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TITLE: Charlie-is-so-"English"-like: Nationality and the branded-celebrity person in the age of YouTube

ABSTRACT: The YouTube celebrity is a novel social phenomenon. YouTube celebrities have implications for the social and cultural study of celebrity more generally but in order to illustrate the features of vlogging celebrity and its wider dimensions, this article focuses upon one case-study – Charlie McDonnell and his video 'How to be English'. The premise of YouTube – 'Broadcast Yourself' – begs the question 'but what self?' The article argues the YouTube celebrity is able to construct a celebrity persona by appealing to aspects of identity, such as nationality, and use them as a mask(s) to perform with. By situating Charlie's 'How to be English' in the context of establishing celebrity, the article argues that the processes of celebrification and 'self-branding' utilise the power of identity myths to help assist the construction of a celebrity persona. Use of masks and myths allows for one to develop various aspects of their persona into personae. One such persona for Charlie is his 'Englishness'. As the social experience of 'Broadcasting Yourself' necessarily asks one to turn ordinary aspects of their person into extra-ordinary qualities, Charlie's use of Englishness allows 'being English' to become a mythological device to overcome the problem of 'self-promotion'.

KEYWORDS: YouTube * Charlie McDonnell * Branding * Mythology * Englishness

Introduction

Branding and celebrity is increasingly becoming a central aspect to personhood in contemporary society (Lury, 2005; Adkins, 2005). Personhood may be defined here as the product of celebrity labour, 'whereby rights of ownership of creative works may only be claimed via the effects of the cultural product in regard to the intended audience.' (Adkins, 2005:124) As celebrities act as commodities in that they sell their personalities to the public, the personhood they develop is their 'name' that unifies their productive efforts (Lury, 2005). One particular exemplar for self-branding is YouTube which, since its launch in 2005, has forged a celebrity culture of its own, a 'big-name' example being Charlie McDonnell. Using Charlie as a case study, this article argues that the 'branded person' has implications for the status of the individual in our culture more generally. By highlighting how celebrity in modern culture rests upon the cult of the individual suggested by Durkheim (in Giddens, 1972) and that their self-commodification is accomplished through the development of a persona (Mauss, 1985), I shall demonstrate how YouTube acts as the platform for a branded-personhood.

Charlie has a considerable following and has had features written about him in the British national presses on the success of his YouTube videos. Charlie's highest viewed video to date is his 'Duet with Myself' (viewed over 7 million times) and he has over one million 'subscribers' to his channel. Charlie became a YouTube celebrity after beginning video-blogging when revising for his GCSE exams in April 2007. After gaining something of a following, his vlogging has since become his profession. His YouTube celebrity took root when he was featured on the UK homepage of YouTube for his video 'How to get featured on YouTube' (www.charliemcdonnell.com) and gained wider media attention for his video 'How to be English' (BBC Breakfast, 2007). Around this time, YouTube granted him 'partner' status and started to pay Charlie for uploading his vlogs. From viewing Charlie's videos one can follow what this investment has given him. It is a job with a salary which is able to help him share a mortgage on a house with fellow vlogger, Alex Day ('nerimon'), and a life to diarise. But as this is Charlie's job we also realise that he is a product of his own making: He is Charlie Inc. and sells the 'charlieissocoollike' brand.

Part of Charlie's celebrity is his 'English' persona. 'Persona', as explored by Marcel Mauss (1985, p.17), referred to Roman legal status and a person's ability to assume the role

of 'the imagines… of their ancestors'. It was an 'artificial character' that would 'become synonymous with the true nature of the individual' (Mauss 1985, p.17). The notion of persona as enduring character types is central to my argument on YouTube celebrity. As video-blogs supposedly capture 'everyday life' and various aspects of the vloggers' ordinariness, their celebrity relies more and more on what their ordinariness is able to draw upon for its self-commodification – with Charlie this is his 'Englishness' as it is, in part, how he 'made a name for himself'. Using Charlie's 'How to be English' video, where he plays a spoof English stereotype instructing the viewer on how to make the 'perfect cup of tea', I address how YouTube allows for the circulation of these mythic elements of national identity through the global platform which YouTube's 'broadcast yourself' ideology encourages. The stereotypical Englishness evoked by 'the perfect cup of tea' is a floating signifier in English society that, to a global constituency, is synonymous with Englishness. Becoming a YouTube celebrity encourages the perpetuation of these cultural stereotypes in order to 'broadcast yourself'. Such stereotypes are used as material for a persona built on self-commodification.

Celebrity on YouTube can largely be seen as turning the ordinary into something extra-ordinary (Strangelove, 2010), a phenomenon observed in celebrity culture more generally, notably reality television (cf. Littler, 2002). National identity in this case is at once either a nominal aspect of the person who video-blogs, or online it can become a more central facet of their celebrity. Combining celebrity as personage – persons of note in a ritual-context (Mauss 1985, p.4) – and national persona are in fact complimentary aspects as vlogger's become notable persons who exemplify national character types in a very recognisable manner. Using Alexander's (2010, pp.325-329; 2008, p.6-8) notion that celebrities combine objectification of their 'self' with audience subjectification, we can see that the celebrity relies on aspects of persona as well as a stage-by-stage process of celebrification (Rojek 2001, p.181ff). In this context, aspects of one's 'nationality' become increasingly part-and-parcel of what this particular celebrity-personage exemplifies. YouTube is especially effective as celebrity becomes much more instantaneous in terms of the mode of reception: videos are uploaded frequently and watched via mobile and portable devices – iPhones, laptops – which 'give the sensation of immediacy' (Marshall 2010, p.44). This, as YouTuber's have commented, makes the watching experience more (a) engaged and (b) viewers more involved in the content, conta. television's 'laid back' 'switched off' 'relaxed' mode of watching.[1]

