**Pulling Down Barriers: Neil Peart, Autobiographical Confession and Negotiated Rock Celebrity**

“I don’t overvalue what I do, or what I am. I hit things with sticks – big deal” (Neil Peart, *Roadshow*, 2006: 89).

When Neil Peart joined the Canadian rock band Rush in 1974, he provided a vital contribution to the band’s sound that would see him consistently make music with bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson for over 40 years, selling some 40 million records. But, aside from his virtuoso drumming skills, Peart also became the band’s chief lyricist and, as an inveterate reader, moved Rush into the literary and philosophical direction that has defined the band’s identity. Hence, while the band’s first album (recorded with John Rutsey on drums) was thematically concerned with teenage pursuits and the drudgery of manual labour, Peart wrote lyrics that were inspired by writers as diverse as J.R.R. Tolkien, Ayn Rand, and Samuel R. Delaney, to Walt Whitman, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, AJ Cronin, John Barth, and Voltaire, cementing Rush’s subsequent image as a distinctively intellectual rock band (Selby Price and Price, 1998; Berti and Bowman, 2011; Freedman, 2014). However, as Rush’s renown grew, Peart rapidly adopted a guarded stance to his celebrity, most famously expressed within the Rush song, ‘Limelight’ (released in 1980 on their seminal *Moving Pictures* album), Within this song Peart reflected upon the pursuit of fame as a ‘universal dream’, but also stressed the downside of celebrity, principally the lack of privacy and, most potently, the unwanted and invasive attention from fans, who Peart dubbed as ‘strangers’ from whom barriers must be erected to protect the private self.

Although their sound has inevitably evolved over the years, Rush are typically regarded as exponents of progressive rock, a genre characterised by ‘long solos, overlong albums, fantasy lyrics, grandiose stage sets…and a dedication to technical skill that borders on the obsessive’ (Hegarty and Halliwell, 2013: 2). Hence, the fame that has accrued to Peart represents what Chin and Hills call ‘subcultural celebrity,’ a mode of ‘celebrity that is restricted rather than general, being recognised by specific (fan/subcultural) audiences rather than being culturally ubiquitous’ (2010: 142).Reflecting this form of celebrity, within his writing, Peart consistently refers to himself as a ‘niche’ celebrity figure with a public persona that is recognisable mainly by Rush fans and drumming enthusiasts. In this regard, although not a mainstream celebrity figure, Peart nevertheless accords with definitions of celebrity which represent ‘a person whose name, image, lifestyle, and opinions carry cultural and economic worth’ (Redmond, 2014: 5). But it is how Peart articulates this prominence which is the subject of this article, because he presents a distinctive insider view of what it is like to be the subject of fan adoration through his ‘second career’, that of the author of a series of autobiographical books in which he unequivocally reveals the dynamic between his private self and public status.

The concept of celebrity representation is a significant feature of Rojek’s now-classic analysis of the nature of celebrity identity, that of the division of celebrity status between a private and public self, of the split between the ‘I’, what Rojek calls (inspired by the social psychology of George Herbert Mead) the ‘veridical’ self, and the ‘Me’, which is the sense of self seen by others. As Rojek explains in relation to celebrity culture:

The public presentation of self is always a staged activity, in which the human actor presents a ‘front’ of ‘face’ to others while keeping a significant portion of the self in reserve. For the celebrity, the split between the I and the Me is often disturbing. So much so, that celebrities frequently complain of identity confusion and the colonization of the veridical self by the public face (2001: 11).

In Neil Peart’s case, the public presentation of the self and public ‘Me’ is significant because, although ‘Limelight’ is predicated upon his desire for privacy and the rejection of the adulation that has resulted from his musical career, his autobiographical books *do* reveal multiple aspects of his private self. To date, these books consist of: *The Masked Rider* (1996), *Ghost Rider* (2002), *Traveling Music* (2004), *Roadshow* (2006), *Far and Away* (2011), and *Near and Far* (2014). Within these narratives, Peart strives to reclassify his celebrity as the division between his self and his personal pursuits (reading, writing, cycling, motorcycling, and his family), and his *professional* status as a rock drummer and lyricist with Rush. Moreover, although Peart has now produced a substantial body of published work that manifest what Redmond (2010) dubs ‘celebrity confessional’ discourses, Peart articulates his stance towards his celebrity through deconstructing it into a professional status, and candidly articulates a critical and uncompromising attitude to fandom, a group he consistently ‘others’.

