

The Beautiful and Damned: cultural theory, celebrity
and the invention of the Cote d'Azur

I

My preamble represents a brief work on contemporary theory-formation in the evaluation culture. I follow this with an exemplification of How To Do Better.

In 1954 Karl Mannheim asked exasperatedly of his fellow sociologists of politics and culture whether '[it must] be assumed that only that is politics which is preparation for an insurrection? Is not the continual transformation of conditions and men also action?' In much of its method, particularly as the always undefined, hardly bounded quagmire of an intellectual field that is Cultural Studies was dug over by the corvée of the Marxists, the answer given to Mannheim's question was yes. In Britain one could put it by saying that the later Raymond Williams replaced the earlier, that Stuart Hall supplanted Richard Hoggart.

The last 30-odd years have been, of course, the years of Theory, and in that time the predominant method in cultural studies worldwide has given itself a moral allegiance and marked out the ground of what Charles Taylor calls our "strong evaluations" inseparable from thought, along the bearings of Western Marxism. Such a Marxism disowns, naturally, all taint of Stalinism (though it cannot escape *some* brutal and bullying inflexions creeping into its tones) and is characterised by that best part of the tradition which declares solidarity with the wretched of the earth. This central strain in Marx's own thought derives, as Alisdair MacIntyre tells us, from the meta-historical framework of Christianity but it is none the worse for that. I take for granted that any intellectual discipline must, in order to command respect and allegiance, offer to its practitioners (in Collingwood's words) "ideals to live for and principles to live by". Indeed, it is not really possible to configure a human or a natural science devoid of the liaison between knowledge and interests, and therefore between a faithful picture of how the world is and an imaginary picture of how it ought to be.

Western Marxism provided so much, especially in its heyday after 1968. The rediscovery of the Frankfurters and of Gramsci provided students of culture with the alchemy for

transmitting their subject-matter into materiality. Culture turned solid; it moved from superstructure to base. At the same time, Adorno and Horkheimer were found to have identified the deadly mendacity of kitsch, the fatal allure that suborned the people, forever promising happiness, delivering disappointment, displacing both with envy. Alongside the classics of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Gramsci's voice was tuned into the music of the day, retrieved from the titanic battlefield of Communism with Fascism. He not only provided an account of the all-pervading quality with which hegemony is effected, but wrote up the heroic part of the organic intellectual with which to stiffen the spine of latter-day redeemers on the outskirts of non-elite institutes in Britain and North America. Althusser and Foucault were then joined in grim complacency to prove the omnipresence of ideology and discourse and, in discerning the lineaments of the will-to-power in every partisan claim to truth, permitted their admirers a delicious sanctimony with which to flavour political helplessness. Finally, when the feminists joined the struggle, they too beat these ploughshares into swords, and marched to their destiny by catchwords.

The deep difficulty with calling in aid from whatever form of neo-Marxism one contrives out of these holy alliances is that, in doing so, as Mannheim also points out, one is entering an always competitive struggle to be in the right, always, in his words, "to be attempting to demolish the basis [of one's] opponent's social and intellectual essence". After demolition, class victory. The trouble is that the class in question has seceded from the struggle, and the Party which formed itself in order to keep the huge and childlike monster of the proletariat up to the political mark has been abandoned by absolutely every one of its members apart from a few desperadoes trying to reposition *New Left Review* on the head of a pin.

So the admirable idealists of Cultural Studies turn out to be fighting less on behalf of the good society and more in the hope of tenure. They see, correctly enough, the monstrousness of the managerialist enemy, but can only oppose it with mud pies and stink bombs. After all, the adjective 'corporate' presumably must include George Soros and the millions he has spent not only on his university foundation in Prague but also on his electioneering against George Bush. Identifying, as a condition of intellectual inquiry, with the wretched of the earth must also, if one is to practise a human science scientifically, commit the cultural student to judgements as to the cruelty and brutality of ways of life amongst the underclass whose victimhood provides the cause.

The decent-spirited student is then at a loss. She sees that a Foucauldian insistence on the power quotient of academic discourse makes it impossible to tell the truth, and that to endorse identity politics as the seat of authenticity means it is just fine for Serbs to kill Bosnians, but her discovery can only throw her into a delirium.

Her predicament is acute although not impossible, as we shall see. It is caused by a certain blindness in her way of seeing her subject-matter. A cross and cross-eyed kind of narcissism is then enjoined by the emphasis in cultural studies on sincere personal feeling and a moral sympathy of a womanly kind for the put-upon, including oneself. Outraged self-importance, however, is an intellectual failure which it must be an attribute of any sufficiently human science to eradicate as a function of its method. It is much to be feared that Cultural Studies fails any such test.

