

‘Living the Dream’?

A Critical History of the ‘ordinary person’ in the media

1. Introduction

For those of us who follow such things, the finale of the UK’s *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2006 was a memorable media event. The winner of the show was Chantelle Houghton whose chief claim to fame was that she was not initially a celebrity. Rather she was an ordinary person required convincingly to pass as a celebrity for her genuine celebrity housemates – a task which, with the connivance (one suspects) of some of them, she achieved. And now, on the last night, she emerged from the house, to the accompaniment of fireworks and flash photography, repeatedly uttering the phrase “oh my god!” as she waved to the cheering crowd. The set, a catwalk, was shot from multiple camera angles, to make visible the presence of security guards and, to its left, a big screen on which live images of Chantelle were played back to the crowd. The presenter, Davina McCall, announced “Chantelle walked in as a non-celebrity and walked out as the star of the show. It’s a dream”. Her words were echoed by Chantelle’s mother when during her exit interview she was asked what she thought her daughter should do now. “Live the dream” was her reply.

This event epitomised a key feature of contemporary media culture, widely recognised and commented on, that the ordinary person, through media recognition, has increasing opportunities to achieve fame. In this, Andy Warhol’s much quoted dictum has become a cliché; and is inaccurate in so far as the fame achieved by some reality TV contestants, like Chantelle, has lasted far longer than fifteen minutes. However there are some recent accounts in the media studies literature which do contribute to a critical understanding of the ordinary person becoming famous, and here I shall refer to two, in particular. The first is Nick Couldry’s discussion of ‘media rituals’ (Couldry 2003) in which he argues that the transformation of an ‘ordinary person’ into a ‘media person’ is one ritual by which the myth of the media’s importance, or social ‘centrality’ is confirmed. Selected ordinary people, like Chantelle, are permitted to escape their ordinariness, transcending the category distinction between ordinary person and media person in rituals like the winning of *Big Brother*.

For Couldry, this is a way of reinforcing media power. Following this, Graeme Turner (2004) has offered a very suggestive account of how that power has diversified, in a variety of media sites where such transformations are celebrated. Popular magazines, tabloid newspapers and websites, as well a multitude of TV shows, focus on what he calls “the discursive processes of celebrification” (p83), the production of celebrity as an object of ordinary fascination and aspiration. He suggests that celebrity has become a reference point for new kinds of identity formation, evident in some “young people’s life plans”, in ways which seem unprecedented. The key point in both these accounts is that ‘celebrity’ is no longer remote from ‘ordinariness’, to be worshipped from afar; rather it can be done by anyone who practises the “discourses of celebrification”.

This lecture is an attempt to reflect on this phenomenon, and in its latter stages, I will return to the notion of what 'living the dream' might involve. I will look at the way Chantelle performs "discourses of celebrification" in her exit interview and beyond. But before I get to this point I want to put the current situation in a historical context. So-called 'ordinary people' have appeared in the media since the 1930s (in this essay my focus is on British broadcasting) and indeed have been defined as such, and in specific ways, by the media contexts in which they have appeared. In order better to understand where we are today, with the Chantelles of this world, it will be helpful to look at other ways of 'being ordinary', in quite different contexts, in other media, and at other times.

2. Ordinary lives and ordinary people.

Turner also quotes Couldry to the effect that "ordinary people have never been more visible in the media, nor have their own utterances been reproduced with the faithfulness, respect and accuracy they are today" (2004, p82). This is a truth widely seen in contemporary media studies to be self-evident: it is apparent in the growth of "ordinary television" (Bonner 2003) and in what has been called the "ordinary-ization" of factual entertainment on British television (Brunsdon et al 2001, Moseley 2000, Taylor 2002). For Bonner, ordinary television consists of routine, daily, uneventful programming such as quiz and game shows, talk shows, lifestyle and reality TV, very often featuring ordinary people as participants. Since the 1990s, the explosion of this category of programming has been related to the increasingly competitive environment of multi-channel TV. Brunsdon et al. have identified a tendency for lifestyle programmes in particular to promote a vision of 'ordinary life': domesticated, familial, gendered and above all, dedicated to consumerism. So prevalent is this that Brunsdon concludes, "As we move into television's second century, I think one of the ways we have to deal with television... is through notions of the ordinary" (2001, p57).

So it is partly in the spirit of this that I now turn to the history of 'being ordinary' in the media. How has the 'ordinary' developed as a category such that it now seems to dominate so much media output? I will begin by noting that there at least two historical contexts in which this category appears, which overlap, but are not identical. I am making a distinction here between concepts of the 'ordinary life' and the 'ordinary person'. In the history of British broadcasting both concepts can be traced to pioneering radio programming in the 1930s, but these were different genres of radio, in which notions of the ordinary meant different things.