This article, therefore, examines Neil Peart as a celebrity case study in relation to his autobiographical work, and argues that his critical insider’s view of fandom is balanced by the consistent positioning of his public self as one based entirely upon, and (ideally) limited to, his professional status as a musician and an entertainer. In this regard, I will apply the sociology of Richard Sennett’s concept of the ‘craftsman’ to Peart’s often blunt contention that his public persona professionally exists to connect with *audiences* and not fans who seek either direct contact with him, or even just public acknowledgement (autographs and photograph taking, etc.). Furthermore, the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu, in relation to his concept of distinction, will be discussed in relation to Peart’s project of distanciation from his fan base, and his literary public and professional self. As such, the article explores the self-reflexive ‘confessions’ of a notoriously private public figure but also evaluates the effects and nature of fandom from the perspective of a subcultural celebrity who does not regard himself as being a celebrity at all, but who nevertheless is the focus of extensive (and frequently obsessive) fan attention. Arguably, this reveals Neil Peart to represent a distinctive celebrity paradox: an avowedly private professional musician who routinely reveals his self to the public autobiographically, but in doing so provides a particular view on the nature of celebrity and his self-reflexive definition of fame.

**Pulling Down Barriers: Rock Star Confessions**

Within *The Star and Celebrity Confessional*, Sean Redmond explores what he sees as a culture saturated by ‘revelatory communications’ of private lives related to scandals, personal problems and deviant behaviours, and, moreover, it is a confessional media culture that increasingly includes celebrities. As Redmond argues:

Stars and celebrities confess – they always have invested in the revelatory mode of self-enunciation – but in the self-reflexive, ubiquitous, highly simulated environment of 24/7 media culture today, they centrally rely on the confessional to authenticate, validate, humanize, resurrect, extend and enrich their star and celebrity identities. Stars and celebrities confess, and in so doing confirm their status as truthful, emotive, experiential beings who – as devotional fans – we can invest in (2010: 1-2).

In Redmond’s view, the celebrity confessional brings together a specific dynamic, a nexus point that unites revelations about the business of being a celebrity figure, their emotional thoughts and often critical appraisals of their public and private selves. Thus, within mediums such as documentaries, TV and magazine interviews or personal blogs:

The star or celebrity seemingly attempts to speak openly and honestly about where they have come from. Such as confession(s) can include reference to their humble beginnings; the troubles, hardships and corruption they may have faced along the journey to fame; who they really are underneath the fame gown; and how alike they are to the everyday people who watch their films, buy their records, go to their concerts (2010: 2).

In the case of Neil Peart, the choice to publicly reveal his ‘humble beginnings’, ascent to fame, and acute personal issues has been realized through the writing of a series of professionally published books that are distinctly autobiographical. The choice to do this began in 1976, during Rush’s breakthrough year that saw the release of the commercially successful album, *2112*, and which resulted in the band touring more extensively. As Peart recounts: ‘Back in 1976…I decided my on-the-road hobby was going to be writing prose. In the same way that loving music had made me want to play it, it seemed that because I loved to read, I wanted to write’ (2006: 20). Although music autobiographies are a perennial presence within publishing (rising in popularity in recent years), Peart’s eschew clichéd tales of ‘excessive and eccentric lifestyles’ which are common in male rock star autobiographies’ (Oksanen, 2013: 123) to alternatively fuse the tropes of travel with memoir-style. Accordingly, Peart’s ‘confessions’ are not of the carnal and decadent variety, nor are they ‘self-disclosures’ that seek redemption for the extremes and controversies of celebrity life (especially within the field of rock music and world tours), and nor do they reveal or redress scandals (Redmond, 2008). Alternatively, they are frequently deeply personal in terms of emotional crises, but also documents of personal experience.

In terms of literary style Peart weaves together personalized perceptions of the locations he visits, detailed and objective research-based discourses, personal and autobiographical As Peart’s books are centrally about his life and not about his band (there are relatively few references to his bandmates, and sparse discussions of the recording of specific albums), they adhere to this conception of autobiographical ‘confession’ as they consist of a hybrid format that brings together straight prose, letters, journal extracts, and blogs, all of which are united through their ‘self-centred’ focus. A key example of this style is his book, *Traveling Music* is predicated upon Peart’s early life, his work as a musician and, more importantly, his perception and evaluation of his celebrity status.

Subtitled ‘The Soundtrack to My Life and Times,’ the book charts a road trip Peart takes across America in his ‘dream car’, a BMW Z-8, in which he plays a succession of music that form soundtracks to reflect specific places he travels to, but also rekindle specific memories that reflect growing up in the 1950s and 1960s serve to spark off the recounting of musical experiences and memories of his youth in Canada.Recalling Redmond’s identification of the ‘confessional’ representing a discourse in which a celebrity reveals ‘where they have come from,’ *Traveling Music* provides the personal history that Rush fans seek, such as the details of the earliest bands that Peart formed as a teenager, their live performances in Canada, and the details of his journey to England at the age of eighteen in search of musical successThus, these subdivisions of *Traveling Music* take the explicit form of a memoir as it reflexively conveys both his development as a musician (auditioning for various bands, and being regularly rejected) and his discovery of progressive rock and the complex drumming time signatures, the prowess that he would later become globally famous for.

