

Chris McManus

# Doubleplusgood prole-watching on Airstrip One

Geoffrey Beattie is a respected professor of psychology and also, as this book's cover repeatedly emphasises, "the official *Big Brother* psychologist" (or psychologist, as an apposite misprint has it). This duality runs the risk of not satisfying either of this book's potential audiences.

For those wanting an academic text on non-verbal communication this is a thoughtful, up-to-date book, masquerading as a spin-off from a tasteless piece of TV pop culture known mainly to academics from channel-surfing while waiting for *Newsnight*. The first two chapters are devoted to the contrived, tedious interactions of Kate, Spencer, Jonny, Adele,

## Visible Thought: The New Psychology of Body Language

FIRST EDITION

By Geoffrey Beattie

Routledge, 206pp, £29.95 and £9.95  
ISBN 0 415 30809 7 and 30810 0

PJ, Jade, Tim, Alex, Alison, Lee, Sophie, Lyn and Sandy — the narcissistic extroverts who accepted weeks of humiliation for C-list celebrity status.

Alternatively, for the 73 per cent of 20-year-olds who know the reality TV programme's contestants, this book might seem

different. While two chapters promise tantalising insight into such events as the night PJ and Jade had oral sex, seven chapters are devoted to the tedious thoughts of Cicero, Condillac, Quintillian, I. A. Richards, William James, Samuel Butler and David McNeill, who presumably were in an earlier series.

Chapter ten eventually delivers the goods on that "famous, or infamous, morning after the night before", when PJ's gestures provided a blow-by-blow account of his night with Jade, but then loses its way, albeit remaining fellatricious, discussing Bill Clinton and the southern proverb

that "eatin' ain't cheatin'". The plot is entirely lost in the last chapter, which contains graphs.

My suspicion is that *Visible Thought* began as a conventional textbook, but the publisher wanted the *Big Brother* material to boost sales. The problem for teachers is that the *Big Brother* references are nigh on uninterpretable, whereas for next year's students PJ and Jade will be "so, so yesterday".

Structurally, the book's problem hinges on using words to describe gestures. Wanting a DVD, we are instead given a film script in passages in which the dialogue and gestures of *Big Brother* contestants are minutely,

but opaquely, detailed. Moreover, Beattie emphasises *Big Brother's* "unique archive of material for psychologists to analyse". Maybe the recordings were too expensive for a mere textbook, but, if so, any serious psychology will be a long while a-coming, despite the grandiose aspirations.

A curious omission here is any reference to George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Newspeak could succinctly summarise this book: "Plusgood prolefeedful facecrime Ingsoc."

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