The 'ordinary life' was a focus for documentary, not only in radio but also in film and in some literary writing. Characteristically it entailed making visible, or audible, 'ways of life' which hitherto had been marginalised in public representation. These ways of life were seen as traditional, sometimes specially skilled, and associated with working class communities (communities defined by the industries that dominated their lives). In a public sphere dominated by middle class voices, these 'ordinary lives' were the lives of 'other people'. Here for example is Olive Shapley's introduction to *Canal Journey*, a radio documentary about people who worked on the Leeds-Liverpool canal, which she produced for the BBC's North Region in 1939:

On this occasion I went after the human story... and tried to get the canal people I met to tell in their own words something of what their life is like... They are not a very voluble race and some found it hard to believe that anyone could find the details of their ordinary life interesting and, when they had been reassured on this point, it wasn't very easy for them to put their ideas into words. All the records you'll hear were made without script or rehearsal" (Shapley 1996, p50)

Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff (1991) have highlighted the pioneering contribution made by Shapley to the development of radio documentary and it is the last point she makes here, about the lack of a script, that is particularly innovative. Nevertheless it is also clear that there is a gap between the 'you' that is addressed by the broadcast and the 'they' whose ordinary lives are the focus for its human interest. There is a casual reference to the canal people as a "race" and an interesting point about their inarticulacy, to which I shall return. We should be clear however that the possibly negative connotations of some of these formulations are nothing to do with Shapley herself, for her intentions were clearly sympathetic, even radical; rather the gap between the subjects of this documentary and its audience was a product of its form, and also the wider context in which she was working.

As several commentators have noted the phrase 'ordinary life', defined in these terms, is a product of modernity. This is the 'everyday life' of the working-classes, women in particular, characterised by a cyclical, repetitive (as opposed to linear, progressive) sense of time, with an accompanying focus on the rootedness of 'home' and habitual, daily routine (Felski 1999). It is a category approached by modernist intellectuals in two ways: either as residual cultural forms to be observed and classified (the better to be governed); or as a focus for critique and transcendence if the working-class is ever to achieve its destiny as the progressive agent of history (Bennett 2004). Tony Bennett includes the Mass Observation movement of the 1930s as an example of the former intellectual response. Through Humphrey Jennings, this had a direct relationship to the development of documentary film, and must have contributed to the intellectual milieu surrounding Shapley in Manchester. As one way of approaching the 'ordinary' it has entered cultural studies, particularly in Raymond Williams' definition of culture as 'ways of life' and in his polemical essay "Culture Is Ordinary" (1958/1989).

Another quotation from 1939 however, contains the germ of a slightly different conception. On March 24th 1939, the *Radio Times* published a special supplement, entitled "The Man-In-The-Street". The front cover featured a photograph of Michael Standing interviewing a passer-by in Piccadilly as part of the long-running Saturday evening programme *In Town Tonight*. The accompanying text tells us that the man is being asked how he has been affected by the Munich crisis of 1938; in other words rather than talking about his 'ordinary life' he is now included in history. A piece inside the supplement extends this interest in the voice of the ordinary person. Entitled "The Man in the Street is a Veteran Broadcaster" it provides a retrospective on several years of innovative broadcasting:

The 'In Town Tonight' idea has spread. The Midland 'Microphone at Large' has introduced us to the countryside counterpart of the man in the street. The West has brought us the voices of workers from Bristol and Brixham. Scotland the rugged Doric of shepherds and crofters from 'The Scottish Countryside'.

The North has been prolific in ‘character’ programmes...D.G. Bridson has allowed ordinary people to tell us the story of cotton, steel, wool and coal. The man (and the woman) in the street have been the subject of Olive Shapley’s programmes... And a series of programmes that deserves a line to itself as a pioneer series was the ‘Harry Hopeful’ series, which brought all sorts and conditions of ‘ordinary’ men and women together in a happy party to entertain you at a common microphone” (pxi)

Paddy Scannell has focussed on *Harry Hopeful* as an early example of what he identifies as a culture of ‘sociability’ in British broadcasting (Scannell 1996, Chapter 2). Hopeful was played by an actor (Frank Nicholls), supposedly an unemployed glass-blower travelling round the northern region in search of work. On his ‘way’ (this was all recorded in the studio) he interviewed selected locals, or invited them to perform their ‘party-pieces’. The term ‘character programme’ captures this precisely: these were ordinary people performing as ‘characters’, doing a ‘turn’. There is, I want to suggest, in the *Radio Times* article, a tension between two different ways of ‘being ordinary’ on the radio. There is still the ethnographic interest in ordinary lives defined by their industrial or agricultural setting. But there is also the emergence of the ordinary person as an entertainer, or as someone with a story to tell. This person is not so much observed, or classified, as celebrated.