However, such recollections present often candid details of Peart’s early life, both personally and professionally, and represent the construction of Peart as an ‘emotive’ and ‘experiential’ individual, providing a ‘humanizing’ insight into the life of a lauded musician who, for much of his professional life, has been private and scornful of the intrusive condition of ‘living in the limelight’. Consequently, Redmond’s categorisation of celebrity confessional texts as revelatory instances of ‘emotional interiority’ (2010: 2) characterizes his written work, especially the memoir, *Ghost Rider* (published in 2002), an autobiographical work predicated upon Peart’s experiences of deep personal loss, grief, and trauma in response to the deaths of his daughter and wife in the late 1990s.

**The Insider’s View of Celebrity: Seeing the Fan as the ‘Stranger’**

Although *Ghost Rider* is fundamentally a chronicle of grief, a significant theme within of the latter part of the book are the sections in which Peart provides insights into how he views his fame, and, more significantly, how he articulates fan reactions to him. In this sense, the confessional component that Redmond argues to centre upon celebrities speaking ‘openly and honestly’ consists of the personal tragic elements of Peart’s life, but also the unwanted and adverse properties of fame. As such, in the final pages of *Ghost Rider*, he recounts an incident that occurred while attending a Paul McCartney record launch event:

I had one awkward moment at the Paul McCartney party, the kind I always dreaded, when somebody recognized me and wanted an autograph…Despite 20 years or so of modest celebrity, I had never grown comfortable with such encounters, but now, after the terrible events in my private life, it seemed exactly *twice* as bad. Whoever I was, I was definitely not the person *those* people thought they knew (2002: 402-403).

Peart’s acute sense of discomfort with his celebrity status, and more specifically, the sense of intrusion that he feels when publically recognised, is a fundamental and candidly-expressed component of his writing, which consistently reinforces his view of fans as ‘strangers’ who are not to be welcomed into his private life. This theme is a consistent motif within his book, *Roadshow* (published in 2006), which describes the locations Peart visited as part of Rush’s thirtieth anniversary arena tour (entitled the *R30* tour) in Canada, North America, and Europe. While a substantial degree of the book consists (given its travel writing onus) of accounts of Peart’s in-between-show motorcycle rides to various destinations, the book also repeatedly deals with the musician’s perception of his fans, and most candidly, his unwanted personal encounters with his fan base.

In Duffett’s view, fandom represents ‘a sociocultural phenomenon largely associated with modern capitalist societies, electronic media, mass culture and public performance’ (2013: 5). Furthermore, as Hills states, fans are individuals who are ‘obsessed’ with a cultural product or individual, be it as film star, celebrity, film, TV programme, or band. Moreover, fans frequently articulate and interpretive of their favoured media texts, and commonly ‘participate in communal activities – they are not ‘socially atomised’ or isolated viewers/readers’ (2002: ix). In this regard, the cultural and sociological study of fandom has progressively stressed the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon, exploring the creative and interpretive characteristics of fandom, from the now-classic conception of the ‘textual poacher’ and the culturally productive fan (Jenkins, 1992 and 2006; Brooker, 2002) to fans as media co-creators through online forums and contact with media producers (Hills, 2010; Larsen and Zubernis, 2012). However, the negative perceptions of fandom from which these approaches have sought to critically counter still endure. As Cashmore expresses in relation to celebrity culture, and, more specifically, celebrity worship, a source of the word fan is derived from ‘the adjective fanatic, from the Latin *fanaticus*, meaning “of the temple”; so the fan is someone who is excessively enthusiastic or filled with the kind of zeal usually associated with religious fervour’ (2006: 79). This underscores the negative perception of fandom that sees it dominated by ‘adjectives such as “crazy” or “deranged”’ (Cavicchi, 1998: 39). Yet, while the figure of the fan is multi-dimensional one and this designation is somewhat reductionist, it is nevertheless the definition that characterises Peart’s perception of his fans, as he asserts within *Roadshow*:

“Fan” is short for “fanatic,” and the kinds of fan who would wait outside a building all afternoon were going to be the most fanatical of all. I know most of them would be very nice, polite, and appreciative, but there were the others. The looks on their faces, the things they would say to me, the jostling, the cameras flashing in my face, the sheer, surreal *embarrassment* of it (2006: 286).

Peart’s uneasiness with fans (the ‘fanatics’ and the polite autograph-hunters alike) has been a personal factor that he has reflected upon since Rush rose to commercial prominence, and how that success changed how fans reacted to the band, and to him. For example, he recalls within *Roadshow* the period in the band’s history in which he could walk to the music venues that Rush were playing at unrecognised, but then how this progressively changed as what he calls fan “reception committees” at stage door became a staple presence, with increasing numbers requesting autographs and personal contact. At one level, Turner’s analysis of fans who attend literary events is applicable to how Peart writes about fan reaction to him (meeting an ‘artist’ rather than a celebrity, whereby they seek personal contact ‘in order to gain an insight into what they are ‘really like’’ (2014b: 21). Nevertheless, far from being pathological, a key element of fandom is what Duffett refers to as the ‘pleasures of connection’ that are implicit within fan behaviour. As he states:

Beyond engaging with the text, for many people some of the primary pleasures of fandom stem from their aim of encountering the performer and perhaps talking to them or receiving their autograph. Stars vary in their attitudes about serving fans as an audience (2013: 166).

