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PAPARAZZI

Media Practices
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A small amount of material in the book has been previously published.

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Introduction

The word 'paparazzi' often elicits strong reactions. Their popular reputation has them either skulking in bushes or crouching on balconies trying to take an invasive shot of a public figure; or else they are uncontrollable urban hooligans, charging down streets in crowds, or pursuing people in dangerous high-speed car chases. The industry is often seen as a male-dominated one, which at times becomes aggressive and frightening for the subjects. Finally, their output tends to be associated with some of the worst excesses of tabloid culture, sensationalism and triviality.

However, this stereotype of the paparazzi is one that needs to be revisited. My contention in the book is that paparazzi images have become of increasing importance within popular culture. They are a fascinating aspect of contemporary society – situated between conventional photographic practice, the economy of news production and society's interest in celebrity (Chéroux 2014b). For example, for Carol Squiers, paparazzi photography 'occupies a seemingly unique position outside the bounds of polite photography, defined by its self-admitted characteristics of aggression and stealthiness, narrow range of subjects, and elastic formal definitions of what constitutes a "good" picture' (1999: 271).

This book is neither a coruscating attack on the paparazzi industry nor an apology for some of its wilder excesses. Instead, it seeks to throw light on one of the least understood elements of today's global entertainment business. Paparazzi agencies and photographers are responsible for images that circulate worldwide, ranging from iconic shots of Hollywood

movie stars, to barely noticed content filler for magazines and newspapers from Brazil to Australia, Italy to Canada. Where celebrities go, paparazzi are sure to follow close behind. Their constant mobility matches the often negative public perception of them as 'fly-by-night' or somehow shady.

The framework

To approach this as a research problem requires an engagement with the wider nature of celebrity and publicity, the industrial practices and work cultures of contemporary media work and the changing nature of photography as a commercial activity. Throughout the book, I bring three distinct fields together: the production of celebrity as an industry; the nature of contemporary journalism and media production as a practice; and the place of paparazzi within the various branches of the photography profession.

First, it is impossible to understand the nature of paparazzi without a grasp of celebrity as an industry. As scholars such as Gamson (1994) and Turner et al. (2000) have shown, this involves identifying the multiple agents who actively cultivate the recognizability of particular actors, politicians and sports stars. This ranges from celebrity stylists and the organizers of junkets, through to entertainment journalists and agents. Certainly, this was always part of the earlier Hollywood 'star system'. But as Joshua Gamson argues in his book *Claims to Fame*, there has been a growing awareness among audiences of 'the tremendously heightened self-consciousness about the systematic production of celebrity and celebrity images for commercial purposes' (Gamson 1994: 48; Marshall 1997, 2006, 2014). For many armchair fans or celebrity watchers, the paparazzi are part and parcel of what celebrity is about (Bajac 2014).

In recent years, there have been a number of very high-profile court cases, ranging from those which revealed very genuine concerns about privacy intrusion (the phone-tapping scandal

which engulfed Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World*) to the more contestable (the legal battle over who, if anyone, owned the exclusive rights to images of the wedding of Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas), or even laughable (Barbra Streisand's ill-advised attempt to bar geological survey aerial photography which included her property). It was well known in gossip circles and the industry that celebrities varied significantly in their opinions and behaviour towards paparazzi, with many enjoying a degree of rapport and mutual recognition, and a realization that being shot 'naturally' as they bought coffee or walked their dog would give them much-needed – and free – publicity.

Second, the paparazzi industry is inseparable from the wider media-content production complex. As I have described in chapter 4, a particular strand of 'serious' news journalism gradually became less prevalent in mainstream reporting, replaced by a softer journalism. Recent work undertaken by Graeme Turner highlights this shift, emphasizing that the way in which journalists engage with celebrity news rests not on the independent and objective viewpoint of traditional news reporting. Rather, 'credibility is established by quality of access to the sources of celebrity news, rather than by their capacity to deliver verifiable evidence-based reports' (Turner 2014: 149). This already familiar viewpoint not only bleeds into the relationship between journalist and celebrity, but also between the reader and the object of authorship. This highlights a small but very important nuance: a shift in how audiences, who have traditionally received or interacted with varying themes of news in specific ways in accordance to their themes, now have a more streamlined and generic experience of the news as a whole, thanks to a growing trend in journalists being free from 'more traditional notions of objectivity and independence' (Turner 2014: 150).