In his chapter on sociability, Scannell goes on to discuss the work of one of the most popular broadcasters of the 1940s and 50s, Wilfred Pickles. It was in shows like *Have A Go!* (BBC radio 1946-67) that programming involving ordinary people was truly established. The programme was peripatetic, transmitted from theatres and community centres throughout the north of England, and featuring ordinary people as contestants in a basic form of quiz show. Pickles himself took on the mantle of champion of the ‘ordinary person’ as a broadcaster. Here he is writing in the *TV Mirror*, October 31st 1953, floating ideas for programmes similar to *Have A Go!* as suitable for the nascent medium of television:

...while ‘stars’ and ‘personalities’ are exhaustible the ordinary people are not. They have yet to make their debut on TV in a big way. With programmes like *Have A Go* some of us found a way of presenting them on sound radio – as entertainment their programmes took the jackpot! And the listening figures!

Just ordinary folk airing their thoughts; the witty and the wise, the daft and the droll, the foolish and the philosophical – all good fun.

I want to make more of this than Pickles does, or Scannell for that matter. “All good fun” it may have been, but I want to suggest that the sociability factor in *Have A Go!* is not reducible simply to ‘happy entertainment’ or the ‘merely sociable’ in Scannell’s phrase. It is not just people engaging in fun for its own sake. Listening to tapes of *Have A Go!* today one is struck, as Scannell points out, by its shifting modes of address. Pickles uses two voices, a ‘posh’ voice suitable for national radio and a more distinctively accented, colloquial, northern voice (Pickles was from Yorkshire) with which he addressed his live audience and the contestants. As soon as the programme gets going the northern voice, or voices, are in dominance and the live audience response to this is highly charged. It is like listening to a show in which ordinary people are not so much, in the first instance, entertaining us as themselves. Clearly

there is a “double articulation” (Scannell 1991) in which the talk produced at the live event is transmitted to an overhearing, national audience; however it is not always directly addressed to that audience, nor is it always intelligible.

The best known surviving tape of *Have A Go!* was recorded at Ramsbottom, Lancashire in 1953. After an introduction in which Pickles makes jokes about the locality and sings a song of welcome, the first contestant, Florence Holt, is introduced. This is the first half of her interview:

- WP: And that brings our first er personality to the microphone and she’s a very charming lady with nice grey hair and a nice grey frock it’s very nice to have you here will you tell me your name?
- 5 FH: Mrs Florence Holt
WP: Mrs (.) Florence
FH: Yes
WP: Have a go Flo
Aud: eheheheh
- 10 WP: Mrs Florence Holt. And where do you live er
FH: Eighty two Warley Road Shuttleworth
WP: Oh you Oh you live at Shuttleworth [FH: yes] do you?
FH: Yes
WP: Eh na then. Well now I know you, you’re Mrs you said?
15 [FH: yes] didn’t you? I know that a lot of women in this part of Lancashire go out to work as well as being housewives [FH: yes] do you do a job too?
FH: Yes I’m a bus conductress
WP: Are you?
- 20 FH: Yes
WP: And how long have you been doing that?
FH: Twelve year
WP: Really? [FH: yes] Well tell me about your (.) where does your bus go to?
- 25 FH: Erm Bury to Rawtenstall, and then we have a country run Ramsbottom to Shuttleworth eh eh [Aud: eheheh] and when we get to the terminus there’s a pub at the end called the Duck’orth Arms
WP: Is there? He he and that’s where you change your trolley?
- 30 Aud: eeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaheheheheh
FH: No we have none of them now we’ve only imitations
WP: Well now how do you manage er Flo, er Florrie do they call you Florrie or Florence?
FH: Yes yes Florrie
- 35 WP: Well how do you manage to do your housework as well as doing a job of work like that?
FH: Well you see me hubby works on the buses and one week he’s on earlies and I’m on lates so we switch over (.) kind of thing
Aud: eheheh
- 40 WP: Sort of fifty fifty eh? [FH: yeh yeh] That’s good and er you’ve

heard me in *Have A Go* before [FH: yes] I ask all sorts of questions let's take one out of the blue and say is there anything particularly special that you like to eat Florrie?

- FH: Steak and Onions!
45 Aud: eeeeeeeeeaaaaahhhhhhhxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
WP: Well that's not so bad is it? [FH: no] You've a lot at stake tonight and my name's Pickles
Aud: eheheheh

There are several things to observe in this transcript, in particular Pickles' great skill in this kind of interview. For most contestants, this would be their first time on radio, but Pickles use of prompts and follow-ups encourage conversational interaction and establish interest in this most ordinary of occupations. There is also, as Scannell again discusses, a presumed familiarity with the format of the show and its routine questions, so the contestants know what to expect. But what I think is most noticeable, listening to this today, is the extreme forms of audience response; they don't just laugh and cheer, they shriek with laughter which seems uninhibited and totally engaged.

