Framing Celebrity

New directions in celebrity culture

Edited by
Su Holmes and **Sean Redmond**

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Celebrity culture has a pervasive presence in our everyday lives – perhaps more so than ever before. It shapes not simply the production and consumption of media content but also the social values through which we experience the world. This collection analyses this phenomenon, bringing together essays which explore celebrity across a range of media, cultural and political contexts.

The authors investigate topics such as the intimacy of fame, political celebrity, stardom in American 'quality' television (Sarah Jessica Parker), celebrity 'reality' TV (*I'm a Celebrity … Get Me Out of Here!*), the circulation of the porn star, the gallery film (*David*/David Beckham), the concept of cartoon celebrity (*The Simpsons*), fandom and celebrity (k.d. lang, *NSYNC), celebrity in the tabloid press, celebrity magazines (*heat*, *Celebrity Skins*), the fame of the serial killer and narratives of mental illness in celebrity culture.

The collection is organized into four themed sections. **Fame Now** broadly examines the contemporary contours of fame as they course through new media sites (such as 'reality' TV and the internet) and different social, cultural and political spaces. **Fame Body** attempts to situate the star or celebrity body at the centre of the production, circulation and consumption of contemporary fame. **Fame Simulation** considers the increasingly strained relationship between celebrity and artifice and 'authenticity'. **Fame Damage** looks at the way the representation of fame is bound up with auto-destructive tendencies or dissolution.

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Where do books come from? The idea for them seems to magic out of thin air – the alchemy of good conversation, pleasurable negotiation, academic provocation, and hard-fought debate. They start off with an explosive energy and an outpouring of thoughts, arguments, concepts and theories. Books to be written are like fireworks or comets blazing a trail. They emerge from intensive intellectual labour: the hard graft of extensive research, the constant drafting and redrafting of sentences, paragraphs and chapters, and the following of false trails, as well as the search for new horizons. Books are the product of journeying.

On this particular journey a great many friends, colleagues, and students have helped steer us in the right direction. We would like to thank our contributors for their energetic support for this collection. Their essays are the fireworks and comets that light up a project like this. We would like to thank Rebecca Barden for initially commissioning the book at Routledge. We would like to thank our long-standing (and long-suffering) friends and colleagues – Deborah Jermyn, Cathy Fowler, David Lusted and Karen Randell – for endless rounds of juicy star-gossip and emotional support. Finally, we would like to thank our students in the UK and New Zealand for allowing us to play out the game of fame in lectures and seminars.

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Chapter 1
Introduction
Understanding celebrity culture

The I and the Me of fame

I want to be a star. I want to be adored. I want to see and hear the screams of *my* fans and the roar of an ecstatic applause. I want my name in neon lights and my handprints on the Hollywood Boulevard. I want money. I want *lots* of money. I want a heavenly mansion in Beverley Hills and a string of servants to pay my bills. I want wealth. I want to land a helicopter on my luscious lawn. I want sex. I want drug and alcohol excess. I want boys and girls and I want boys and girls to want me. I want a size 8 supermodel in my heart-shaped swimming pool. *Give me luxury leather.*

I want to be a celebrity. I want to be loved. I want the glitz, the glamour, the sparkle and the existential glow. I want the red carpet treatment. I want VIP champagne parties. I want TV chat show hosts to fawn (fall) over me. I want to be harassed and harangued by the tabloid press. I want to be on the cover of *Hello* magazine. I want fame. I want celebrification. I want to be holy, extra special, a precious metal, worshipped and loved. I want a statue of me on Wellington's Lambton Quay. I want the key to my home city.

I want to be the star of a blockbuster film. I want to be Colin Farrell. I want to be a hard-bodied action hero, a smooth-talking Irish romancer, and an icon of male perfection. I want to be Kelly McGillis, in *Top Gun*, kissing Tom Cruise. I don't want to be a nobody. I want to be the centre of attention. I want to be someone called … Leif Memphis …

As one of the co-editors of this book, this is how Sean introduces fame to his undergraduate students. As he begins to take on the persona of 'Leif Memphis', PowerPoint slides of the objects/events/possessions being referenced appear on the giant screen behind him. The students laugh, thankfully, but they also begin to get an intimate sense of the footprints of contemporary stardom and

celebrification that the lecture goes on to explore. In fact, the introduction to the lecture sets up many of the dominant themes of star and celebrity analysis that are taken up in this edited collection. 'The Leif Memphis Story' is very much the story of this book, as we now go on to outline briefly.