While not the sole reason for Charlie's success on YouTube, Charlie's persona of 'Englishness' represents the mythic value of speech. Myths are stories whereby the act of telling them promotes wider socio-cultural meanings despite being isolated to particular speakers when (re)told. The myth is seen as perpetuating itself for its central purpose lies in preserving cultural values through retelling (Lévi-Strauss, 1963 p.210). The use of national identity myths explored here demonstrates the process of YouTube celebrification; in order to create a persona and sell himself, Charlie requires these myths to articulate what it means to be 'Charlie' and 'English'. Stemming from Charlie's mediation to act upon a global platform, his English persona spirals into other media and speaks for 'Englishness' as it performs 'Englishness' – part of what Turner (2009 p.143) calls the 'immanence of connectedness' offered by YouTube. As such, evoking Englishness functions as a myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 1966): it espouses the origins of personality by providing a story made up of empirical elements whose analysis renders patterns apparent and, via repetition, aim to 'provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction…' (Lévi-Strauss 1963 p.229). This is the 'intellectual impulse' (Lévi-Strauss 1963, p.229) which provokes mythology. I shall argue the contradiction to be overcome is the mediating activity of creating a YouTube celebrity. As Stiegler sees it, the contradiction is 'broadcast yourself, but also, first look for yourself …and of course, produce yourself' (2010, p.41)

As a contribution to celebrity literature, I follow those who have argued celebrity-selves are like masks representing mythic persons (Alexander, 2010). There is a ritualised performative dimension to such masks since celebrities remain highly conscious of the way audiences consume and identify with them (Marshall, 2010, p.40). As celebrities, YouTubers are part of the 'demotic turn' (Turner, 2010): YouTube allows them greater access to the media of celebrity – i.e. vlogging as self-broadcasting – but no guarantee to greater power or influence through such a medium. With greater access to media, the vlogger's 'personality' is based upon discourses of ordinariness. Out of such ordinariness being turned into a celebrity mask, it leads to a heightened self-awareness. As such, vlogging celebrity becomes 'meta' celebrity as they become highly self-aware of the own conditions of their celebrity persona. With Charlie, this self-awareness allowed him to parody his Englishness only for it to later become part of his celebrity-personality and 'brand'. This self-awareness of Englishness, with regard to YouTube more specifically, can be seen as part of the vaudevillian character of video-blogging (Burgess & Green, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). The vaudeville aesthetic of

YouTube, as Jenkins calls it (2006), can be found in the sheer heterogeneous content available to users and content creators: as one can watch all manner of content – from LadyGaGa videos, to 'Double Rainbow', to a funny cat video, to EpicMealTime – anything can be judged credible viewing or content to be uploaded. Notably Jenkins (2006) suggests that such diversity is indicative of present globalisation. As YouTube promotes access to national identities and their cross-overs, the self-awareness one has to how they will be viewed in such a virtual space is, in part, a contributor to a culture of parody.[2]

YouTube and the vlog

Video-blogging can be said to have its socio-historical origins in what Charles Taylor (1989) called the 'expressive turn': one becomes a 'self' not through having a stable internalised 'essence' but rather through the expressive practices which articulate, fortify and 'make manifest' (Taylor, 1989, p.374) one's self: 'I express my vision of things in some work of art, perhaps a novel or a play' (Taylor 1989, p.374) or a YouTube video. This notion of expressivism allows for ideas of creativity to re-enter conceptions of celebrity and brands, contra Lury's (2005) claim that brands deny the presence of an authorial voice. For Lury, the power of the 'brand' as a totalising entity for self-hood negates creativity, yet the way I use 'Englishness' below is not meant as an all-encompassing identity. Rather the videos YouTubers upload are expressive 'visions' of themselves and, by implication, allow space for other facets of creativity to flourish in their video-making. Vlogging as medium incorporates multiple generic features, e.g. other formats, other content and topics for vlogger's to employ.

Central to Taylor's expressive self was the presence of an interlocutor which allowed for a reciprocal understanding between persons to develop a dialogue: one is recognised for their contributions to a community of speakers (Taylor, 1991). YouTube celebrity develops this dialogue of self-hood, enabling celebrities to have 'parasocial' (Marshall, 2010, p.43) interactions with audiences: Twitter, Facebook and other embedding mechanisms (wikis, tags, likes and video-responses) create a dialogue or conversation between YouTube users which moves beyond an imaginative interaction with celebrities (Marshall 2010, p.38) to a more situated interaction 'on YouTube' as a virtual space (see, Burgess & Green, 2009). Vlogging is primarily a medium for human speech and communication. Each vlog (act of speech) is connected, immanently, to every other vlog through embedding mechanisms that classify them as 'speaking to' each other. As Adami (2009) has shown in the context of

'video-responses' on YouTube, YouTubers welcome responses to their videos as it creates the impulse for new innovations and developments in communication/creativity. Vlogs thereby become mediums for what Henry Jenkins (2012) calls 'spread-ability' as users take up content and, through sharing it or transforming it, multiply its value as it becomes expanded into various contexts outside its original state. YouTube vlogging thrives on spread-ability and this opens up questions to view celebrity in line with dialogical recognition, for as vlogger's circulate their expressive visions of themselves they also enable and offer the opportunity to others (cf. Hartley, 2009).

This expressive self of the vlog demonstrates, additionally, that YouTube 'celebrity' and its ideology of 'broadcast yourself' is a generalised facet of self/personhood in modern society and relies upon common normative claims for the value and sanctity of the individual.