It is important to recognize that the paparazzi industry is defined as much by its distribution channels as by the taking of the photos in the first place. The continual developments of social media have broadened and 'elasticized' access to, and

flows of, celebrity images (Marshall 2007). Paparazzi agencies bring audiences the images of celebrities, but it is the increasingly sophisticated distribution technology – smartphones, tablets, super-lightweight laptops – which allows the photographer to generate images with unprecedented immediacy. The technology kit of an individual paparazzi photographer is increasingly smaller, lighter and more accurate, with high-definition cameras that can take up to 300 shots a minute, as well as ever-smaller, state-of-the-art video cameras. With agencies now based online, paparazzi images can be uploaded and accessed within minutes of being taken. The organizational structure of the paparazzi agency is crucial here. Agencies often have more than one base, so as to cover 'celebrity-heavy' destinations, such as Los Angeles and London.

Thus, the significance of paparazzi agency entertainment websites lies not only in the simultaneity of their production of fan-oriented content, and outsourcing to other news and entertainment agencies, but also in the web's speed and ability to reach a mass audience (Jenkins 2006). Publicists work with paparazzi agencies because they know the value of their power, driven by the web, with the ability to distribute pictures and news stories around the world in as little as twelve seconds (Heinich 2014). It is also important to consider how social media – Twitter, Instagram, Facebook – is influencing the way in which images are redefining celebrity news. Mobile and visual social networking, where celebrities are on the same platform as fans and followers, provide an interesting new dimension to the study of paparazzi, and one which will become increasingly significant (Wortham 2013).

The third area of concern is how paparazzi fit within broader traditions of photographic practice and professionalism. What kind of photographer the paparazzo is provokes much debate. The transition from analogue to digital photography brought a gradual shift in the nature of professional photographic practice, which had always required a long apprenticeship or training. Up until the late 1990s, high-level photography

was not an easy career choice: from the heavy cameras which required manual focus and exposure, to the inconvenience of flashes which needed to be constantly changed, to the expensive film which also required changing as well as development in darkrooms, followed by the sheer expense of distributing and syndicating the best images, it is little surprise that the field of the paparazzi was a relatively small one.

However, we are now in a time of 'ubiquitous photography' (Hand 2012) and the 'amateur meta-picture' (Becker 2014). The remarkable development of smartphone camera technology means that it is also important to recognize that there has been a transition in the number and quality of photographers in the world. When we see the paparazzi in action, they may often appear to be almost amateurs, holding the camera aloft without even using the viewfinder. The sophistication of top-of-the-range cameras such as the Canon 6D means that almost anyone can take a commercially successful photo in theory. Yet there are many who believe that the most successful paparazzi are as talented, and as misunderstood, as historically revered artists (Kimmelman 1997a).

This requires an understanding of the nature of photographic practice and training, and also a working knowledge of the emergence of digital photography. There is now an established scholarly interest in the development of photography as a practice (e.g. Bull 2010; Shore 2007; Wells 1996). However, the discussion in this book extends this to include the importance of photo agencies in structuring the distribution of the image, together with its price. To understand this requires the realization that, as Frosh (2001b) puts it, photography is 'both an image and a material artefact' (p. 43):

> photography's uniqueness stems from its fusion of indexical and iconic signification in a mechanical-chemical process: the fact that the camera can create realistic and infinitely reproducible images of whatever is situated in its field. This combination of physical contiguity, visual similarity and unlimited multiplication with regard to the visible world

endows photography with what we can call 'representational power'; and it is of a type and degree that constitutes a historic transformation of representation in relation to previous visual media. (Frosh 2001b: 44).