Adulation, identification and emulation are key motifs in the study of celebrity culture. The *desire* for fame, stardom, or celebrification stems from a *need* to be wanted in a society where being famous appears to offer enormous material, economic, social and psychic rewards (Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). Nick Couldry (2000, 2003) argues that, in the modern world, being famous gives one access to a social space that sits at the centre of meaning generation and belonging. If you are *not* famous then you exist at the periphery of the power networks that circulate in and through the popular media. If you are *not* famous you help make up the legions of fans that celebrate the famous. If you are *not* famous you become part of the deifying crowd who help co-produce (along with the popular media) the overriding impression that stars and celebrities are indeed at the centre of things. Contemporary fame circulates in a spider-web-like tautology: it is at the beginning and end of a great many important social relations.

This particular discursive strand of 'me, me, me' fame also relates to what one might refer to as the egotistical, fractured, or incomplete nature of (post)modern identity. On the one hand, it is argued that the modern self is overly vain, narcissistic and increasingly founded on possessive qualities – qualities that the star or celebrity best embodies. The 'possessive individual' (Abercombie *et al.*, 1986; Pateman, 1988) understands the self to be 'a kind of cultural resource, asset or possession' (Lury, 1996: 8) that has to be styled or accessorized in the same way that famous people are. The possessive individual measures their self-worth in terms of the way they look, which is part dependent on the clothes, jewellery and beauty products they own – consumption choices strongly influenced by the stars and celebrities who are 'in fashion' at any one particular moment. On the other hand, the modern self is said to be marked by a great deal of anxiety, doubt and confusion over who- and how-to-be in a world where identity is felt to be more malleable, more questionable, and much more decidedly manufactured. According to Kobena Mercer, 'in political terms, identities are in crisis because traditional structures of membership and belonging inscribed in relations of class, party and nation-state have been called into question' (1994: 4). The alienated individual of the modern age, then, may feel homeless, and in a perpetual state of dislocation.

The I/Leif Memphis personae come into being along this representational axis. Leif Memphis exists as the epitome of the successful, narcissistic star, made to be in love with his own idolized image. He is an idealized male who loves to be loved. He is 'onstage' (Braudy, 1986: 549), in public view, and such visibility guarantees his selfhood. By contrast, the possessive 'I' of the narrative wants to

be famous (to become Leif Memphis), so that he can live in the social centre, where material wealth and psychic good health supposedly lie. But the 'I' is also a split figure, dissatisfied and unhappy with his lot in the world, desperately reaching out for that which he thinks will bring him plenitude or ontological and existential wholeness. His desire to be famous reveals emptiness at the core of his being. Yet one could also argue that Leif Memphis has a similar, if perhaps inverted, incomplete subjectivity. The surface level and commodity-driven nature of his imagined life can be said to be devoid of meaningful intimacy. The drink and the booze can be said to be a coping, but a nonetheless destructive, device to deal with the constant glare of fame. The (perhaps ironic) desire to be hounded by the press reveals a fear or loathing of its intrusive and unkind gaze – a gaze that leaves Leif without a 'private' world into which to escape. Across these vacillating subject positions, then, a story of fame emerges that is shot through with uncertainty, ambiguity and unfulfilled desire: one is or one wants to be somebody else, somewhere else, continually. In the modern world one is psychologically damaged, whether it is as an anomic fan or a lonely famous person. This version of existential drift is compounded by the way stardom or celebrification are made synonymous with one another. The 'I' can see little difference between them, and only simultaneity in the utopian promises and dystopian consequences they both offer. To be famous is *to be famous* and that is all that matters.

The wider context of the para-social relationship that emerges between the fan and the star or celebrity is important in the analysis of fame. Stars and celebrities have often been perceived as performing a surrogate function, standing in for absent or non-existent friends and family (Schickel, 1985). Anomic, atomized individuals reach out for idealized stars and celebrities in what might be called a self-directed healing process. In the modern world where real face-to-face intimacy, with people you know, has arguably decreased, fandom involves an 'illusion of intimacy' that aims to compensate for such loneliness (ibid.: 4). But the para-social relationship may also involve a much more productive or life-affirming connectivity. The fan/star/celebrity relationship may actually be one of the most intimate and far-reaching forms of sociability in the modern world (Elliott, 1999). Fandom is often a creative enterprise, involving the production of artwork, fiction and dedicated websites. Fandom opens up new networks of communication and interaction between and across fan communities. Gossip about stars and celebrities can be understood 'as an important social process through which relationships, identity, and social and cultural norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared' (Turner, 2004: 24). In this context, the star or celebrity is not just a desired object but also an intimate doorway for connecting people. If Leif Memphis were real (authentic), then his stardom would also be a productive and affective cultural force.