YouTube: celebrity and cult of the individual

Rojek (2001, p.46) has stated that while various accounts of celebrity differ, they all agree that the mass media is central to its valorisation. Yet how one appreciates celebrity involves an important distinction. This is the distinction between 'celebrity' and 'fame': celebrity is about personality or persona; fame is circulation of the name of the person who is the concrete embodiment of these traits (Elliot 2011, p.468). Elliot has argued that contemporary culture has made a wholesale shift from fame to celebrity, 'fame emptied of content.' (Elliot 2011, p.468). Such a historical and cultural shift is only reasonable in so far as we follow Elliot and Rojek in their treatment of the mass media element of celebritisation, that celebrities have a dual role of forging possible role-models for fans and of sustaining 'abstract desire' under capitalism (Elliot 2011, p.474f; Rojek 2001, p.181ff). Elliot and Rojek create an unnecessary split between celebrity and fan, producer and consumer. As celebrity is the mark of a democratic/demotic age where fame becomes both achieved and attributed celebrity (Rojek 2001, p.28; Marshall 1997, p.6), central to YouTube celebrity is the breakdown of the distinction between celebrity and fan.

This breakdown occurs because the mask central to modern celebrities is itself so ambiguous – the YouTube celebrity is an ordinary person turned extra-ordinary as they gather fame on-line. While all celebrities are ordinary turned extra-ordinary persons, what YouTube vlogging highlights is that celebrities upon relies on capacities of self-presentation that we all engage in, e.g. vlogging as a diary of our lives. And YouTube offers celebrity to

us in a realm of easy DIY style content creation. Furthermore, as Lange (2007) argues, YouTube offers levels of participation in vlogging: certain vlogging celebrities may be 'well known' to a YouTube viewership but are not – like Charlie – partners of YouTube. While this complicates matters with regards to a 'major' or 'minor' celebrity on YouTube, what is crucial to our arguments is that all vlogger*'s have audiences and are stars of their own reality* show, their vlogs. As such, the YouTube celebrity simply highlights the tightrope walked between ordinary and extra-ordinary, person and celebrity (a fact true of all celebrity). But that this tightrope becomes so clearly visible and is so important is because it brings to light a crucial development in the thesis that 'the celebrity' is the sacred object in a secular age (Rojek 2001, p.51ff; Collins 2004, p.280f; Alexander, 2010). More than a sacred object, the celebrity also marks the celebration of what Durkheim (in Giddens, 1972) called the cult of the individual – the individual is sacred and this is a cult where the individual is *'both believer and god.'* (Durkheim cited in Giddens 1972, p.149, added emphasis) A premise if taken to its logical conclusion reveals that all celebrity rests upon this: we are all fans and celebrities of our own lives. Our fame rests upon being both fans and celebrities (believers and gods). YouTube merely highlights this further.

Constructing a YouTube persona involves self-celebritisation in the sense that one forges an online character for themselves in one video only to forge another character in the next video. The YouTube celebrity can adopt multiple narratives and personas which demands knowledge of these roles to perform them adeptly. For example, Charlie's videos include a series 'Fun Science', 'Challenge Charlie' and 'Cooking with Charlie'. These videos develop personas similar to established television presenter-role styles and often use the same generic motifs and stylistic devices. In this way the YouTube celebrity works like the film-actor in Marshall's account of the system of celebrity. They embody the cultural capital of production as they develop superior performances and mastery of the profession (trending on YouTube) but also bring in economic capital as top names – as stars which attract audiences (advertising on their channel) (Marshall 1997, p.188-189). But, as I will argue further below, the element of auratic distance that Marshall highlights is always placed within a context of an authentic personality for the YouTube community of vlogger's because of the fault line of 'celebrity' and 'ordinary' person: this is a distinction of 'anyone could upload anything on YouTube' versus 'being a Hollywood movie star is out of the question to most of us'. The

YouTube celebrity walks the tightrope of 'believer and god', fan and celebrity, ordinary and extra-ordinary.

Within this community, the disjuncture suggested between celebrity and audience, also, is largely an artificial distinction. Rojek's (2001) account would lead an analysis of YouTube celebrity into a reductionist ideological critique, i.e. that celebrities are nothing more than symbols of capitalist accumulation rather than meaningful objectifications of 'self' (Alexander 2010 p.334n.5). As the believer and god of modern society, the individual is not divided between seeking out abstractions of personality because they lack a personality; rather it's the other way round. Consumer culture is one of choice (Davis 2008, p.73ff) and the individual 'determined to choose' forges their personality through these choices, always remaining in the position to choose again. Charlie's Englishness is not an all-encompassing identity but is performative as it calls upon notions of identity in its enactment (Alexander, 2010). Charlie performs Englishness as much as he is English. Following this, each choice of personality – the English boy, the TV chef, etc. – depends upon character abstractions which allow for their concretisation (i.e. in videos). This performative accomplishment goes toward understanding how celebrity on YouTube is not a fait accompli. Video-performances rely upon Alfred Gell's (1998) specialist term 'captivation.' Gell's speculative theory applied to YouTube vlogs would suggest that what keeps us viewing and what keeps video-bloggers with an audience is the notion that video-blogs display a performative agency we all could easily adopt or enlist ourselves. Captivation comes from the ability to ensure that the recipients are able to see some semblance of their own capacities as an agent in the video. Showing us an agency we are all capable of demonstrates that the audiences are both believer and god as they watch the god who is also a believer.

