystify the documentary-making process. That is, Niedzviecki wanted his readers to know about the "pick-up" shots that were captured, by Chocolate Box Entertainment, long after his original scenes had been filmed: "Hey everyone," he wrote, "we're down in my basement all day today shooting what's [sic] called "pick-up" shots for Peep Me—the Peep Culture documentary. Basically we're going back and "recreating" or you might even say "faking" shots we now realize we need, but didn't get the first time around" (*Peep Me*). My sense of *déjà vu*, of course, was linked to the *Torontoist* interview that had brought me to Niedzviecki's peep-rigged house in the first place. During that interview, Niedzviecki had talked about having to "take out the trash multiple times" in order to satisfy the camera operator's (and the producers') needs. Perhaps not surprisingly, Niedzviecki had written about this "recreation" when he first started posting on the *Peep Me* blog. While Niedzviecki was, undoubtedly, providing his readers with valuable insights into documentary production processes, he was also playing into the public persona he had created for himself. In *The Peep Diaries*, Niezviecki had presented himself as a street-savvy, only-slightly-holier-than-thou public intellectual, and he was using intertextual means—his blog, and the documentary—to support his now-polysemic image.

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