Fandom, and the construction of stars and celebrities, has always involved the 'search' for the 'authentic' person that lies behind the manufactured mask of fame (Dyer, 1998). However, this 'game' of star and celebrity hide-and-seek seems to be an increasingly important one given the amount of 'extra' artifice and simulation in the modern world. New and old media technologies have enabled stars and celebrities to be endlessly circulated, replayed, downloaded and copied. Their images, qualities and cultural values are found almost everywhere, invading or affecting many areas of social life. At the same time, the digital and the virtual media technologies have also opened up the number of spaces where the star or celebrity can be found out, re-written, and seen *in the flesh* as they really are. The desire, by both the popular media and fans/consumers, to get behind or to see through the manufactured nature of the star or celebrity image is one of the over-riding discourses for the way contemporary fame is circulated and interpreted (Gamson, 1994). The body of the star or celebrity is key to this search for the 'truth' about the star or celebrity. If one can see the famous person stripped of all their finery, then one is supposedly getting unrestricted and unfiltered access to gaze at, and be intimate with, their primal state. If one gets to see the star or celebrity body as flawed (fat, spotty, wrinkled), then one is supposedly getting a more natural or unmediated picture of them. The bare flesh either confirms them as desirable beings or as beings whose flesh disappoints, perhaps just like our own skin and bone. The bare flesh confirms them as idealized beings or as beings who are as materially fallible as we are. It also confirms or helps to disrupt the gendered and sexual nature of hegemonic desire. The body of the star or celebrity either functions to reproduce dominant culture's patriarchal, racial and heterosexual gaze, or it allows transgressive, oppositional, and queer feelings and fantasies to emerge. Of course, the naked body of the star or celebrity is not an indicator of authenticity, nor can it ever be 'pure' or 'natural'. Images are touched-up, shot in soft focus, or digitally manipulated, and the persona of the star or celebrity (which may in any case be built on nudity) always haunts the representation. And with cosmetic surgery and the emergence of digital stars (such as Lara Croft) there is no longer a 'real' body referent to anchor this anyway.

Bodies surround the imagined star persona of Leif Memphis. He is a figure of idealized sexual attraction and corporeal desirability, and he craves the bodies of groupies who will confirm his own physical perfection. The 'I' of the passage is an embodied fan, too, wanting to be the body (of Leif Memphis) and to have the bodies of fans that such stardom would bring. The body is imagined to be the vessel that will grant intimacy, authenticity, and guarantee present/future film parts, photo-shoots, and front-page newspaper and magazine coverage. The body is both felt to be authentic and a saleable commodity. But the body is also sexually fluid and promiscuous: desire oscillates between straight, queer and transgender identification. The fantasy 'I' imagines itself as both a famous female and a

male body, and desires bodies that are young and which will keep its body feeling young. As such, the 'I' of the passage is also a cipher for subversive, marginal fans who seek identificatory pleasures through the re-inscription and appropriation of the famous body. Leif Memphis's desired body is not his own, it belongs to the cultural industries; and it belongs to the fans who can make of it what they will.

To return to the performance in the lecture hall, it is also an embodied one. The lecturer pretends to be the possessive 'I' and the desired/desirable Leif Memphis. He tries to literally bring the discourses of fame into the lecture space – embodying a figure that dresses, talks and walks for the part. The lecture ends with a 'publicity' photograph of Leif, in close-up, that is signed with the inscription, 'with love, Leif Memphis xxx'. In this sense fame has entered academia in two ways: it provides the performative material out of which lectures can be delivered (Sean has also 'starred' as Charlie Chaplin and David Bowie), and it provides the issues and debates that drive many film, television, cultural and media studies courses. Of course, academic fame exists in other forms. There is the star academic whose work is publicly well known and who regularly turns up on television to provide authoritative commentary. There is the star academic fêted within the academic community, whose name guarantees a publishing contract (in the same way as a Hollywood star can guarantee funding for a movie), and who is invited to star at conventions and symposia. At the 2005 Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference, Richard Dyer's plenary speech was delivered from what can only be described as a stage. His entrance was greeted with ecstatic applause and he delivered a paper that was full of witticisms, jokes and self-reflexive innuendo, all signifiers of the Richard Dyer star persona. We loved it, lapped it up and crowded around him afterwards – fans of an academic star who had just delivered a star performance. Richard, of course, is the author of *Stars* (1979), arguably the most important (*famous*) study of this phenomenon, and the book that launched his academic career. Richard, then, is an academic star in part because of the study of stars.

In a sense, then, the story of the possessive 'I' and of the desired/desirable Leif Memphis is the story of this edited collection. The themes of belonging, identification, empowerment, psychic loss, authenticity, intimacy, affect, corporeality and dislocation/damage reoccur across the essays and the sections the book is composed of. These are decidedly contemporary concerns: the collection speaks to the here-and-now of fame culture – although of equal concern is how the present is situated in complex articulations with historical trajectories of stardom and celebrification. The collection aims to address how the production, circulation and consumption of fame have been transformed by new media technologies, formats and (post)modern sensibilities. More specifically, the collection attempts to situate the study of stars and celebrities in relation to new or under-researched sites of analysis. Fame is made sense of in terms of its ubiquitous

presence in all areas of modern life. Fame is analysed in terms of its increasingly simulated nature but also through the sense that it is now often represented as less authorized and therefore more authentic. Fame is understood to be centred on the body and there is an emphasis on how corporeality drives the production and consumption of stars and celebrities. Lastly, fame is explored in terms of the destructive damage it does to the famous and the fans of the famous. Modern or postmodern fame is often apocalyptic in nature, with hate and despair – as much as love and desire – at its burning centre.