Within Cavicchi’s study of the fans of Bruce Springsteen, a key factor that his fan base has habitually related to is that of his status as ‘just a regular guy’, stemming from Springsteen’s working class aesthetic, expressed through his lyrics, and his apparent discomfort with fame (as revealed within interviews). Subsequently, such factors have led many of his fans to view him as being contactable, to the degree that Springsteen himself is perceived by fans to value this connection with his audience. This view is evidenced by instances in which Springsteen has engaged in reciprocal letter exchanges with fans, and, more directly, ventured out from backstage into concert areas to ‘wait for fans to find him’ (1998: 67). Peart, alternatively, uses his ‘regular guy’ self-perception to shut down such audience connectivity, and recounts within his autobiographies his deliberate avoidance of as many personal fan confrontations as he can. For example, the *R30* tour included pre-concert ‘meet and greet’ autograph events for contest-winning fans, but they were only attended by his bandmates, Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson, because, as Peart reveals, they would be ‘an uncomfortable ordeal for me. So I stayed away’ (2006: 93). Thus, even within carefully contrived meeting points (Meet and Greets admit only a small number of fans, limited band contact (autograph signings and photographs with the band), and security personnel are present), unlike Lee and Lifeson, Peart rejects the fan process of seeking out ‘moments of contact with celebrities’ in their perception of them as ‘intimate strangers’ (Duffett, 2013: 167). Furthermore, Peart also reveals that he does not travel with his bandmates while on tour, preferring to immediately leave the stage at the close of a performance and enter his own tour bus and leave the venue, which further serves to minimise fan contact. To justify his attitude and behaviour within *Traveling Music* Peart becomes reflective with regard to justifying his perception of fandom and his rejection of fan confrontations in the face of those who ask about his fandom and fan behaviour as a teenager, and how he reacted to the bands he revered. He is also asked if such memories could allow him to sympathetically empathise with the fervent behaviour of sections of his fan base, Peart’s response, however, is unequivocal:

Obviously, I was, even in the true sense of fan as “fanatic,” but I never imagined trying to approach my heroes, never even *dreamed* of hanging around a backstage door, or trying to find their hotel. It was about the music and the image and the magic of it all, not about trying to invade their *lives*. So no, sorry, I don’t understand (2004: 80).

A focus of fan-produced disquiet within Peart’s writing surrounds his plainly expressed view that while on tour he feels ‘under siege’ from ‘stranger’ attention, and especially the more extreme fans who endeavour to ‘figure out where to find me’ (2004: 116). This is an apt use of words as the word obsession developed from the Latin word obsidere – ‘to besiege’ (Meloy, 1998: 13) – and the motif of fanaticism/obsession is a recurrent theme within *Roadshow* as it reveals contacts with more extreme fans and stalkers who claiming to have personal and spiritual relationships with Peart. As he reflects on the motivations for such attention:

My one regret about talking up lyric-writing was that it attracted the attention of that kind of schizophrenic much more than drumming did. Such people rarely found secret messages in drumbeats, but words were so powerful for good and ill. Drummers only tended to attract other “drumheads,” who were generally harmless, but when I was approached by a stranger, I couldn’t know if they were attracted to me as a guy who hit things with sticks, or as a visionary messenger who planted secret messages for them alone in my song lyrics (2006: 142).

Within this quote, Peart disregards any ‘active’ polysemic potential or agency that fans may take within his lyrics and negates what Fiske (1989) (employing Roland Barthes’ concepts) calls the producerly text. Instead, he reads alternative interpretations of his work as false understandings of his authorial intention. McDonald supports this view citing Peart’s stance within interviews which cast him as a lyrical auteur, whereby:

Discussions of his role as lyricist emphasize his literary influences, his inspirations for specific songs, and his attitudes toward his craft. When he addresses fan interpretation, it is often to discredit what he sees as excessive. Peart once quipped that Rush could start a 'flake‘ of the week club’ based on some of the lyric interpretations fans write down and mail to the group (2009: 178)

For this reason, Peart’s views tend towards seeing fandom as pathological behaviour which possesses stalking potential. In Rojek’s view, the celebrity stalker, is an individual who becomes overwhelmed by the ‘magnetism’ of the celebrity to the extent that they lose sight of the division between the public image of the celebrity and their veridical self, and, more fundamentally, they seek to transgress the conventional parasocial relationship that exists between fans and the objects of their fandom through ‘intrusive shadowing and/or harassment’ (2001: 66). Within *Roadshow*, Peart makes reference to stalkers who have threatened violence if they do not get an acknowledgement from him of the spiritual connection they are perceived to share (and he cites the examples of John Lennon and the former Pantera guitarist, ‘Dimebag’ Darrell Abbott, both of whom were shot dead by stalkers). However, the most extreme fan encounter he recalls comes directly after a concert in London, in which a fan manages to get through security and enter Peart’s personal tour bus - his ‘one-and-only-sanctuary’. The fan is instructed to leave, but refuses, instead proffering a selection of Rush vinyl records for signing, and Peart is forthright in his verbal and physical response to this spatial and personal ‘intrusion’:

He still wouldn’t budge, standing there holding his LPs out to me, determined to get what he came for. My temper was rising, and finally I yelled, “Get the fuck *out* of here! and pushed him away. Bolstered by a show’s worth of adrenaline, as well as my reaction to this nightmarish moment, I gave him a *mighty* shove, and he went over backwards, his LPs scattering across the floor. He lay there for a few seconds, complaining about his elbow, but I was furious now. “I don’t care, just get *out* of here! (2006: 316).

That this incident is described as ‘nightmarish’ underscores Peart’s tone of ‘otherness’ that Duffett argues is central to such celebrity perceptions of fans as the ‘embodiment of everything’ they are not (2013: 37). The issue of the blurring of the lines between the private and the public is a recurrent theme throughout his autobiographical memoirs, even those which are decidedly less dramatic than the tour bus ‘invasion’ incident. The majority of direct fan encounters recorded in his books result in feelings of discomfort and embarrassment, especially when one request for an autograph leads to increased visibility and producing instances of ‘mobbing’ (as occurs at a BMW dealership among the staff, when all Peart wants are parts for his bike to continue with his travels). The issue of the parasocial relation is a crucial one as Peart consistently strives to maintain the secondary relationship fans have with him, and limit his contact with fans to the professional context of his status as a recording and touring musician. The perception that emerges from his revelations is that the idea of establishing a divide between himself and his fans is a significant element, and one that accentuates his persistent reinforcement that his celebrity is purely a *job*, and that his contact with fans should go no further than recording music and playing on stage for them. In consequence, the audience is very much that, an *audience,* that only exists strictly beyond ‘the lighted stage’, and whose proximity should progress no further, and, crucially, retreat away from him when the performance is over. But, within such reflections, Peart seems to fail to recognise the ‘cult’ nature of his fame and his music.

Returning to the concept of Chin and Hills’ ‘subcultural celebrity’, a personality whose fame is predominantly restricted to a core audience, Peart himself acknowledges this in his writing, but as a means by which to downplay his fame and deny his accessibility to fans on the grounds that he is simply ‘a regular guy’ and not culturally significant enough to warrant such fervent personal contact. But to support this reading of his status, it is interesting to note McDonald’s reading of Rush, which he argues is a prime example of a ‘cult’ band (given their non-mainstream musical status). In McDonald’s view, Rush has attracted a distinctive form of fandom whose ‘ultra-loyalty’ singer-bassist Geddy Lee has praised as being a prime factor in the band’s remarkable longevity, to the point that he ‘has generally seemed at ease with, even approving of, Rush’s audience being characterized as a cult following’ (2009: 180). Peart, alternatively, expresses uncertainty and discomfort over such acceptance. However, as McDonald further argues, it is an ironic stance because it is Peart’s lyrics that have been a key factor in the creation of such a fan base, and one that potently encompasses Abercrombie and Longhurst’s ‘Fan-Cult-Enthusiast’ continuum (1998), because:

His vigorous cultivation of virtuosity-evidenced in his becoming a contender for the title of “best rock drummer” by the early 1980s-inevitably drew drummer-fans seeing him as a larger-than-life hero. His lyrics and song concepts-the grand ideological statements, the epic narratives, the metaphysical topics, uses of science fiction and fantasy-were perfect ingredients for the creation of “cult texts” (2009: 180).

However, Peart’s negative othering of fans *is* counterbalanced within his writing by his warm appreciation of *appropriate* fan behaviour at Rush concerts. As he states within *Far and Near* of the positive aspects of his live performances: ‘I really like to see people’s faces – to see them smiling, singing along, getting excited’ (2014: 254). From the performative perspective, Peart does display fan appreciation when it occurs within a *professional* environment – the arena of the rock concert. As such, Peart’s autobiographical writings contain numerous positive references to enthusiastic fans who visibly experience gratification from seeing Rush perform live (with Peart frequently ‘rewarding’ such individuals with drumsticks conveyed to them by his assistant, recognising (and recording in his journals) fans who regularly attend concerts, and enjoying seeing witty and amusing signs that fans have constructed to catch the band’s attention – although he quips that a fan banner which reads: “I Want to Meet Neil” is doomed to failure). Here, then, is an example within his writing of a positive reaction to fan presence, and one that arguably captures the essence of what Larsen and Zubernis refer to as the celebratory space of the fan convention, the space that brings ‘fans and creators together in a carnival atmosphere’ (2012: 21). While a rock concert rather than a convention, the issue of proximity is paramount (and as Larsen and Zubernis state, even the convention’s apparent intimacy is largely illusory due to the presence of mediators who manage fan/creator contact). Consequently, the tone of these Rush fan evaluations *are markedly* different from those which involve face-to-face confrontations, as this quote from *Near and Far* illustrates:

Even people who don’t like our band have to appreciate our *audiences*. They simply enjoy themselves so much it’s contagious. Some sing along with every word, some play air drums or guitar, most just smile and rock along with us. It’s a wonderful thing to witness, especially from my vantage point (2014: 72).