Furthermore, there are moments which, at this distance, are unintelligible. Some of the puns are obvious, and it is understandable why the audience laughs at jokes about the local area, but the innuendo (if that's what it is) of "change your trolley" (line 29) escapes me and I have no idea at all why the audience reacts in the way that it does to the announcement that Florrie likes steak and onions. Pickles' pun on this is clear (line 46) but I can only assume that the dish itself had particular connotations for this audience, at this time. Crucially Pickles does not clarify this for his overhearing audience; he just leaves us listening to the local merriment.

This can be contrasted to another moment later in the interview where another routine question elicits an answer which does require clarification:

- WP: Have you ever (.) ever longed Florrie (.) ever longed to say anything to anybody and you've said just you know you've oh I daren't do it but I'd like to?
FH: Yeh. Tell er tell Philip Dobson where to put his duty sheets!
5 Aud: eeeeeaaaaaehehehehehxxxxxxxxx
WP: I (.) I would say in fairness to our listeners we should really know who Philip Dobson is who is he?
FH: He's our inspector
WP: Oh Oh I see
10 Aud: eheheheh

What is hearable on the tape, but not easily represented in the transcript (I have used exclamation marks) is the voice Florrie uses in making these announcements. It is a raised voice, assertively Lancastrian, even slightly transgressive. Here *Have A Go!* is enabling Florence to perform confidently as an ordinary person; she certainly does not have difficulty (as apparently do Shapley's canal workers) of putting her ideas into words. Vociferously supported by her local community, here she is on national radio demonstrating a distinctive cultural identity.

One wouldn't want to make too much of this, but I think there is a difference between being the subject of a documentary and being a 'character' on a programme like *Have A Go!*. In Pickles' interactions with his contestants, before these live audiences, where he uses his local accent, there is a kind of celebratory 'northern-ness' which prides itself on its distinctiveness and is implicitly, if not explicitly, about being working-class. At least, this is a reading confirmed by Richard Hoggart in one comment about Pickles in *The Uses of Literacy*:

Whatever their origins, Gracie Fields and Wilfred Pickles hardly qualify as members of the working classes now. But they are still warmly 'alright' because they remain of them in spirit and have conquered the 'moneyed classes' with their working class wit and attitudes. 'They love Wilfred Pickles down South' working class people will say, meaning that people not of their class love him: there is some pride that their values, those of the unpolished and 'straight' are appreciated by other classes. Their 'comics' have stormed the posh citadels: 'good luck to 'em!' (1957, p86)

Certainly, the north/south divide in England has long served as a metaphor for class relations. It has, of course, been widely deployed in literature and in film, but also on radio and TV since the 1930s, probably reaching its peak in the 50s and 60s. As 'northerners' ordinary people became publicly visible and hearable in the ways I have begun to describe, and not only as objects of intellectual curiosity. The display of sociability in programmes like *Have A Go!* goes beyond the confines of the 'merely sociable' to offer an assertion, on a national stage, of an authentic cultural identity. But let us note finally that it is (or was) a precondition of this cultural formation that ordinary people remained 'ordinary', indeed defiantly so. They are not media people, as Pickles, in his *TV Mirror* article clearly states – 'ordinary people' are not 'stars' and they are not 'personalities' (it is interesting that he uses terms now enshrined in media studies). That they are not is their strength and the source of their entertainment value.

3. 'Celebrification': a history

So now, how can this discussion of the 'ordinary person' in early radio possibly illuminate the circumstances of Chantelle? In terms of any direct comparability not a lot; although it might be the case that Chantelle also possesses a working-class identity, as an "Essex girl" which is referred to in her exit interview (I shall return to this). However quite clearly in her media appearance Florence Holt has nothing like the opportunities which are now opening up for Chantelle. At best, if she gets the questions right, Florrie will win a small amount of money; but she will always, by definition, be 'ordinary'. For Florrie, 'living the dream' is not an option. By contrast not only will Chantelle win a sum of money that is potentially life-changing, she will also gain entry into a media culture that did not exist in Britain in the early 1950s. It is the aim of this part of my lecture to outline what this is, and to trace its historical development.

One way to begin to understand the differences in the circumstances of Florrie and Chantelle, is to consider the different ideologies of the shows in which they perform. Here it is possible to distinguish between two different notions of 'character'. As we

have seen, *Have A Go!* can be defined as a ‘character programme’, where ordinary people are performing as ‘characters’, in the sense of being ‘a character’ in doing that performance, telling a story, entertaining an audience. *Big Brother* on the other hand, in its most popular incarnations, has foregrounded a rather different conception of *moral character*. As studies of the programme’s audience have shown (Hill 2002, Jones 2003), viewers have been making judgements of the moral worth of contestants, in so far as they must come across as genuine and sociable, and not-scheming or ‘two-faced’. Contestants seen as manipulative game-players are candidates for eviction; the winners are honest and consistent in ‘being themselves’. It has also been the case in Britain that several winners of *Big Brother* have demonstrated a certain moral courage in overcoming social obstacles such as gender transformation and physical disability (Tolson 2006).