The 'charlieissocoollike' brand

In this discussion of the construction of 'self' and also celebrity we may turn to Bauman's (2007, p.6, original emphasis) assertion that social-networking sites reveal self-commodification: 'the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are themselves.' The 'charlisissocoollike' brand comes from his ability to turn his life into a commodity. In addition, commodification also means his person is circulated beyond his physical existence, into the minds and mouths of others (as Munn (1986) defines fame). This happens through the use of his name, a 'name' that conjures up a whole imagined persona

(Munn 1986, p.105ff). A YouTuber's username and website name allow for this sense of individual uniqueness to arise. At the 2009 'Tomorrow's Web' conference, Charlie commented on his unfortunate dislike for his username. Set up in an ad hoc manner he chose 'charllieissocoollike' due to 'charlieiscool' being already taken. Charlie stated:

> Stephen Fry met me recently and he referred to me as 'charlie is cool is he like'… and pretty much any combination of those words mixed up is, is, is, me. …but I will show you [moves to computer], my username is 'charlieissocoollike' but if you have a look there [shows URL name] I have www.youtube.com/charlie, which is perfect. […] If you have a look at the people who do the best on YouTube, its pretty simple, it comes down to usernames. The number one [in 2009] on YouTube is Fred, www.youtube.com/fred and its obvious why, it's so easy to spread around. It's Fred. (Charlie McDonnell, 'Tomorrow's Web, 2009)

Via the processes of YouTube mediation, the use of easily recognisable names is central to the distribution of the videos as well as authorship. As YouTube is user-generated and user-distributed (cf. Wesch, 2008), circulation of the name is dependent upon people's ability to 'like' a video or 'tag' a video and, with these actions, circulate it beyond its original static state on one personal homepage. Central to this quick and chaotic motion of circulation is the simplicity of the name. The name is crucial as it acts as a way to circulate and recognise the vlogger. The username becomes a cognomen of the YouTube celebrity. Charlie continues:

> if you're wanting to start making content on YouTube, its always good to think about the username. Because what this username is, 'charlieissocoollike', I didn't really think about it when making my account, but I was making a brand new name for myself. So when people meet me in the street, and they recognise me, they call me charlieissocoollike, which obviously isn't my name, it's Charlie McDonnell, I'd much prefer for people to call me Charlie McDonnell, so, yeah, this is essentially my name. And because I'm a video blogger, what

I'm selling, well I'm not really selling, my product, is me.
Because I video blog, everything I distribute is just me, my
opinions on stuff, what I'm doing, what I think about things, my
humour, shared with people. My whole brand, if you will, is
me. (Charlie, Tomorrow's Web, 2009).

Becoming synonymous with his 'username', Charlie has been given over to YouTube and its circulation of videos across vast distances of time and space. When he says 'I was making a brand new name for myself' and then concludes, 'my whole brand … is me', one notices that 'brand new' means two things. First it refers to how his name is now blurred with his cognomen, illustrating that he has a "brand new name", i.e. it is how he is recognised by his public. Second it refers to how his cognomen (brand-name), 'charlieissocoollike', unifies his video-content and becomes synonymous with his own person.

As Mauss (1985, p.16) pointed out, cognomens merge with the visible recognition of the person by their audience. The embarrassment Charlie feels can be linked to the mediation of turning one's person into a brand. As logos in contemporary branding are 'marks of social identities …extended through their iconic presentation or personalities, persona or faces' (Lury 2004, p.75,), we realise Charlie's logo is his face and the embarrassment concerns how his 'face' allows his very person not to be recognised as 'Charlie McDonnell' but rather 'Charlie-is-so-cool-like, TM'. The ordinary boy from Bath is now a celebrity on YouTube. The celebrification process is one that allows for the creation of a brand, a name that is synonymous with a kind of product. The name 'charlieissocoollike' is now based upon certain expectations from viewers; the name suggests what 'one will get'. In this regard we notice the overlap between YouTube as a site for the creation of a 'branded' self and also the performativity of the vlogger: preforming oneself goes hand in hand with performing one's brand. As YouTube's partnership programme demands 'branding' in the form of a 'banner' for their personal website and also a thumbnail 'icon' [Fig. 1], partnership demands performing through this branded-matrix. One's name becomes evidence of their products, as Lury (2005) has argued in the case of Damien Hurst's art-works. Their brand-name refers to 'the relation between products in time' (Lury, 2005, p.94): one's YouTube channel is a chronological series of videos as well as past incarnations of their 'selves' which are inseparable from the branded strictures of the YouTube website.

In such a process, 'creative labour is defined …not in terms of the relations of personhood but in relations external to the person.' (Adkins 2005, p.119). This externalisation of aspects of personhood, Adkins (2005) argues, is due to the importance of commercial success for the intended audience. Commercial success on YouTube is measured (like the labour-market) by abstractions: 'views', 'subscribers' and 'features.' Yet commercial success on YouTube is not commercial in a more traditional understanding of commodities orientated to a market (Marx, 1976): the success of a commodity is determined solely upon 'how well it sells' and is understood through the economic knowledge of 'market forces'. In contrast, YouTube demands more reciprocal interactions between viewer and viewed, which is also part-and-parcel of how one presents and produces themselves on YouTube.

One's username, as the circulation of one's influence in the minds of others, becomes the fetish of the YouTuber's commodities. The username is a fetish which, while illusory, is that which gives one their individuality (cf. Marx 1976, pp.167-168; Bauman 2007, p.14f). Vloggers are seen as their cognomen. As Mauss (1985) argued, it was the mask which gave rise to notions of the individual. Yet the performance of YouTubers is mediated, like commodity exchange, by a market. This means vloggers products – videos - have to go through judgement from others in order for it to be deemed worthy of viewing. Such mediation is a problem resulting from turning oneself into a 'brand' and it is based upon what Marx (1976, p.178-180) saw as the Faustian 'difficulty' of commodity-exchange: videos cannot make their own way onto YouTube so we have to have recourse to their makers. Vloggers have to turn themselves into a persona appealing to others, translating themselves from a particularity into universality (for Marx this was 'use-value' into 'exchange-value'). This 'Faustian difficulty' is, like Goethe's Faust, the problem of having all the worldly knowledge but no worldly experience or recognition for it. Marx evoked this analogy by stating a particular commodity (e.g. a video for YouTube) is a use-value in that people find it enjoyable, for instance, but is not recognised as a 'commodity' unless it can be measured by an external standard. For Marx this was 'money' (1976, p.181); for YouTube it's view-counts, subscriptions and audience interaction.