We suggest that this collection has something new (even profound) to say about the processes and practices of stardom and celebrification as they are played out in the modern world today. However, at the same time, we fully acknowledge that the idea of what is 'new' is both highly complex and open to interpretation, and that history is always written into the present of any phenomenon that comes into social existence. As Jessica Evans has observed of contemporary celebrity culture: '[C]hange often happens in a small-scale, piecemeal fashion, so that elements of the "old" are reformulated and combined with new developments' (2005: 16). One of the challenges here, then, is to keep this balance in play.

Talk About Fame

> Did you see such-and-such on TV last night? Didn't she look beautiful! Don't think much of him though … they'll never last, mind you …

Braudy argues that we 'live in a society bound together by the talk of fame' (1986: 1). If we take 'talk' to encompass both social interaction and media discourse, then it is this dialogue which constitutes the very concept of celebrity. The famous are constructed, circulated and consumed through the busy channels of media production, as well as the social networks with which they intersect, and in debating how we might explore this phenomenon, the student or academic has to find a way to enter (and even 'pause') this flow, which has perhaps never seemed so prominent and pervasive. Celebrity clearly courses through these cultural circuits in many different ways, shaped by a myriad of different contexts, technologies and interactions. Within this environment, Graeme Turner observes the range of ways in which the question of 'what is a celebrity?' might be understood:

> First, commentary in the popular media … tends to regard the modern celebrity as a symptom of a worrying cultural shift: towards a culture that privileges the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the

> enduring, the written, and the rational. Second, those who consume and invest in celebrity tend to describe it as an innate or 'natural' quality … [here] the defining qualities of the celebrity are both natural and magical … Third, and in striking contrast to this, the academic literature … has tended to focus on celebrity as the product of a number of cultural and economic processes (2004: 4).

This is certainly useful in indicating the different discursive investments in celebrity. Rather than echoing the discourse of 'broadsheet think-pieces railing against the C-list celebs infecting our culture' (Hilton, 2004: 21), academic comment indeed aims to analyse celebrity – examining its historical development, cultural, political and economic functions, or its social and cultural use value for the audience. Rather than dismissing it as the ultimate symbol of cultural decline, it aims to explore, then, why and how it *matters*. At the same time, such boundaries are not as clear-cut as they might first appear, particularly when it comes to situating the role of academic analysis. Issues of 'taste' and cultural value have long since shaped conceptions of celebrity, and the contemporary lament over the empty status of modern fame is deafening. Indeed, the claim that there is something 'new' or different about celebrity in contemporary culture is often a political act – it is rarely neutral (see Evans, 2005). Reality TV, for example, has become a particularly visible site for debate here. While academic analysis has undoubtedly provided far more reflective and complex accounts of such fame when compared to the 'sound-bite' assertions in the press, it still inhabits the same cultural framework. Reality TV contestants can be described in academic contexts – as indeed they are in the press – as 'the epitome of the fabricated celebrity' (Turner, 2004: 60), or as 'a bottom level of regularly replenished celebrity' (Corner and Pels, 2003: 5). Furthermore, in terms of this arena in particular, the discursive environment has fostered roles which are somewhat interchangeable: academic comment is used to contextualize comment on fame in the press, public intellectuals can even *become* contestants/participants,[1] contestants can become media 'commentators' on fame, and the perspectives of producers now appear in academic collections (e.g. Carter, 2004). As 'The Story of Leif Memphis' has already (and perhaps provocatively) suggested, despite traditional conceptions of academic 'objectivity', academics get close to the stars and celebrities they write about: their case studies or approaches can often be shaped by an affective connection with the famous figure in question. One only has to read Richard Dyer's oft quoted end to *Stars*, to see (*feel*) the emotional investment in the stars and celebrities that he chooses to study:

> When I see Marilyn Monroe I catch my breath; when I see Montgomery Clift I sigh over how beautiful he is … While I accept utterly that

> beauty and pleasure are culturally and historically specific, and in no way escape ideology, none the less they are beauty and pleasure and I want to hang on to them in some form or another (1998: 162).