In short, *Big Brother* has often constructed scenarios where unacceptable behaviour has been punished. but virtue has been rewarded. As we shall see, Chantelle was indeed rewarded not only for successfully completing her task, but also for demonstrating ‘bravery’ in so doing. This quality is taken to be a facet of her innate moral quality as a person; so she is not rewarded for doing anything specific, but just for being who she is. It is for this that she is now elevated as the ‘star of the show’ and invited to ‘live the dream’. By implication this kind of recognition might be given to any ordinary person who possesses similar virtuous qualities.

The offer to the ‘ordinary person’ in this scenario is that they can enhance their ordinary identity by becoming a ‘media person’. This seems to be a specific, contemporary kind of offer which was not made to ordinary people in the past. What does it entail? Certainly it helps that the individual now has £50,000 to spend; but it is a key part of the offer that the ordinary person also has access to Graeme Turner’s “discourses of celebrification”. To clarify what precisely this might mean it will be helpful, briefly (for want of space) to consider the concept of ‘celebrity’.

‘Celebrity’ has been widely discussed and debated in contemporary media and cultural studies because it is seen as a defining feature of our age. From the point of view of the argument I am developing here however it will be necessary to distinguish between helpful and less helpful discussions. Less helpful are general theories which tie celebrity to the more pervasive concept of fame, and argue that societies have always had famous people; or that ‘celebrity’ covers every context in which a person might become famous, whether in business, politics, or even criminality, as well as in sports and entertainment. Nor is it particularly helpful, from this point of view, to construct typologies of ways in which people can become celebrities; ascribed, achieved, attributed and so on. What I am interested in here, and what I think is the thrust of Turner’s argument, is that the “discourses of celebrification” are distinctively modern, and focussed on the ordinary person. They are modern in that they were not available to the ordinary person in (in Britain) 1953, and they focus on the ordinary person specifically in the context of their appearance in the media, in the ‘media ritual’ described by Couldry.

In this very particular context, I think it is most helpful to define ‘celebrity’ as a lifestyle option. It also helps to understand this, not simply as something a person is, or becomes, but rather as a set of practices which a person might (given the opportunity) or might not *do*. As a lifestyle option of this sort, celebrity involves two

main practices: the first is conspicuous consumption and the second is the transgression of conventional barriers between public and private (in which the media play a key role). So by this definition, 'celebrity' is not what anyone famous necessarily is or has to be; rather celebrity is what some people do, and then only part of the time. Footballers play football, pop singers sing; but as celebrities they consume lavishly and (in ordinary people's eyes) sometimes excessively; they invite magazines to visit their homes, attend their weddings and photograph their babies; they go to clubs and parties with other celebrities, so becoming prey for the paparazzi. Celebrity is not about doing a job or being a 'public figure'; in this definition it is a lifestyle – though there does seem to be a class of people for whom doing this lifestyle has become a career, in that 'living the dream' is all that they seem to do.

I am reminded here of an account published twenty years ago in Stuart Ewen's *All Consuming Images* (1988). In a section on "Photography and Celebrity" he writes of a "celebrisystem" whose message is that "through its channels the 'underlying population' can achieve the status of 'those at the top'" (p94). His evidence for this are museums of the "hall of fame" variety dedicated to ordinary people whose musical talents took them to the top; or more generally, magazines devoted to the "life-styles of the rich and famous" (p99). Here, the crucial point in his argument is not just that celebrities live celebrity life-styles; it is that these life-styles become aspirational for everyone in a consumer society. It is then, the consumer society that constructs celebrity in this fashion, as something for ordinary people to emulate:

In a consumer society, the lives of celebrities are not merely guideposts from which people can take their stylistic cues. They also embody every consumer's dream of what it would be like if money were no object... The luminaries, their clothes and cars and villas and vacation yachts, represent a consumerized interpretation of personal freedom – a "middle class" ideal – multiplied exponentially, beyond comprehension, but never so far as to undermine a glimmer of hope in the mind of the spectator. The dream of abundance, the principle of appearances, circulates in the lives of celebrities as it circulates in the desires of those maintaining – or attempting to construct – the semblance of a "middle class" life. (p99-100)

At what point did this 'dream of abundance' become possible for the ordinary person? In tracing the history of discourses like this, precise dates are inappropriate, but it is possible to trace broad cultural shifts in ideas and stories in general circulation (largely through the media). For example, Richard Dyer (1979) has discussed the fascination with the lifestyles of film stars evident in fan magazines from the 1930s, very much focussed upon conspicuous consumption as one of its key elements. Interestingly these magazines also often speculated about the 'ordinariness' of stars, in the context of their now extraordinary lives. In the same period, Ewen refers to Walter Sussman's account of Babe Ruth, as a "transcendent individual in a standardized world", transcendent partly because of his excessive consumer lifestyle. (1988: p96). The main point about these pre-war discourses seems to be that although ordinary people can certainly achieve this level of consumerism and glamour (for this is the American dream) it is precisely distinct from the ordinary 'standardized' life. Furthermore, in this myth, only the special few are chosen for their exceptional beauty or talent.