Walter Benjamin (2008) discusses this problem of translation in relation to the movie-star's experience of 'the camera', the medium of translating cinematic performance into a commodity, or their 'acting' into their 'stardom'. The branded person on YouTube goes through this mediation and it impacts on what this means for the circulation of their videos.

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Benjamin noted that the manner of performance demanded by the camera lens brought with it existential consequences:

> the screen actor, by not presenting his performance to the audience in person, is deprived of the possibility open to stage actors of adapting their performance… the cinema audience is being asked to examine and report without any personal contact with the performer intruding. The audience empathizes with the performer only by empathizing with the camera. It thus assumes the camera's stance: it tests. (2008, p.18)

The 'test' of the camera is a disquieting experience for the potential vlogger. The camera deprives the performer of the cues of everyday interactions which make performances seem natural (Goffman, 1959). Mike Wesch's study of vlogs saw that the 'tests' of the camera led to what he dubbed 'the context collapse of the webcam' (2009, pp.22ff): deprived of a context to perform to, the vlogger has to perform without a 'face', 'line' or even interaction setting. Deprived of these, 'it is not surprising to find many would-be first-time vloggers perplexed by the webcam, often reporting that they spent several hours transfixed in front of the lens, trying to decide what to say.' (Wesch 2009, p.23)

The solution of such performative lapses is to appeal to a broad series of expectations, judgments and responses from (anticipated) future judgements from others. As such vloggers make anticipated responses part the vlogger performance itself (Wesch 2009, p.24f). This usually takes the form of introspection and retorts from imagined reprimands from imagined others. For instance, Charlie usually presents a line and then, as if receiving a scolding, makes an apology to his viewers. Internal dialogue with oneself is, like a diary entry, a way to negate the context collapse and present an acceptable face in the absence of an interlocutor.

Because the video is the basis of fame as 'an artificial inflation of 'personality' outside the studio' (Benjamin 2008, p.21), the existential question of 'who to act toward' has become subject to a special criterion of evaluation, the other side of the Faustian problem: once the actor has been universalised on YouTube in a sea of video-selves, so too has the viewer. Deprived of an interlocutor, the viewer asks 'is this ordinary person for real?' Mechanical reproduction leaves the work of art to be 'underpinned' by a 'politics' of authenticity (Benjamin 2008, p.12). Being 'real' is vital to the verdict of one's celebrity on

YouTube and subsequently becomes part of the value people grant them, as documented by others (Wesch, 2008; Burgess & Green 2009, p.29).[3] Lacking authenticity is anathema to the values of YouTube celebrity: ordinariness allows these videos to resonate with people.[4] The viewer finding out the vlogger is inauthentic after the premise of the vlog to be 'reality' is an insult to those same viewers who attribute fame and circulate the name.[5] This was a scandal that occurred in 2006 when the assumed-to-be reality video-blog of 'LonelyGirl15' was discovered to be a fictionalised online-soap in a video-blog format. As Burgess & Green (2009, p.28-30) argue, the social networking devices – of commenting and video-responding – allowed the purported 'reality' of LonelyGirl15 to go on for so long: people thought she was real as she would respond, talk to others via vlog tagging and exchanges. Through her persona and cognomen, people thought they were speaking to someone 'real'.

Along with his authenticity, Charlie's success (in part) comes from his commitment to speak directly to 'you'. As an extension of the authenticity criteria, Charlie partakes in a growing dispute about 'only getting famous' on YouTube, a dispute which regards video-content to be about the content, not the subscription count. Charlie states:

> I have in the past become obsessed with numbers going up and down and I'm happy now just to have a nice bunch. And that way of thinking also extends to how I make my videos. I don't see it as a sea of eyeballs that I need to trick into 'liking my video', or 'subscribing to my channel' … I just try to make good stuff and I have faith that if I make good stuff all that stuff will come with it regardless. And I also like to think that I'm making these videos for you. Because you aren't a sea of eyeballs, or a community: you're a person. One normal, actual person, sitting in front of your computer, or whatever, watching this. And this I think, thinking about you as anything other than what you are, makes it less personal, and I like it when its personal… ('Hello', www.youtube.com/charlie)

This claim to authenticity through treating an audience as one person is part of the para-social dimensions of online fame: as Charlie speaks to 'you', 'you' are able to speak back in comment or video response. The social-networking devices demonstrates awareness of fans

as individuals and as such, for the celebrity, their 'public self is presented through a new layer of interpersonal conversation that in its mode of address bears little relationship to its representational media past.' (Marshall 2010, p.41).

As Marshall (2010, p.41-42) elaborates, social media allows celebrities to gather a following that demands continual recognition so as to maintain their effective self-presentation/promotion. Charlie has a million followers on his channel and uploaded a video about this landmark, saying:

> I do just want to say thank you for the last four years, or so, of my life. Pretty much all of the closest friends I have met on YouTube, all the opportunities I have had to do cool things in my life have come from being on this website. Fundamentally from people watching me on this website. […] Thank you. You have given me my life, like on a plate, if it wasn't for you I, I don't know what I'd be doing without this website. ('One million subscribers', www.youtube.com/charlie)

Given this centrality of the ordinary, the everyday person elevated to celebrity and a brand has interesting consequences for investigating what the persona of 'charlieissocoollike' entails. As his celebrity is achieved, we have to understand how this affects his persona. What does Charlie have to do in order to maintain his 'me', his brand that is himself while living his life through the gazes of his viewers and highly aware of this? The centrality of maintained authenticity is also used to heighten his self-awareness and reflexively monitor his 'image' so as to deal with the 'generalised generalised other' (Wesch, 2009) and maintain celebrity.