This sentiment of fan approval in their guise as a collective audience underscores the appropriate aspect of the parasocial relationship that Peart is concerned with maintaining, and which is legitimate within a professional context. In this regard, his celebrity is renegotiated as work, and fame is consciously re-evaluated as a vocation, the basis of which is not delivering fan gratification through personal connection, but through professional musical performance, the only arena of fan participation that he validates positively. This, ultimately, is Peart’s unwritten ‘contract’ with his fans, and it is how he perceives his own public status and the limits of his celebrity obligations, as he reflexively contemplates within his journal in *Roadshow* in relation to charges that he is ‘difficult’ and emotionally and physically remote from fans:

Thinking tonight how it bothers me that people should think ill of me. I give them *everything* onstage, every night, but some want-demand-more. Another unbridgeable divide. Humphrey Bogart quote: The only thing I owe the public is a good performance (2006: 215).

**Fame as Physical Work, Celebrity as a Job**

While arguably all celebrity activity can be ultimately classed as an economic practice, as it is labour that constitutes paid work in the form of- acting, modelling, singing, etc. (King, 2010), and also frequently involves the ‘contractually obliged work’ of publicising media products (Bonner, 2013: 176), a recurrent subject throughout Peart’s autobiographical writing is his emphasis that recording and touring effectively constitutes his ‘trade’. Whilst his writings convey the common pressures of touring (separation from family, the boredom of tour bus life, etc.), they also communicate his precise perception of his fame and how he appraises his celebrity status. As he reveals within *Roadshow*: ‘It’s probably safe to say that any job done professionally is never going to be fun, exactly – because it’s a job. Don’t get me wrong, I love my work as much as anyone ever could, but it is still *work*’ (2006: 88).

In assessing definitions of work from sociological perspectives, Friedson points to the relative and multifaceted nature of the concept, but states that ‘work as the expenditure of energy is about the only conventionally recognised definition we can use’ (1990: 152). The physical nature of playing drums for Rush is a perennial theme within Peart’s prose, and he frequently makes explicit reference to the gruelling ‘toil’ of playing for audiences on tour: ‘it was a nice feeling to look out and see people enjoying themselves like that – especially when I was sweating and straining so hard for them’ (2004: 158). This is particularly acute not only given the intensity of Rush’s drumming techniques (each performance contains an extended drum solo segment), but also in the context that Peart was in his 50s when he performed the *R30 tour*, and had turned 60 for the *Clockwork Angels* tours discussed in *Near and Far.* As Peart confirms within *Traveling Music*:

For me, after thirty years of touring, the constant upheaval and intrusion of that life, as well as the sheer difficulty of the job, had long ago stopped being glamorous and exciting. It still meant everything in the world for me to *play* well, and I would give everything I had to prepare for and deliver the best show I could – but it wasn’t exactly *fun*. Like Mark Twain’s definition of work, “anything you’d rather not do,” touring was work. But it was my job (2004: 376).

Peart’s fusing of both the gratification of live performance with an acknowledgement of the labour involved in playing echoes what Studs Terkel reported in his ethnographic interviews into a variety of working practices and professions, including jazz musicians. Of the latter, Terkel explored the relationship between the ‘magic’ of playing live for audiences and the physical labour demanded by performances, as one respondent illustrated: ‘Hundreds of times I’ve gone to work thinking, oh my God, I hate to think of playing tonight. It’s going to be awful. But something on a given night takes place and I’m excited before it’s over’ (1974: 459). Being in situations that have the same degree of expectation, Peart routinely reports a similar sensibility: the gratification that a good show provides him, but aligned with a confession of relief that a performance is over. This is partly from the physical toll that the repetition of playing multiple live performances takes, but also because of the high personal expectations that he places upon himself as part of his professional ethos. For instance, recalling a concert in Dallas, 1996, Peart recorded in his journal: ‘I could feel I was playing well that night, but it was never easy. I could never relax and take it for granted, or let down my professional *intensity.* And as always, I was aiming higher’ (2004: 158).Here, Peart’s self-perception accords with that of Geraghty’s analysis of the labour of celebrity in her assessment of the film star as not merely a fan-consumed image, but as a ‘star-as-professional’, in which the actor’s performance on screen, however glamourous, is the product of work, craft and talent, with the ‘body as a site of performance’ (2000: 193). Thus,Peart’s post-performance self-reviews frequently flag the negatives of touring but with some acknowledgement of the few ‘magic shows’ that are judged to hit the professional self-imposed standard that comes with the complexity and physically demanding nature of his drumming techniques, reinforcing his conviction that playing ‘a Rush concert was the hardest job I knew’ (2004: 259).