A major cultural shift began to occur, I think, in the 1950s and 60s, initially in America and later in Britain. It was brought about firstly by an increasing circulation of material about stars' private lives and/or secondary media appearances (for example in news conferences) that gave increasing access to the business of 'doing celebrity' (Marilyn Monroe is an icon here). Secondly there was a growth of opportunities for ordinary people to achieve celebrity, particularly through popular music. If Elvis Presley was the American prototype, its first major British incarnation was the Beatles.

David Marshall (1999) has written about the Beatles as representing "a re-reading of the cultural value of fame and celebrity" in terms of its "democratic celebration" (p170). Now, he writes, "popular music performers were imbued with the new authenticity of democratic celebrity" (p173). This was partly because the expansion of the popular music industry opened up new opportunities for popular cultural expression (in ways which did not require classical musical training) and partly because fame and celebrity could now be more closely articulated with ordinariness. In this context, the Beatles' TV interviews and press conferences were often occasions for an ironic take on 'doing celebrity' from the ordinary person's perspective. This can be seen in the following extract from such a press conference in 1964, immediately after their first successful tour of America:

- IE: What did you most like about the trip Ringo?
 R: Oh I just loved all of it you know especially Miami the sun you know I didn't know what it meant until I went over there.
 IE: Don't you get it up in Liverpool?
 5 R: No they finished up there you know [P: ah ah ah] put it out.
 IE: Did you ever have a chance John to just get away on your own [J: yeh] without anyone recognising you?
 J: We borrowed a couple of millionaire's houses you know (.) we:ll?
 R: Well we did!
 10 IE: You could afford to buy a couple of millionaire's houses
 All: No No You're joking
 J: We'd sooner borrow 'em it's cheaper. And we did a bit of water skiing well sort of anyway
 R: Yeh we had a great time
 15 IE: Did your wife enjoy it over there?
 J: She loved it who? Who? Who?
 R: Shh don't tell 'em he's married it's a secret
 IE: Oh I'm sorry I'm sorry about that I didn't mean to [**to Paul**] What about the taste of the fans over there did you find the same (.) stuff you
 20 know?
 P: Yeh (.) Yeah (.) Er we expected them to be very different but they weren't at all. The accent was the only thing you know the only difference (.) lovely
 IE: Did they reckon you sang in an English accent or an American accent?
 25 P: No some fella said how come 'cos you're from Britain and you still sing in an American accent or something funny we'd been trying to explain to him that [it's a Liverpool accent (...) it was funny
 J: [we aren't American you know but he didn't

- believe it
- 30 IE: I hear I hear anyway that the four of you will be millionaires by the end of the year.
- G: [Oh that's nice
- All: [eh eh eh
- IE: Have you got time have you got time to actually spend this money?
- 35 G: What money?
- [cut]

Here Ewen's 'dream of wholeness' has become a reality for four ordinary boys from Liverpool. That they are from Liverpool, remaining recognisably so by their accents, and hence remaining 'northern' (and thus metaphorically working class) is explicitly foregrounded as part of their brand. But in equal focus is Ewen's consumer dream of what it would be like if money were no object: the Miami sun, the millionaires' houses, water-skiing etc. Again the key point is that these two discourses, the ordinary and the celebrity lifestyle, are now articulated together; non more so than in John Lennon's observation that borrowing such houses is 'cheaper'. Here it is clear that the ordinary is not simply 'transcended', not entirely left behind, for it is part of the mix. Ultimately, this is what I want 'celebrification' to mean: a new way of being an ordinary person in the media; possibly a new kind of 'democratic celebrity' to use Marshall's phrase. But of course, before we reach Chantelle Houghton, there is a further cultural shift to come. The Beatles had talent, but Chantelle's 'celebrification' was notable specifically for its absence.

4. The 'ordinary celebrity'.

Arguably the Beatles did pave the way for a growing number of 'ordinary people', or at least people from humble origins, to achieve celebrity status. In the 1960s the main sites for this were popular music, fashion, and the associated media industries (magazines, radio and TV). There are clear continuities between those developments and their proliferation in contemporary media, as in the search for the next 'pop idol' or 'America's next top model'. There is also the 'ordinari-ization' of the make over, whereby glamour, of the high-street affordable kind, can be part of anyone's life-style. But quite how 'democratic' this might be has been questioned, particularly when it is claimed that such developments are politically progressive. The boundaries between ordinariness and celebrity might be blurred, but only in an ever expanding market of purchasable life-styles, epitomised by the celebrity lifestyle at its apex.