Charlie's Englishness: between persona and person

Charlie's sense of self-awareness is where the emphasis on Englishness becomes important. First, he talks in an English accent and is simply an 'Englishman' in the global community of YouTube users. Secondly, interacting in this global community, he is further attributed Englishness from this presence of 'the other', other nationalities, ethnicities and classes attribute to him his Englishness, thereby heightening his own national identity. Yet the main source of his Englishness is his use of his turning himself into a stereotype (auto-

stereotyping) as much as it is based upon foreign perceptions of stereotyping. Peter Mandler (2006, p.53) claims that the use of auto-stereotyping refers to self-conceptions as much as foreign stereotypes as they become part of an external vision of 'how others see us' and are internalised as part of national identity. Such (auto-)stereotyping becomes, quite often, the province of national identity myths, for nationalities are often viewed through the lens of their 'mythic' dimensions, e.g. famous ancestors (e.g. Kings, Queens), legends (e.g. Merlin), folklore (e.g. Beowulf) (Rojek, 2007 pp.76ff), even celebrities that become the epitome of national character, e.g. Hugh Grant for Englishness.

By drawing upon mythic identities, Charlie's use of his nationality is also a dimension that helps forge his celebrity personage. As Lévi-Strauss argued, myths only have a value in so far as they refer to practical, technical activities which endure in a society (Lévi-Strauss 1966, p.35). Myths are historically inherited assumptions from a society's past. Such assumptions provide the source of 'stereotypes' and 'auto-types'. For myths are made up of

> elements which can be defined by two criteria: they had a use, as words in a piece of discourse which mythical thought 'detaches'… and they can be used again either for the same purposes or for a different one if they are at all diverted from their previous function. (Lévi-Strauss 1966, p.35, original emphasis)

Charlie's YouTube celebrity is located in this gap between previous and present use of mythic materials. His use of them rests upon historically inherited assumptions of what an 'Englishman' is and his YouTube persona partly rests upon his use of mythic stereotypes as an elevated yet partly incidental aspect of his 'brand'. In his 'How to be English' video, Charlie's mythic use of Englishness is associated with the elite sections of British society which have become part of a globally recognisable notion of an 'Englishman' due to imperial projects (Colley, 1993) and post-imperial resonances in British society (cf. Tyler, 2012).

While historians explore the varieties of Englishness (Colls, 2003; Mandler, 2006) and take issue with 'elite' Englishness as synonymous with 'England', the English life lived by elite sections of British society is a pervasive feature of what one would associate or describe as a quintessentially English person. This inheritance of 'upper-class' Englishness as the predominant form of the Englishman has become hegemonic in media representation of

them as indicative of 'the nation' writ large while other classes are conceded belonging localities (West Country, Geordie, Essex) (Nadel-Klein, 1995). Charlie's location in this myth of England can be said to have arisen due to a playful mocking of this stereotype in his 'How to be English' video: it is a parody that draws upon the myth and perpetuates it as it recognises its cultural value for English identity.[6]

In what follows I shall develop the English mythology that Charlie espouses in his videos, utilising the method outlined by Lévi-Strauss (1963) for mythological analysis, i.e. by isolating its constituted elements (mythemes) and showing how when these are related and combined they forge meaning (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p.211). Mythemes are components of a story which when isolated can 'show that a certain function is, at a given time, linked to a given subject.' (Lévi-Strauss 1963, p.211). The function is to emphasise Englishness as a heightened part of Charlie's identity and the subject is to articulate this identity to the YouTube audience.

'How to be English' ... *and its* 'imponderable joy'

In Figure 2. we see Charlie in a suit, waving with a toothy grin. We have our first mytheme, the initial appearance of a character and his opening speech:

> Hullo. And welcome to another episode of 'How to be English'.
> … My name is Charles, and I will be showing you the ancient
> English art that is making a cup of tea [snorty laugh].

In this mytheme the relation between person and the speech is to link up to the personality of Englishness – adopting an 'upper class' accent and changing his name to 'Charles', Charlie's suit and his speech relate to what 'Englishness' is, i.e. the upper-class gentleman. Yet in the opening section we also see a series of jump-cuts and lapses of his accent and with it the undermining of this speech. These mythemes – the content, the performance and its undermining – take on the quality of a spoof and a heightened sense of self-awareness in order to create a parody. Yet given the use of these mythic entities, (speech and personality, suit and ties, snorty laughs, upper class accents), they forge a self-conception of Englishness which acknowledges the use of these entities by using them for purposes of comedy and parody over lived personality (cf. Jenkins, 2006 on parody).

When we consider the content of 'making a cup of tea' as the next mytheme, we see it also relates to the disjuncture between parody and actuality. Charlie's use of kettle, semi-skinned milk, Yorkshire tea bags, sugar, a mug and tea-spoon [Fig. 3], are all existing features of English life and practice, as is the suit and an upper-class accent. Yet for heightened self-consciousness these elements relate back to a national identity of 'being English' and gives these everyday facets of English life iconic status. Additionally these class signifiers – of Yorkshire tea-bags, mugs and upper-class accents – actually contradict each other and give rise to a heightened quality of parody, illustrating Lévi-Strauss' (1996, p.35) claim cited above that elements of myths can utilised for alternative purposes.

These two mythemes make up the 'How to be English' myth. With this we have to understand what the myth's use is, its value, for myths take on value through resolving real, social contradictions in the cultural imagination (Lévi-Strauss 1963, p.229): the social contradiction of camera mediated performance relies upon imaginative solutions. This contradiction is the intellectual impulse of the Englishness parody. Yet 'the myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted.' (Lévi-Strauss 1963, p.227) Aware that people on the earth originate from disparate parts of the global, the use of mythic entities is itself a form of politics – for the video contains within it a synchronic facet by its very nature. It is this feature of being 'timeless' that give myths 'operational value' (Lévi-Strauss 1963, p.209): the video is clicked, played, replayed and circulated uncompromised at each instance. Such synchronicity gives it the quality of explaining 'the past and the present as well as the future' (Lévi-Struass 1963, p.209).