It is not that its practitioners are mistaken that they need a theory of the sentiments – or of what Hume so finely called "the civil affections". It is that the sentiments endorsed by the subject as institutionalised compel upon its advocates the irresistible sweetness of sentimentality, self-righteousness, and of a high-toned assumption of protectiveness towards all *les misérables du monde* as well as of the role of injured party in any intellectual clash of wills, a certainty that a view is more credible for the fact that they hold it. We are enjoined to provide "the missing discourse of a feminist politics of emotion". In such a thing, we find not only the dire curlicues of Cultural Studies calligraphy – the forward slash and its multi-modality (culture / power / history), the phrasal fashion accessories (binary, resonate with, lability, critiquing, paradigm), the exaggerated use of inverted commas – and also the utter incapacity to say *anything* new. All the theorist can rehearse are deathly banalities about "the dominant ideology's appropriation of feminism" and "the gendered particularities of our subjective positioning", a diction with which it is impossible to think (or feel) accurately and with discrimination.

It is true and important that we need to realign passion and the mind in action, although some disciplines (maths, philosophy, anthropology, history) do so without a fuss. But the only passion really brought in hundreds of pages by contemporary culturalists is self-pity. An unbridged chasm has yawningly opened between past narratives, present irresolution and future invisibility, and all our scholars can do is lapse into moist pieties about 'the politics of

despair' among modern youth, its inhabiting "shifting cultural and social spheres marked by a plurality of languages and cultures".

Well, so did Chicago and London in the 1870s; so do Jakarta, Mexico City, Glasgow. Cultural theorists suffer from an over-excitability unrestrained by a mildly anchored habit of historical comparativism; they also lack an interpretive frame of feeling rather nearer to loving kindness than the high-pitched *outrance* which sounds so shrilly from their pages.

Intellectual life is hard; it corresponds to the facts, and the facts are moral. This being so, my comrades should take heart from such homely masters and mistresses as there are to hand. Any subject needs a few sacred texts; these people have largely chosen the wrong ones. Disciplinary round-ups like this might do better to stop lashing themselves into a fury with banners about globalisation and cybertexts, and turn instead to the plain, good-humoured and beautiful idiom in which, say, Richard Hoggart, Clifford Geertz, Stanley Cavell, Onora O'Neill and Seyla Benhabib report the world.

I hand over these hostages to pay for my strictures upon the awful prose, concrete slogans and ideological clichés in the condition of my own area of passionate human inquiry. Triteness, much inflated by both sanctimony and a hatefully pretentious vocabulary, has taught that power *is* rather than how rulers conduct themselves; that wretchedness is bad for people rather than inquiring how things might come out better; that even to essay understanding of the Others is to contribute to their oppression rather than to reject such moral hypochondria as compounding uselessness with self-righteousness. The attractions of victimhood have proved irresistible even to such distinguished, overpaid and conspicuously under-victimised doyens of our subject as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

The old obligations to keep up hope in the good society as well as to find such points of redemption as one can in the bad is surely the right balancing point for all or any of the human sciences. Interpretation rather than insurrection is the goal, and as it is my concern to show, the hermeneutic act is necessarily performed against a moral horizon. To find happiness in others' lives demands a moral sympathy coterminous with the imagination, such that an answer is found, temporarily and in time, to the question, how can such-and-such a life be lived well?

The pursuit of this inquiry, as Bourdieu contends, can only be effective, fulfilling and conducive to human emancipation if its practitioners "sacrifice once and for all the myths of the 'organic intellectual' and agree to work collectively for the defence of their own interests". The invasion and pervasion of sheer money values and the deadly electro-magnetism of their forcefield, 'celebrity', have done desperate damage to the condition of intellectual life. To defend our own interests is to oppose sheer money, never ore so than in chronicling simple lives, good deeds and the intrinsic comedy of things.

II

To take holidays as the focus for a short history of consumerism is to study, as I have suggested, the form of the correspondences the culture of capitalism has effected between the structure of our feelings, the definitions and orderings of our time, and the arrangements of our geography. The vacation predicates time and money to be spent finding the right place to have the best feelings. It is hardly a surprise that the place which best gave rise to the feelings in question was the Mediterranean littoral. Those seas, rocks, groves and sands gathered and intensified the images of leisure, luxury and freedom which started life, one could say, in the poems and architecture of the small city-states which, two and a half millennia ago, gave birth to some rough ideas of beauty, selfhood and human flourishing.

An affection for those origins lives on in the vacation carefully planned to take in sunshine, wine, cultivated idling, a little edification and a song in praise of that idleness. Without the Mediterranean origins, no way of conceiving the classical iconography of the grand hotel, let alone the seaside. Without Greek colonnades and porticos, no spas; without the Alhambra, no urban gardens; without Naples, no promenades; without the fountains of Rome, none of the pleasing municipal waterworks which, even on a squally day in north-western Europe, soothe and sparkle in the spirit of the harmless pedestrian on a constitutional.