Turner prefers to call this the age of the 'demotic', rather than the democratic celebrity (2004: p82). His term neatly captures its populist connotations, in so far as what now qualifies the 'ordinary person' for celebrification is sometimes not talent at all, but simply popularity. If Chantelle Houghton can be taken as the personification of 'ordinary celebrity', it is not because she can sing, has an enviable style or is even particularly good looking – it is that she has won a popularity contest. In fact her lack of talent and her questionable dress sense are explicitly brought into her exit interview by Davina McCall. What then are her redeeming features? What are the key qualities of the contemporary 'ordinary celebrity'?

D: Welcome back and welcome to your winner Chant:elle!
Aud: yeeeeeeeeaaaaaaah
D: Can I just say Chantelle I want to kick off with we have got a nice warm pashmina what are you wearing? [You've got no clothes on.
5 C: [Do you know what I can not feel anything at the moment except happiness and excitement. I cannot feel the cold anything hh
Aud: yeeeeaaaaah
D: What I think is quite funny is that you are not (.) officially (.) a
10 celebrity=
C: I know I know I know
D: =and you've just won celebrity Big [Brother 2006
C: [I know I know. Are you sure though are you sure?
15 D: No we checked and double checked and you didn't just win it it was a landslide fifty six per cent
Aud: [yeeeeaaaaaaah
C: [You're joking. Oh my god.
D: Was does it mean to you?
20 C: Ah words cannot say what I mean I just can't believe what's going on at the moment. I just can't believe it's real is this another task or something? [Aud: eh eh eh eh] I'm just like wowers
D: Why do you why do you why do you think that the viewers would have voted you for the winner?
25 C: Because (.) I'm (.) Because I'm just down to earth and I'm just (.) easy going [and like
Aud: yeeeeaaaaah
D: Shall I tell you why?
C: Yeh please do
30 D: I think it was for all of those reasons but you know the task that you had to go into that house and make everyone believe [C: aaah] and then to find out that you're not a celebrity and to still fit in and to stand up for yourself [C: yeah] like you did in that house you're a very brave girl.
35 C: Oh thank you (...)
D: You are you're very brave. Now let's talk about your celebrity status in the house now before you went in you were a proms girl from Essex.
Aud: [eeeeeeeeaaaaaaah
40 C: [Yeh he he
D: Quite a few Essex girls in the audience tonight
Aud: eeeeeaaaaaaah
D: Erm how hard was it to do that first task when we asked you to pretend to be a celebrity?
45 C: Well before I went into the house I thought there was something going on. I thought hang on a minute you know Celebrity Big Brother what is little old me doing going in Celebrity Big Brother?
D: And all the people as you were walking up to the house they're all going who's that?
50 C: I know. The press were shouting Chantelle Chantelle and I'm like what

hello you all right? eh eh eh hiya oh you know my name eh eh But oh my god no this is

D: Well it was (.) it was quite difficult wasn't it [C: yeh yeh] pretending to be a celebrity cos actually I have to say I mean I don't was to be rude or anything but you did make it look quite hard at times...

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I have already mentioned that moral virtue is a defining feature of the ideology of *Big Brother*. It is significant then that Chantelle is praised by Davina for being “very brave”. However that begs a question, which is what it is about her to which bravery can be attributed, or more generally in which moral virtue can be recognised. If Chantelle is ‘celebrified’ for being herself, what is that self (if it is not talented, stylish etc.) that can be celebrated? I want to suggest that this exit interview provides one source of evidence for an answer to these questions, particularly if we pay some attention to the way Chantelle talks. Here it is that she performs ‘being ordinary’ with a certain aplomb, in a distinctively modern and endearing way.

It was Harvey Sacks, the founder of conversation analysis, who first argued that ‘doing being ordinary’ was a particular kind of practical accomplishment (Sacks 1984). In his argument, being ordinary is not something someone, by definition, is; nor is it some sort of statistical average person – rather it is a repertoire of ordinary practices, such as having an experience, which can be told to another person in such a way as to reinforce one’s ordinary credentials. One does not tell an ordinary experience as if it was an epic; instead it is told as an experience that anyone might have. A particularly good example of this is provided by Martin Montgomery in his recent book on broadcast news (Montgomery 2007). Eyewitnesses to catastrophic events, like the London tube bombings, tell their stories as if anyone, going about their normal daily business, would experience these events this way. They do not represent themselves as heroic or even particularly brave, but as slowly coming to terms with the catastrophe and wanting to ‘get back to normal’.

In a similar way, though clearly in a very different context, Chantelle presents herself as an ordinary person in unusual circumstances. Here though the interview is not only a way she can be *defined* as ordinary (as a “promos girl from Essex”); it also provides her with a stage on which she can *perform* her experience as anyone from that background would. Again, this is not just a matter of reporting her excitement, that she is lost for words, and “just can’t believe what’s going on”. It is performed by her finding a way to express herself in a distinctively modern, colloquial way: “I’m just like wowers” (line 22). The most telling moment however, which really sums up many of the themes I have been working on in this lecture, is where Chantelle represents her encounter with the photographers, in the canonical moment of ‘celebrification’. Here (line 50) she shifts footing, from reporting the encounter to animating, in her ‘Essex voice’, the words she presumably spoke; and of course the central point is that she is now publicly recognised by her name.