Utilising these English mythemes, Charlie's imaginative solution to the real contradiction of YouTube's ideology of 'broadcast yourself' also becomes part of his celebrity personage due to the spreadable nature of YouTube content. Contemporary media gives the myth its spiral quality, emphasising and expanding the intellectual impulses which the myth seeks to resolve. Charlie's mythic vision of England and Englishness spirals off into other media texts. On his 2007 BBC interview about the video becoming a 'sensation' in America, the interviewers state:

> BBC 1: You needed a bowler hat and an umbrella, to make it
> really, really English…
>
> Charlie: I would have if I had one.

BBC 2: You're playing up, were you deliberately making this video for the Americans because you're playing up that being English, it's all about the correct cup of tea, although you really should have had some bone china instead of a clunking great mug?

Charlie: ... Yeah, I kind of made fun of the Americans as much as I could, I tried to slip into a German accent at points, because they can't tell the difference, between, European people…

(BBC Breakfast, 2 Oct 2007,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5bEny17MVo (accessed: 23/06/2011)

The spiral quality spawns more mythemes. Here the use of the mythic stereotype – the Victorian gentlemen with umbrella and bowler hat, or the eighteenth century tea-party with bone china – are utilised in order to create a heightened vision of Englishness established in Charlie's parody. And it is also revealed that the American orientated aspect of the video plays up these perceptions. This auto-stereotype is a common cultural construction among (many but not all) English people and utilises a common set of mythemes (bowler hats, umbrella, bone china, etc.) which is revealed as a feature of foreign perceptions. Yet it is also an ability to utilise these attributed characteristics to create and circulate the video. Taking on the perception of others is itself part of the 'context collapse' Wesch (2009) outlined and the ability to resolve the problem of 'selling' and 'broadcasting yourself'.

These mythemes give Charlie a component part of his persona. This is heightened when we consider his utilisation of this Englishness in his video productions, notably his signature sign-off/outro to his videos. This sign off [Fig. 4] is spoken by Stephen Fry:

'Uh, you've just had the almost imponderable joy of watching charlieissocoollike which makes you, like, cool.'

The mythic value of the Stephen Fry outro is that it gives transformational quality to the mythemes of Englishness already established by Charlie. It turns his Englishness from parody

to a lived identity with the use of England's 'most English Englishman'. Stephen Fry's celebrity in many ways relies upon his Englishenss as he has become increasingly a 'global celebrity'. The stereotype of Englishness exists in the celebrity persona of Stephen Fry as the archetype for our imaginative vision of Englishness, a view that Stephen Fry is highly self-conscious of:

> The longer I live the more clearly one truth stands out. People
> will rarely modify their preferred view of a person, no matter
> what the evidence might suggest. I am English. Tweedy. Pukka.
> Confident. Establishment. Self-assured. In charge. This is how
> people like to see me… (Fry 2010, p.276)

The imaginative quality of persons is of operative importance to the value of the Englishness myth: Fry's celebrity persona expands the spiral quality of myths. Fry's persona gives Charlie's persona a transformational quality. The Englishness of the 'How to be English' video spreads through the media coverage, linking Charlie into a common inheritance of Englishness and expands into new dimensions. For instance, Charlie played host to his YouTube friend and vlogger, the American Michael Aranda ('arandavision') at his London flat and created the video 'How to speak English', wherein they see if Michael is able to decipher the meaning of English vernacularisms, consisting of aubergines, bogey, chav, chuffed, flap-jack, faff, numpty, spiffing, slash, nosh, fit and winkle [Fig. 5a & b].

Utilising this English stereotype of quaint nouns, Michael and Charlie play off each other as they establish ethnic differences through each being an Other to each other. They illuminate the qualities of Englishness and Amercianness through the minutiae of a common language. To end the video Charlie asks Michael to 'do his best Stephen Fry' for the outro of the video, thereby heightening the persona of Englishness through the imaginative qualities of Stephen Fry's celebrity – the words and the impersonation being two mythemes which grant Englishness a sense of reality. This bricolage of stereotyping is, stemming from the spiral of media circulation, also down to the creativity which YouTube video's demand. Dealing with the context collapse, they have to utilise a series of culturally prominent facets of 'Englishness' if they are to be received as English but also to account for the person making the video as they circulate on YouTube as a global platform.

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This brings us back to Bauman's statement that the 'self' today stems from people being 'simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote' (Bauman 2007, p.6), which he elaborates as consumer society's 'subjectivity fetish'.

Bauman's term 'subjectivity fetishism' (2007, p.17), drawn out of a reading of Marx's 'commodity fetishism,' (Marx 1976, pp.163-177), refers to how we forget the origins of our identity in a consumer society. Subjectivity is

> a thoroughly human product elevated to the rank of superhuman
> authority through forgetting or rendering irrelevant its human,
> all too human origins, together with the string of human actions
> that led to its appearance and was the sine qua non condition of
> that appearance. (Bauman, 2007, p.17)

Commodity fetishism and subjectivity fetishism both deal with the same thing. They are problems of dealing with the origin of things. With the Marxian commodity fetish we emphasise the pound sign over the product and people who sell it and with Charlie we overemphasise the persona always forgetting that it has its origins with a camera lens. The origin of the YouTube videos stem from the creators own volition, but lacking a means to display their own person they rely upon mythemes in forging a celebrity personage, notably for Charlie a stereotype of Englishness. This is not objectification as alienation but rather the tightrope the cult of the individual walks. Charlie's dialogue with 'Others' in the YouTube community gives itself over to a heightened sense of self-consciousness (such as differences in vernacular). To be a YouTube celebrity one needs to create a 'brand' of themselves, turn the 'ordinary me' into a persona that consists of easily attached imaginary ideas: Charlie being, as his webpage states, 'An English twenty-something who makes videos' (www.youtube.com/charlie), is the basis of playing up Englishness – factual Englishness leads to heightened self-consciousness. This sense of Englishness is, therefore, partly ordinary and factual but also based upon a mythology and the spread-ability its subject to in forging a person into a celebrity.