This self-reflective stance towards live performance as work, with the self-critical dissection of professional standards, serves to link Peart to Richard Sennett’s sociological conception of the craftsman: the artisan as a ‘maker’ who is driven by the desire to produce work at the highest level for its own sake as much as functional outcomes and who is ‘seldom satisfied by just getting by’ (2008: 45). Within his book, *Craftsmanship* Sennett examines craft skills across the productive spectrum, but gives a persistent focus to the craft of musicianship in relation to the skills and demands required to attain musical mastery: the countless hours of practice, the physical deftness of hand co-ordination, and the seamless ability during a live performance to recover from any errors and not to play on.

Craftsmanship, Sennett argues, is built upon the foundational principle of a productive skillset that is developed to the highest degree and which is rooted in an acute sense of pride in the products of work. As a result, the ‘craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence: the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressure, by frustration, or by obsession’ (2008: 9). The sense of frustration is frequently related to the primary personality trait of the craftsman: perfectionism, the sentiment that nothing that is produced ‘ever feels good enough to the person measuring who he or she is against who he or she should be’ (2008: 252). To illustrate the relevance of this aspect of craftsmanship to Peart, he recalls within a letter to his friend and travelling assistant, Brutus: ‘Reminds me of one night on the bus when I was giving my performance a critical review and you said, “You’re too hard on yourself,” and I said, “Hey man, it’s my *job*” (2004: 37). This attitude cogently reflects Sennett’s conception of the craftsman, but it also reinforces Peart’s introspective conceptions of his celebrity, that his public self is a *professional* role that is fundamentally founded upon his craft skills as a recording artist, an accomplished drummer, and a consummate live performer, one who is routinely revered as one of the most technically expert percussionists in contemporary rock music. As Peart recounts on overhearing a person describe Rush: ‘Aren’t they the old guys with the world’s greatest living drummer?’ (2006: 280). In terms of celebrity typology, such a description places Peart within the category of ‘fame’ which, as Barnes defines, traditionally been associated ‘with individual demonstrations of superior skill or striking deeds as displayed by a select few’, rather than celebrity, which tends to rely upon ‘marketing, timing, and instant appeal’ (2010: 19). This perception further deepens the craftsman component of Peart’s public self as a musician of high skill and critical repute, and underscores his own deconstruction of his celebrity which is predicated upon his affirmation that: ‘As a rule, I do my work with Rush, and hide behind a low profile otherwise’ (2004: 29). However, this particular ‘confession’ also encapsulates the major aspects of Peart’s subcultural celebrity that has been discussed within this article as it highlights the principle of *distinction* that underscores Peart’s writing and attitudes to his fame and fans and, as such, suggests the relevance of the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu to further elucidate Peart’s celebrity ‘capital’.

Bourdieu explores how individuals acquire ‘cultural capital’, such as cultural tastes, educational attainment levels, or knowledge of the arts and culture, a form of capital which distinguishes its possessors from other social groups. Thus, as Bourdieu states within *Distinction*, taste represents an indicator of class whereby the ‘manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it’ (1984: 2). In relation to Neil Peart, his public persona, as revealed within his autobiographical books, consistently conveys his accumulation of social capital, most commonly through his discussion of literature, but his emphasis upon his professional nature as a professional who is distanced from his audience is also captured within Bourdieu’s work. For instance, Bourdieu argues that social actors’ aesthetic choices ultimately constitute a lifestyle, a factor apposite to the professional, whose ‘accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability’ (1984: 291). This accords with the essence of Peart’s self-defined celebrity status, as McDonald’s analysis of Rush contends, the band has long communicated a precise middle class sensibility (defined in terms of bourgeois and professional values and specific relationships to standards of taste) due to its lyrical ‘dramatization of the individual-against-the-masses myth’ and ‘the central goal of middle-class identity: to stand out’ (2009: 81). To illustrate this point, whereas ‘Limelight’ is the song that conveys Peart’s othering of fans as ‘strangers’, ‘Subdivisions’ (from the 1982 album, *Signals*) concerns the middle class world of the suburbs, with their ethos of conformity of values and nine-to-five vocational respectability, or what Peart calls ‘the mass-production zones’. But in revealing the nature of this social world, the essence of ‘Subdivisions’ is fundamentally about escaping from it in order to attain a condition of ‘authentic selfhood’ (Selby Price and Price, 1999: 39), in essence, to achieve a status of individual distinction. This attitude is present within numerous Rush songs (‘Anthem’, ‘2112’, ‘Freewill’, ‘Grand Designs’ and the ‘Clockwork Angels’ suite), and it is a sentiment of distinction that has extended to Peart’s fans. As McDonald argues from his own experiences and through interviews with Rush fans, the ‘fact that my peer group included very few Rush fans did much to make Rush fandom feel like a mark of difference, and feelings of superiority were certainly not irrelevant’ (2009: 82).