This power is 'dramatized, in part, through the iconography of the image itself: content, compositional clues, focus, colour, and the response of those photographed to the presence of the camera' (ibid.). At various points, I connect the discussion back to older traditions of visual representation, particularly portraiture and street photography (Sturken and Cartwright 2001).

The fieldwork

When I first decided to undertake a study of paparazzi, in 2009, I had no idea whether photographers would be interested in participating in an academic study, and anticipated that it would be quite difficult to gain access. I tried my hand at emailing a few Sydney-based photographers with contact details I found from their websites, and before long had been put in contact with Peter Carrette, one of the city's best-known 'old-school' paparazzi. He had gained notoriety in the late 1960s for taking a shot of Marianne Faithfull (then Mick Jagger's girlfriend) as she lay in a coma in a Sydney hospital. Carrette invited me to the Bondi Icebergs café for lunch with him, paid for my meal, and was cheerfully candid about his work and personal life – giving the impression that the two were inseparable. The interview opened up many doors, and revealed industry secrets that I had been unaware of.

It was already clear, of course, that the key sites of the paparazzi industry were in the United States, above all in Los Angeles and New York. Before too long, I made the trip to Los Angeles, which houses many of the world's leading paparazzi agencies. I had a short but fascinating discussion with a leading agency head in West Hollywood's iconic Canters Delicatessen. I sat outside the Coffee Bean at the top of Robertson Boulevard

with a couple of well-established photographers, as we counted the numerous stationary 'pap' cars waiting for a celebrity of any description to emerge onto the sidewalk. In the offices of Bauer-Griffin, I admired the agency's widely circulated image of a toned Barack Obama surfing in Hawaii days before his inauguration as American President. A trip to New York followed, and there I was indebted to the photo editor of *Us Weekly*, Brittain Stone, and Rob DeMarco of *Life and Style*, who gave me a candid and highly entertaining set of accounts of their jobs, and of the industry more broadly. I staked out a red-carpet premiere, paying more attention to how the photographers lined up than to the celebrities themselves; followed a journalist as we tried to track down Katie Holmes, rumoured to be shooting a film in Nolita; and was nearly enrolled in an 'airport job' (spotting and photographing arriving celebrities as they come through arrivals). In London, Toronto and Berlin, I was given insights to the very specific conditions of paparazzi work in these cities by some leading industry professionals. Coming full circle, back home in Sydney, I Skyped with others who couldn't meet in person on my travels.

Aside from the thirty semi-structured interviews I conducted with paparazzi agency owners, photographers, photo editors and entertainment journalists, the empirical material encompassed a wide range of other sources. This included reference to some of the key existing book-length sources: first-person accounts such as Ray Bellisario's *To Tread on Royal Toes* (1972), and Brad Elterman's *Shoot the Stars* (1985); and Darryn Lyons's *Mr Paparazzi* (2008); the comprehensive – and highly pictorial – surveys provided by Howe (2005) and Chéroux (2014a); and the huge volume of press coverage over the years provided by publications as diverse as the *New York Times* and fan blogs. The UK Leveson Inquiry, set up to examine widespread phone-tapping practices undertaken by News International's *News of the World,* has provided a remarkable archive of evidence about the actual operation of contemporary media industries, which I have drawn from in chapter 6.

The structure of the book

The book begins by briefly tracing the emergence of what we now know as paparazzi photography, from its origins in post-war Italy, its refinement in the work of the likes of Ron Galella who operated in the New York of the late 1960s and early 1970s, its torrid relationship with the British royal family, and its commercial explosion in the American magazine-circulation battles of the 2000s. This era also helps us to understand the way in which celebrities have needed to utilize the paparazzi's role as key players in their careers (Gamson 1994:81).