On a number of different levels, then, it is worth returning to Leo Braudy's comment that we should be wary of the easy 'pose of objectivity that steals into language' when we talk and write about fame (1986: 11). The point made above is less intended to 'rehabilitate' the cultural value of celebrity in reality TV, than to emphasize the difficulty of positioning academic comment on celebrity as an entirely autonomous sphere, separate from – and only commenting on – the wider circuits which constitute celebrity culture. While it certainly has its own particular aims and agendas which differ from popular media commentary, academic comment is always part of the cacophony of voices discussing fame in any one moment, shaped by its contexts in a range of different ways. For example, 'academic' texts such as those by Daniel Boorstin (1961) and Leo Lowenthal (1961) are now read as elucidating something of the history of fame – the discourses in operation during the time in which they were writing. From this perspective, we might ask about the status and role of our own comment here, and what it reveals about celebrity in the *here and now*.

So, in relation to discourses of cultural value, we make two points here. First, it is impossible to discuss contemporary celebrity without *also* addressing such judgements – they form such an integral part of how celebrity circulates in the public sphere. Essays dealing with the porn star, the celebrity 'skin' or gossip magazine, celebrity reality TV, or boyband fans on the internet, necessarily confront these judgements in a number of different ways. Second, issues of cultural value simultaneously (and necessarily) structure the varying perspectives our contributors offer on celebrity – some keen to defend and rehabilitate their topic of concern, others more openly ambiguous and critical. What emerges in this talk of fame is a searching and kinetic exploration of its textures, forms and processes.

Furthermore, and as perhaps another example of the ubiquitous nature of fame, it is worth noting that compiling an academic collection on celebrity has connections with the processes of fame which structure a celebrity magazine – even though we might conceive of them as radically different media forms. *Framing Celebrity* is a text which is capitalizing on the popular, as well as the academic, interest in contemporary celebrity. At the level of content, there is also the need to consider whether the stars/celebrities discussed garner a sense of national and international appeal, whether they have enough 'cultish' capital, or whether their fame carries a certain market value. In fact, the economic 'worth' of the star or celebrity often influences their potential visibility in the pages of academic analyses. In addition to this, and as noted above, academia has been conceived as operating its own form of 'star system', with the fame of authors

functioning to market the appeal of academic works.[2] Tim Spurgin has fascinatingly distinguished between 'star academics', 'superstars' and 'megastars' (2001: 2), bringing out how the 'academic star system' both compares to, yet differs from, the circulation of fame in wider cultural contexts. The Su Holmes and Sean Redmond of this edited collection, then, are perhaps hoping for their own bit of academic stardom.

Celebrity matters

Although it did not mark the beginning of intellectual comment on stardom (Barker, 2003: 5), Richard Dyer's work had a seminal influence on the field, and his books *Stars* (1998, originally 1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) continue to be canonical texts. Dyer famously argued for the analyses of stars in the realm of representation and ideology. Stars could be understood as 'signs' – read as 'texts' and 'images' – and investigated using the tools of semiotics (Barker, 2003: 6). Paul McDonald, for example, summarizes Dyer's approach as the investigation of how 'cinema circulates the images of individual film performers and how those images may influence the ways in which we think of the identity of ourselves and others' (1998: 176). For Dyer, stars articulate what it means to 'be human' in capitalist society, dramatizing 'ideas of personhood, in large measure shoring up the notion of the individual but also at times registering the doubts and anxieties attendant on it' (Dyer, 1986: 6). Dyer's broader argument here is that stars function to work through useful questions about personhood (as the example of Leif Memphis at the beginning of this section also suggests). It is precisely the mediated status of stars and celebrities, and the highly performative context in which they appear, that activates this contradictory dynamic, fostering questions such as: Is there a distinction between our 'private' and 'public' selves? Do we have any unique, essential, 'inner' self, or are we simply a site of self-performance and public presentation? Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies* also went on to offer a more detailed framework for conceptualizing and researching the star image (Dyer, 1986), situating it within the myriad of historical, social and cultural contexts from which it emerged. Film studies arguably remains the most developed field in this respect, and it has increasingly widened its focus on stardom in recent years, addressing in more detail questions of political economy, histories of stardom, and the role of the audience (see McDonald, 1998; Barker, 2003).

Exploring the relationship between identity and the cultural functions of celebrity has permeated much of the work in the field, and this focus is further pursued by the essays collected here. But in media and cultural studies (as well as sociology or sports studies and beyond), it is fair to suggest that this subject has also been approached as a set of broader cultural and political processes which are not necessarily anchored to, or explored through, a particular star/celebrity