Conclusion

Charlie's 'How to be English' video was uploaded in September 2007, a mere five months after creating his YouTube channel. While it gained substantial attention as a viral

video, the nature of celebrity on-line is not confined to this aspect of contemporary culture. Charlie's celebrity lies in the fact that his individual 'self' has manifested itself through a process of self-commodification and branding. His individuality arises through this promotional culture that is also a presentational medium (see Marshall, 2010). Having explored Charlie's 'How to be English' video I shall conclude with the implications this case-study of a YouTube celebrity has for notions of celebrity writ large.

As the cult of the individual, and the centrality of self-commodification, is the basis for forging a celebrity character and personality, we have to pay attention to the fact that 'celebrity culture articulates a way of thinking about individuality and producing the individual self through the public world.' (Marshall 2010, p.46) For Marshall, the continued power of celebrity culture lies in two main facets. First is its ability to educate people to take the reins of cultural production to forge their individuality; online media is a prime site for this to occur. Second is to recognise the ideological significance of individual power in contemporary capitalism. What this article has documented is one such version of individual empowerment through use of vlogging and celebrification as well as the significance of commodification and self-branding in this respect.

The ideological significance of such individuality manifest through capitalist processes of commodification and branding stems from how individuals have to become celebrities to gain their autonomy. Bernard Stiegler posited YouTube as a possible medium for such autonomy because, through audio-visual media, 'the spectator is active on a motor level: he must learn how to make functions work and is no longer only in the position of the consumer.' (Stiegler, 2010, p.51) Actively creating their 'self' through their camera mediated performances, the autonomy YouTube celebrities have is realised through their ability to gain a following via their persona. As Burgess & Green (2010) point out, the celebrities on YouTube are both 'entrepreneurial' in their selling of themselves as celebrities and brands as well as lessons in 'how to build a meaningful presence and an engaged audience.' (Burgess & Green, 2010, p.105) This observation can be furthered when combined with John Hartley's (2009, pp.131-133) claim that YouTube 'updates' the 'bardic function' that television had in twentieth century. Fiske & Hartley's (2003, pp.85ff) notion of the 'bardic' function of television was to demonstrate how narrative television served to offer structured messages to reinforce existing, everyday life and meanings. YouTube offers this bardic function to everyone, emphasising an all-embracing, democratic quality of open-access and non-expert communication (Hartley 2009, p.133f).

Individual autonomy gained through celebrity on YouTube could suggest something quite radical: 'we are all celebrities now'. As stated above, the mask is a key metaphor for celebrity persona in contemporary scholarship. In light of the claim 'we're all celebrities', the mask may need redefining. And as is well known, the 'mask' is an ancient inheritance – evoking Greek theatre and its cult of tragic heroes. The mask of the ancient hero marks a clear dividing line between the hero onstage and the citizen audience. For here the hero is not autonomous but rather 'a function of the plot fate assigns him,' as Bakhtin (1981, p.36) noted. Unlike free citizens, masked ancient heroes remain trapped within their story, within their already-established and fixed destiny. Part of this heritage of the mask exists in celebrity studies. Jeffrey Alexander (2010, p.331), noting the pre-modern inheritance of masks as the basis for celebrity-icon's, asks 'if the celebrity-icon is a mask, what of the 'individual' who lies behind it?' And Alexander answers in a pre-modern fashion: anything contradicting the mask is tantamount to celebrity downfall. Celebrities, on this view, remain trapped by their masked persona. Yet with YouTube, the suggestion that 'we are all celebrities now' seems to go against such a view of masking metaphors. With the YouTube celebrity, the mask does not completely absorb the individual. For as we've seen with Charlie's self-consciousness of his own self-branding, and use of multiple persona, as well as parody use of Englishness myths, the all-absorbing power of a mask is diminished as it is liable to transform and undermine itself at any given turn. As such, the celebrity on YouTube could be called a meta-celebrity. A meta-celebrity is one constantly aware of and bringing to attention their own celebrity qualities. This is a feature of the YouTube vlogging celebrity more generally and it demonstrates that a celebrity as an extra-ordinary person and an ordinary person as a potential celebrity is situated on a very fine line distinction.

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[1] See: 'What YouTube isn't | Becoming YouTube | Video #9'' for interviews from vlogging celebrities about the difference between television and YouTube, esp.09:30: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FDgT-elh60 (uploaded: May 31st 2013). The engaged mode of watching is in line with scholarship on web 2.0 products (YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, etc.). YouTube promotes the active engagement as users are 'prosumers', producers and consumers (See: Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2009; Beer & Burrows, 2013).

[2] For the purposes of my argument, a culture of parody does not undermine national identity myths. See note 6.

[3] Amongst YouTuber's, 'the F word' is Fake.

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[4] As Matthias Varul (2006:115 n.1) points out: 'It is an irony of the 'expressivist turn' (Taylor, 1989: 368ff.) in modern culture that the growing importance of the inner life of the self at the same time opens it up to social scrutiny.'

[5] This was a scandal that occurred in 2006 when the assumed-to-be reality video-blog of 'LonelyGirl15' was discovered to be a fictionalised online-soap in a video-blog format: (see, Wesch, 2008).

[6] As Lévi-Strauss observes, the value of the myth 'does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells.' (1963, p.210, original emphasis): Charlie's use of the upper-class persona is a story; its parody makes it no less powerful for it still articulates Englishness in the process of retelling.