Chapter 2 describes the operating conditions, techniques and skill base of the paparazzi photographer, and highlights their daily routines. It examines the ways in which people can approach and are approached by agencies to become photographers, and how, in the currently unregulated system, there is a tendency towards employment of a precarious nature. This chapter goes on to explore the ways in which employees under these conditions manifested a demonization of the public image of the paparazzi. The pursuit of celebrities, rather than stakeouts (that is, waiting for something to happen in front of them), became the norm in the day-to-day business. This physical practice, and the psychological tactics accompanying it, also changed the course of the industry. It created the idea of 'celebrity circuits', mental maps of places and pathways where celebrity 'traffic' would gather. As the chapter explains, this in turn created the 'gangs' of paparazzi that would be assigned to a certain celebrity in order to get as many shots as they could.

Chapter 3 focuses on the structure of the industry, highlighting the pivotal role of agencies and photo editors in driving the production of celebrity images. It looks at the shift from smaller-scale agencies to the massive Getty Images as a new player in the industry landscape. The focus here is on the power of the stock image, where celebrity isn't a necessity, but rather a portion of an already huge database of varied visual imagery, ready to be disseminated to the related media. The

importance of this lies mostly in the dexterity of the dissemination process, such as syndication, by an agency, and how the main photo agencies operate, particularly in terms of how they source photos and then price them. It also discusses the role of photo editors in media outlets who are key mediators in the image markets.

In chapter 4, I discuss how this fits into entertainment-media news agendas, and how new media platforms, from the video paparazzi of TMZ to gossip websites, have in turn shaped the celebrity industry itself. It also considers how certain celebrities become particularly newsworthy through the conscious construction of 'story arcs', which are based around paparazzi images. Following from this, the chapter also explores the nature of celebrity characterization within these story arcs. In this sense, the celebrities are created by the story arcs they are slotted into, as well as being the catalyst for the stories themselves. This is an example of how paparazzi, tabloid media and reality TV co-create rich, saleable storylines which can be serialized for weeks on end. Gossip bloggers such as Perez Hilton helped to pave the way for agencies themselves to channel their content in front of the consumer audience as well as the client-based one. This was in no small part due to the unlawful use of their content by bloggers, which contributed to the autonomous creation of entertainment news by agencies themselves, and thus another stage in the growth as a hybrid business-to-business, business-to-client and business-to-consumer industry as it exists today. The advent of social media has entirely reconfigured the celebrity industry, allowing celebrities to curate 'private' imagery.

In chapter 5, I trace through some of the connections between paparazzi shots and other genres. The chapter highlights a connection between historical imagery and paparazzi photography, and suggests that social, compositional and aesthetic elements of what modern viewers understand as 'fine art' has similarities to paparazzi photography. Scholars and the general public alike approach portrait painting and

street photography with a reverence of historical and/or cultural importance not granted to paparazzi imagery. However, through a discussion of various street-inspired photographers such as Weegee, Diane Arbus and Juergen Teller, we can situate modern paparazzi photography within a wider context in the history of photography. The expressionistic tones of street photography – achieved in part by the inherent movement of both the subject and the photographer – form an essential characteristic of these historical fine-art pursuits, one which also defines modern paparazzi aesthetics and intentions. The chapter considers the ways in which the aesthetics and practices of paparazzi are exhibited and enacted, and how they work between high and low culture.

Finally, chapter 6 pulls together some of the key regulatory and ethical questions concerning paparazzi activity, particularly around rights to privacy, and paparazzi conduct. This is by no means an easy task, given highly different traditions of rights in different countries, as well as different media institutions. It begins with an overview of the legislative climate surrounding paparazzi activities, and the attempts by certain celebrities to bring forward a law in which the impact of camera technology would be specifically named. Cases such as the unsolicited circulation of images of the wedding of Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas, which triggered a series of court cases over image copyright, highlights the complex nature of image ownership. In a similar way, further discussion of the ethics of taking pictures of the children of celebrities is contemplated, with consideration of the idea that celebrities' children suffer from 'fame by association', and are thus 'born into' a life of exposure. This argument is further complicated by the fact that the exposure of celebrities' children is not uniform and that, in fact, many celebrities 'exploit' their children in formally contracted images sold to magazines, for example, as a story on the celebrities' home life. These examples help to unpack the complexities of the desire for privacy in the midst of celebrity work and, further, the issue of separation of work