image (Turner, 2004) (e.g. see Braudy, 1986; Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001).[3] From this perspective, wider questions are asked about the cultural functions of celebrity. Chris Rojek (2001) for example, examines the phenomenon in relation to the historical contours of community and religion, while John Corner and Dick Pels (2003) have been among those to explore the relationship between celebrity and discourses of modern citizenship, particularly in terms of its implications for the political arena. As briefly referred to above, Nick Couldry (2000, 2003, 2004) has pushed at the traditional parameters of the field in a fascinating set of analyses, raising new questions about the role of celebrity in producing and legitimating the media's (wider) symbolic power. Rather than asking questions about the cultural functions of celebrities once they take up their place on the media stage, Couldry has questioned why it seems 'natural' to create this arena *in the first place*. Couldry argues that the media constructs and maintains a symbolic hierarchy between media/ordinary worlds, in which the media is presented as the privileged '"frame" through which we access the reality that matters to us as social beings' (2004: 58). This is what he terms the 'myth of the media centre', in which mediated space is constructed as 'special' and significant, and to enter it, or even briefly pass through it, is to receive a form of symbolic capital. Reality TV has epitomized this assumption, and is seen as catering to a new era of public narcissism ('pick me!') in which the self is validated by performing for the gaze of others. This perspective suggests a wider view, one in which we need to address how public visibility *in itself* functions to validate social identity and belonging – a means by which we can ensure we 'really' do (or did) exist (Braudy, 1986; Littler, 2004).

This brief outline of disciplinary contexts is important here, as this collection draws upon the heritage of these different spheres. It explores the construction of particular star/celebrity images, while it also gives attention to a much broader set of questions about how celebrity functions. But it is crucial to pause here given that mapping this terrain also raises the issue of terminology – the categories used to explore and conceptualize fame. The terms fame, stardom and celebrity have a degree of liquidity, as our discussion so far has no doubt suggested. In fact, the malleable and porous nature of these concepts is taken up and contested in this collection (see David Schmid's essay). For example, in film studies, where the term 'star' is most commonly used, stardom was understood to mean the product of an interaction between on- and offscreen construction, a dialogue between the performing presence, and the 'private' life of the star (deCordova, 1990; Ellis, 1992), while it also carries auratic, glamorous and desirable connotations. (There are of course also other terms which could be placed above or alongside this, such as icon or idol.) In comparison, the term 'celebrity' has historically had a more contradictory and often less prestigious lineage, in terms of both its popular and its academic use. As P. David Marshall demonstrates, the

use of the 'term *celebrity* in its contemporary (ambiguous) form developed in the nineteenth century' (1997: 4; italics in original); Marshall provides more detail of its historical trajectory than is possible here, and illustrates clearly how the term's shifting significance is bound up with its changing relations with cultural value. This in turn is a trajectory which is inextricably linked to the rise of capitalism (and celebrity is conceived as its product). While originally indicating an 'affinity with piety and religion' (ibid.), by the nineteenth century celebrity had become 'a term that announce[d] a vulgar sense of notoriety', and 'some modern sense of false value' (Marshall, 1997: 5, 4). From this perspective, then, celebrity is historically conceptualized as a particular form of fame – one which is the product of capitalism, and which implies a particular connection to the historical evolution of public visibility, and its relations with the mass media and changing notions of achievement.

This shift is seen to be intimately intertwined with the democratization of fame: as fame becomes more ubiquitous, so its currency is seen to be devalued, at least at the level of public discourse. Indeed, the term celebrity has increasingly come to be used in a highly playful and usually derogatory sense – from the irreverent and cheeky peep into 'celebville' provided by publications such as *heat* magazine (Holmes, 2005), to the joke that celebrity can now be referred to as the alternative 'C-word'. Even here, however, we might note that with the designation of categories from the A- to the Z-list of celebrities now a part of popular cultural discourse, there is a bid to establish an ordered taxonomy of fame. This is perhaps a good example of how it remains a deeply hierarchical phenomenon, even while it seems to proliferate and expand (Turner, 2004).

The term celebrity has various uses in academia. It can function to indicate how the media contexts of fame are now less specific, with individual celebrities rarely restricted to a single media form (Bonner, 2005: 65). It is also used to indicate the broad category of being famous, as now defined by public, mass-mediated, visibility. Rojek describes how 'celebrity = impact on public consciousness' (2001: 10), while Marshall conceives of celebrities as 'overtly public individuals' who are permitted to 'move on the stage while the rest of us watch' (1997: ix). The term can also be used to indicate the broader redefinition of the public/private boundary where the construction of the famous is concerned: where the primary emphasis is increasingly on a person's 'private' life or lifestyle rather than their professional role – if indeed they have one at all (Geraghty, 2000). It is not difficult to see how celebrity then becomes a general term in this respect, given that the emphasis above now characterizes the dominant way in which people are made legible in the public sphere. As Turner comments:

> We can map the precise moment a public figure becomes a celebrity. It occurs at the point at which media interest in their activities is

> transferred from reporting on their public role … to investigating the detail of their private lives (2004: 8).

So the term celebrity is ambiguous in its meanings, and we have noted how it can also imply (or confer) judgements about the topic or figure under discussion. (As Christine Geraghty has observed, for example, women 'are particularly likely to be seen as celebrities whose working life is of less interest than their personal life'; 2000: 187.) Nevertheless, we have used it in the title of this book to signify its contemporary currency in describing mass-mediated fame, and to encompass the scope of its cross-media focus. At the same time, the authors of the essays have used different terms, as shaped by their particular media focus or perspective. They have also used the same terms in different ways.