There is not the space here to develop this point, but only to refer to previous work I have done on the way people talk in *Big Brother* (Tolson 2006). How they talk is critical to the way they come across. In the moral universe of the programme there is a preference for talk which places its recipient in the experience of the speaker, enabling a sharing of that experience through its dramatization. The use of the

quotative 'like', as in 'I'm like' + this, or 'I'm like' + what I said, is a common device for doing such self dramatization, routinely used by young people today. So when Chantelle uses it ("I'm like what hello you all right?") albeit unconsciously, she is endearing herself to her audience and reinforcing the popularity for which she is being celebrated. 'Being yourself' successfully, in these contexts, means being able to do 'being yourself' successfully, in these ways.

And so, as the reward for her popularity, Chantelle is now entitled to 'live the dream'. As one final reflection on what this might mean, I want to turn again to Florence Holt, by way of comparison and contrast. I want to suggest that although their circumstances are clearly very different, there is still a kind of working-classness about Chantelle. It is the way this identity is constructed in the media that has changed. Although reference is made in the exit interview to Chantelle's job and to where she is from, there is absolutely no interest in the details of that job or her 'everyday life'. Nor, it seems to me, does being an 'Essex girl' have the same connotations that were previously carried by 'northern-ness'. I think it might be possible to be an 'Essex girl' without actually being from Essex, in so far as this is not so much a distinctive regional identity, as a lifestyle or taste formation which any young woman might emulate. The reference is to a certain cosmetic look, a branded sense of fashion and to opportunities for hedonistic consumerism routinely portrayed by fashion models, pop singers and footballers' wives and girlfriends. It is sold to young women in celebrity magazines, by the tabloid press, and here, from time to time, in *Big Brother*. In all this however, the key point on which I want to end this lecture, concerns the way that 'we', the media audience, is positioned. For this no longer about being fascinated or entertained by the ordinary lives of 'other' people. On the contrary, Chantelle is 'our winner'; she is every ordinary person, just like us, but now enabled to live every ordinary person's dream.

5. Postscript: some thoughts on the Internet.

Today, if you want more of Chantelle, you can find her, of course, on the Internet. There, you will discover that she is now a millionaire, having made half a million pounds in one single transaction with OK magazine, for photographs of her wedding to fellow *Big Brother* contestant Samuel Preston. You can also find numerous reports and images of Chantelle 'doing celebrity', ranging from reports of plastic surgery, to paparazzi shots of her partying with other celebrities, and rumours that, having now divorced Preston, she is dating the ex boyfriend of another celebrity. And so, over two years since her moment of glory, she still seems to be 'living the dream', courtesy of the brand she promotes through the Neon management agency which advertises her availability for modelling and promotional work.

However it is another feature of this Internet presence that I want to focus on, as a postscript to this lecture. If you visit Chantelle's website, you will find a promotional video for an E4 TV programme predictably entitled "Chantelle: Living the Dream", which is located on YouTube. Click on this, and YouTube makes a set of links available to other videos of Chantelle, and other *Celebrity Big Brother* contestants. You can then follow a series of links which will take you, via paparazzi footage of Chantelle's wedding, and a promotional video for a bridal wear company, to images of ordinary weddings, in the form of self-produced videos and slide shows. In other

words, on YouTube, the ordinary person is just four clicks away from the celebrity, in an electronic media network which links them together. This is not to say conclusively, that in the world of Web 2.0, filesharing and social networking, ordinary people have at last become celebrities; but rather, as Couldry tentatively suggests at the end of *Media Rituals*, perhaps the category distinction between ordinary people and media people is beginning to de-construct.

I think there is a research agenda here. I think we need to know much more than we do about how the Internet works as a media experience for those who participate in it. Obviously this is quite new, but often academic discussions seem to focus on general economic and cultural interpretations of the Internet, for instance in establishing an online economy which works through consumer surveillance (Andrejevic 2004) or a post-Fordist employment culture in which everyone can advertise their 'branded selves' (Hearn 2008). These are certainly salutary alternatives to naively optimistic accounts of the democratic potential of the Internet, but they do not take us very far into the way it works as a medium. I want to suggest that we now start to investigate specifically how the Internet works, as an architecture of linkages, offering particular generic opportunities for self-representation, through personal websites, videos on YouTube, Facebook profiles etc. There still may be a distinction here between ordinary people and media people, but equally, in a sense, there are no 'others'; for everyone is linked to everyone else, by virtue of their media presence.

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