**Othering Fandom or a Celebrity Swimming Against the Stream?**

Given Neil Peart’s desire to stay below the fan radar while not performing music, it appears somewhat paradoxical for him to produce a consist series of autobiographical discourses that explore multiple facets of his personal life to an often painfully emotional degree. And this contradiction is not lost on Peart, either. As he remarks within *Roadshow* on the sales of his books at concert merchandise stands:

It was nice to know all those people were buying my books, but in another way, it was strange to think of all those people *reading* them, knowing so much about me and my life. But I had obviously been willing to share it – on my terms, anyway (2006: 149).

However, the nature of Peart’s ‘confessions’ is not universally appreciated by sections of his readership who are motivated to consume his autobiographies from the perspective of their fandom of Rush and represent an example of Johnson’s concept of ‘fan-tagonism’, which describes the ‘competitive struggles between both internal and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests’ (2007: 287). Consequently, online sites such as Amazon enable fans to ‘answer back’ to Peart’s othering of fandom, and criticizes his stated discomfort with face-to-face fan meetings, his perception of live performances as mere ‘work’, and express grievances at his revelations of his material possessions and the freedom that his professional status grants him to travel while distancing himself from fans – the body which, through their consumption of Rush materials, finances his celebrity status. And yet, however fan-tagonistic Peart’s revelations are, they nevertheless, stress the nature of his public persona, that of a remote literary figure whose contact with fans is only expressed within his professional work and through his published autobiographical writing. Here, then, his aura of distance and distinction casts him in a distinctly ‘Modernist’ light. Certainly, his lyrics have long espoused modernist sentiments that ‘places a premium on individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress’ (Cahoone, 2003: 9), as evidenced from the now largely-eschewed Ayn Rand ultra-Libertarian sensibility that informed *2112* (Hiatt, 2015), through the songs critical of organised religion and religious extremism (‘The Way The Wind Blows’, ‘Armor and Sword’ or ’Faithless’), Furthermore, modernist writing is a crucial aspect of Peart’s lyrics from the 1980s, with many songs being directly and avowedly influenced by writers such as Theodore Dreiser, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and T.S. Eliot. As such, the literary nature of Peart’s public persona is one that is now seemingly at odds with a media and fan culture that has been transformed by the Internet (Duffett, 2015), and in which social media forums such as Twitter and Facebook has enriched and extended the parasocial relation, enabling fans to seemingly communicate directly with celebrities, or at least produce the potential for fan-celebrity discourse (Marwick and boyd, 2011). But, while musical celebrities such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, Taylor Swift and Josh Groban have fully exploited such forums to communicate collectively with their fan bases, Neil Peart and his fellow Rush bandmates have consciously avoided them (Greene, 2014). Instead, as a writer, Peart communicates only via traditional publishing as a literary figure, with no channels for fans to respond to his ‘confessions’ directly. Consequently, as a celebrity whose fame arose in the 1970s within a cult band that attracted a cult fandom, Peart’s frank attitude to his fans is one that is unlikely to be exhibited by contemporary musical figures, representing a somewhat unique example of the producer-fan matrix that could perhaps only be sustained by such a self-confessedly individualistic musical figure with a career spanning four decades, and an image principally built upon the foundation of a cult following.

Therefore, Peart communicates his views on fans within his own personal ‘revelatory communication’ medium, and are expressed, however ‘fan-tagonistic them may be, on ‘his terms.’ While the issue of celebrity privacy is an intrinsic feature of celebrity culture, with personal security and formal legal barriers in place to repel overly-intrusive fans and journalists (Marshall, 2005; Ferris and Harris, 2011), this ‘open’ stance runs counter to conventional celebrity public discourses in which the veridical self is typically obscured by a public self that is habitually positively constructed and represented, with news and information managed ‘through their personal or organizational promotions and publicity Machines’ (Turner, 2014a: 145). Yet, his writings, rooted within autobiographical forms, are often starkly personal and emotional, and constitute an unapologetically confessional self-acknowledged ‘subcultural’ celebrity’s view of fame lived on a day-today basis. Moreover, they actively strive to draw a clear sense of distinction between his veridical self and a professional performative self, whose prime debt to fans is repaid through the rigour of performance, with no incentive to offer anything further offstage. As he recalls within *Roadshow*: ‘One time, on a family outing...somebody asked me, “Are you the drummer from Rush?” and I smiled and said “Not today!”’ (2006: 246). The distinction between celebrity and the public is a fundamental aspect of celebrity culture. As Kirby states, celebrities are habitually separated from their audiences, and are generally unapproachable because ‘fans bore them, for the most part, and stalkers frighten them’ (2011: 22). However, few reveal this state-of-affairs as unambiguously as Neil Peart’s autobiographical books present readers/fans with a subjective ‘inside’ view of fame that is invariably frank and personal, and which plainly reveals that he still does not pretend that fans are ‘long-awaited friends.’ In 1980 these sentiments were expressed in a single song, but he has now produced some 2000 pages packed with ‘emotional interiority’ to *emphatically* reinforce this.

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