All of the approaches in this book work from the premise that celebrity is less a property of specific individuals. Rather, it is constituted discursively, by the way in which the individual is represented' (Turner *et al.*, 2000: 11). As indicated above, it may well be true that the significance of celebrity as a discursive category has taken on a particular significance in the contemporary cultural climate. This emerges from the suggestion that it may increasingly be a 'generic' mode of representation, a set of discursive structures through which the famous are constructed, shuttled and consumed. This is an idea that is usually articulated with a sense of alarm and distaste, and Turner notes David Giles' suggestion that 'the brutal reality of the modern age is that all famous people are treated like celebrities by the mass media, whether they be a great political figure, a worthy campaigner, an artist "touched by genius", a serial killer or [a reality TV star]' (Giles, 2000: 5, cited in Turner, 2004: 7). This effectively prioritizes the 'authorship' of the apparatus over the celebrities it produces, reflecting the argument that the publicity machine has become a highly visible player in the cultural fabrication of celebrity, 'as much an object of fascination as the individuals it promotes' (Mole, 2004). These debates are particularly important in relation to this collection, given that it explicitly aims to offer a cross-media, cross-disciplinary focus.

The study of stardom and celebrity was for some time reliant on a small range of canonical texts, and while it has represented an expanding field of publishing in recent years, edited collections have not been especially prominent. More importantly, and despite the arguments about the blurring of categories above, they have been organized around a particular media/cultural focus – such as cinema or sport (e.g. Gledhill, 1991, Babington, 2001, Andrews and Jackson, 2001). What we want to suggest here is that, in the contemporary media environment, a range of studies from different contexts can productively speak to one another in a dynamic and broader dialogue about fame. The form of the edited collection is unique in enabling a number of arguments, approaches and

perspectives to unfold, and we suggest that this is highly suited to the far-reaching and often contradictory rhythms of celebrity culture.

This also requires qualification. The collection indeed ranges across some of the figures mentioned by Giles above – 'the genius', the serial killer, the reality TV star – but that is not to imply that their 'celebrity' is interchangeable. To assert this would surely be a woeful neglect of their discursive construction, or the affective relations they may foster with the audience. Equally, while the media contexts of fame have become more blurred, many faces *do* remain associated with a particular media context or role. John Mercer's essay here is interested in the textual and cultural specificity of the male porn star, while Sheila Whiteley examines how the generic norms of popular music have shaped the political contours of celebrity at the level of gender, subjectivity and transgression. This is evidence of the need to balance the 'discursive regime' of celebrity with the more localized attention to detail, case study and context. At the same time, other contributors are interested in movement *across* such boundaries: how rock/film stars move into politics (see Drake and Higgins' essay), how a tennis player travels across promotional intertexts (Ramona Coleman-Bell's essay), or how a famous footballer is quite literally reframed as the subject of a video portrait in a gallery (see the essay by Catherine Fowler). But while it is true that earlier work perpetuated restrictive media categories that are now (in part) outdated (Deborah Jermyn's essay in this collection revisits the earlier dichotomy of the film star versus the 'TV personality') (see Ellis, 1992), debates about the overriding significance of the celebrity *apparatus* also give rise to other ways of conceptualizing media specificity. If earlier work anchored this to a particular media role, many of the essays collected here are interested in how particular genres or media formats – through which a range of celebrities may move – give rise to their own ways of understanding fame, and its aesthetic, technological or ideological implications. Contributors explore how the internet, the magazine, the tabloid newspaper, the gallery film, celebrity photography, or celebrity reality TV, demand a consideration of how celebrity culture travels *across* and through the contemporary media landscape, bringing out what can be seen as differences, as well as commonalities.

This internal flexibility is respected by the sections, which organize the essays according to overriding themes. It will also become clear that a range of other concerns interweave between these categories. For example, something which deserves a particular mention here is the contemporary interest in rendering celebrities, and the idea of being a celebrity, more 'ordinary' – an idea which pivots on the related discourse of 'democratization'. These (symbiotic) claims have certainly been part of the mythic construction of fame for some time, and there is ample evidence to suggest that the concept of democratization brought the modern phenomenon of celebrity into being (see Marshall,

1997). But these discourses do seem to be articulated with more fervour and frequency, albeit with different points of reference. We might refer to how the famous are constructed for public consumption (the boisterously democratic attempt to capture them looking the worse for wear, the desire to 'starve' them in reality shows, and the move to invade every waking minute of their lives), to who gets to *become* famous, and the routes through which this can be attained ('ordinary' people in reality TV, the DIY celebrity culture of the internet). Whether the observer adopts the perspective of cultural decline, in which modern celebrity is viewed as a fall from an earlier period when fame had more scarcity and prestige, or celebrates the freedom of an apparently populist democracy, both arguments agree that fame has opened its doors to more 'ordinary' people in recent years (Evans, 2005: 14). As Nick Stevenson describes, audience members

> are now increasingly likely to perceive themselves as potential stars and celebrities, rather than being content to admire others from afar. However, we need to be clear that most of the audience are still *unlikely to become* either stars or celebrities [our emphasis] (2005: 159).

As this suggests, critics have been sceptical as to whether this 'shift' undermines the traditional economic, ideological or political structures of celebrity in significant ways. Even if the celebrity, and the idea of *becoming* a celebrity, is increasingly promoted as 'ordinary', this far from indicates an equality of opportunity. Furthermore, it is perhaps easy to forget that any claims to 'democratization' always sit on the fault-line of an unassailable contradiction. As McDonald usefully reminds us: 'Fame, like power, could never be evenly distributed, for even if it were possible that we could all be famous, if everyone were famous then no one would be famous' (1995: 65). The contributors in this collection further reflect on the political dimensions of these claims, bringing into focus new perspectives, sites of analysis and case studies.

Inside this book: Exclusive! Uncut! And only in *Framing Celebrity* ...

Framing Celebrity is organized into four themed sections. Each section addresses what the editors and contributors consider to be a particular dominant feature of stardom and celebrity as it is configured in the modern world. Nonetheless, while each section makes a case for its own purchase on the play of fame, conversations, interconnections and arguments emerge in and across the book.

Part I, 'Fame Now', broadly examines the contemporary contours of fame as they course through new media sites (such as reality TV and the internet), and

different social, cultural and political spaces. The section considers the pervasive nature of fame and its impact on everyday life, while also examining how contemporary fame circulates within – and is profoundly shaped by – its different cultural, political and technological contexts. Key issues and terms that emerge in this section include authenticity, ordinariness, intimacy, televisual stardom, the celebritization of politics and the phenomenon of subcultural celebrity.

Part II, 'Fame Body', attempts to situate the body of the star or celebrity at the centre of the production, circulation and consumption of contemporary fame. The hard, soft, black, white, partially-dressed or pornographic celebrity body is positioned as central to processes of audience identification, emulation and desire, and to the transmission of powerful ideological messages about race, class, gender and sexuality. Stars and celebrities communicate through their flesh: the popular media produces a gaze that focuses on the shape, size, *look* of the body, and fans idolize and decry the famous on the basis of the perfect (and increasingly) imperfect bodies they display. Key issues and terms which emerge in this section include corporeal anxieties, muscularity, queer desire, physical agency, flesh-as-authenticity, and the relationship between the celebrity body and feminine/feminist self-affirmation.

Part III, 'Fame Simulation', considers the increasingly strained relationship between stardom and celebrity and artifice and authenticity. One of the central paradoxes of the construction and consumption of stars and celebrities rests on the supposed 'unmediated' nature of people's relationship with them, and the highly manufactured way they are brought into vision. A range of new media technologies and formats has made this dialogue between actuality and fakery much more charged. Famous people are now often captured in the raw, 'up close and personal', and yet they are also fabricated by the ever-expanding reach of PR networks and digital technologies which manipulate and distort the 'real'. Key issues and terms that emerge in this section include postmodern subjectivity, hyperreality, self-reflexivity, performativity, democratization and mediation.

Part IV, 'Fame Damage', looks at the way the representation of fame is bound up with auto-destructive tendencies or dissolution. One of the dominant scripts of stardom and celebrity now centres on the real and symbolic pain fame brings to those who exist in the glare of the media spotlight, and who live a life of material and sexual excess. At the same time, the popular media are increasingly involved in 'damaging' the image of the star or celebrity through salacious, critical and unflattering reportage. The famous find themselves subject to existential loss and despair – the object of media representation that brings negation to their doors. Key issues and terms in this section include the decline of individuality, catharsis, narratives of mental illness, trauma, transgression, celebrity-'bashing' and celebrity gossip.

Summaries of each essay can be found in the Introduction to each section. We hope that the direction taken by this collection makes for an enriching, provocative and perhaps even intimate journey for the reader in its bid to contribute to an exciting and expanding area of scholarship.

Notes

1 We refer here to the example of Germaine Greer who entered the *Celebrity Big Brother* house in the UK in 2005. After leaving voluntarily, Greer returned to her role as intellectual critic of the format, foregrounding its exploitative nature.

2 There may of course be objections to the notion that we can describe academia in these terms, as perhaps countered by the suggestion that academic stardom is based on a deserving meritocratic ethos, and that it is name and intellect, rather than persona and personal life, which characterize 'fame' here. These are doubtless fair points, but this is still a system which recognizes achievement through individuation and recognition.

3 This is not necessarily to point to a 'deficiency' in the approach adopted by film studies, but merely to emphasize the different disciplinary influences in operation here.

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