The Mediterranean by way of Rhine and Rhone defined the actuality of the Grand Tour and, for the two centuries thereafter, filled to the brim the average vacationer's imagination. No wonder, therefore, that when mass leisure mobility burst open the doors of the air terminals, so many people were heading for the birthplace of their favourite pictures of paradise.

Vacations, holidays, tours are European inventions which spread, with Europeans, to North America. As that enormous half-continent came first to dominate and then to transform the nature of capitalism, then all that went under the name of vacationing was turned by capitalism's alchemy and its house magicians in the advertising agencies into an unprecedented world. It is a world in which fulfilment is always stretched a little too far, and aspiration tinged with disappointment; it is a world in which glamour, magnetic as it always is, attaches itself to those we can look at but cannot emulate, see but not be; it is a world of foreshortened experience, where pleasure is compressed into a workrate (one cathedral, one master fresco, one glass of Brunello is a good morning), and leisure required to pay a dividend (the hours spent lying in the sun pay for the shining golden tan).

It is the argument of this book that this complicated and hierarchical architecture of pleasure, with its many different rooms and contradictory principles of extension, was devised out of the history of the last two hundred and fifty years, in particular as that history so organised its production that the leisure and the increased longevity leisure brought with it provided fresh space and time for the exercise of undreamed-of freedoms formerly confined to the rich.

The rich we always have with us and the realm of their leisure expanded well ahead of everybody else's until they came up against the peculiar excesses of very late twentieth-century acquisitiveness, whereafter, for a time, power-hunger and stupefying wealth, taken together, will not let their owners rest. The strange new international elite who thus combine glamour and overwork, greed and asceticism, will figure as ominous omens of a post-millennial irresponsibility when, in Chapter 10, we come to the doors of the future. In the meantime, the creation of leisure and the competition to buy and sell it are best understood as a history of how to feel, how to imagine, how to yearn, and how to go places and do nothing.

As Braudel began by telling us, the people of northern Europe have a predilection to love the Mediterranean. It has always featured so very largely in the education contrived for European elites and then by extension for the less-than-elite children who have subsequently won an education for themselves. I have much insisted that present culture may be most easily grasped as an early nineteenth-century invention, and the history of our passions as starting out from the codes of feeling written down by the Romantics. Those codes, however, had to come from somewhere, and the whereabouts in question was the classical tradition.

In the 1760s Winckelmann reaffirmed antiquity as guide and tutor to the young blades and middle-aged scholar-sybarites of the Grand Tour, and taught them of the lavishness and grace of old Italy. Admiring the paintings of Claude and Poussin, they drank copiously from the Pierian springs. In visiting the excavations, at Pompeii and Herculaneum as well as in Rome, they rediscovered the power of the old poets whose lines they had learned by heart painfully to analyse and construe in the long drudgery of ruling class education in the eighteenth century. Behind them, in turn, stood the great fortresses of Renaissance learning built out of the materials of rediscovery, when the intellectual riches of Catholicism were first broken open by the Italians, the Germans and finally by the Dutch and English, and the new humanism was effected from the union of classicism and Christianity.

New culture grows out of old residues. Boswell and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu doubtless knew much of Virgil by heart, but plenty of those grandish tourists who solemnly visited Avernus just north of Naples, where Virgil was escorted by Aeneas down to the underworld in order to meet the shades, did not. Nonetheless, their little outing, presaging a large picnic, was tribute paid to those who *did* know the old poets by heart, and their brief moment of indifferent attention to the dark lake acknowledged the presence of the Mediterranean in their formation.

The Mediterranean meant, and means no doubt, much more than the imagery of the Latin authors. But the poets fixed up the first views of its geography. We owe to them, just as we do to Poussin, Claude and company, our familiarity with olive tree, cypress and vineyard, white marble and quiet water. We owe them the very idea of *belvedere*, of a view opening gradually beyond the slopes and coppices which frame it into the largeness of distance and the curves of the horizon. We even owe them the plans and poetics of the houses from which we shall see these views. It was the Augustan Romans who invented the country villa and its direct descendants, the holiday home, and the classier kind of seaside hotel with its courtyards, balconies and poolside greenery.

III

All history must have a prehistory, if one is not to be deceived into thinking that a short history of events is all that really happened. This making of the Mediterranean must serve, apart from being the preface to 'visible cities', as our prehistory. Certainly, the great

colonialists of Spain and Portugal sailed to Latin America and tried desperately hard to recreate the Mediterranean when they arrived. They couldn't grow grapes or olives or figs, not in the north at least, but they could make courtyards, squares and balconies. Wherever imperialists found the right climate and its accompanying geography – Argentina, Chile, California, the Cape, Victoria and New South Wales, they built a colony which reproduced the antique relation of stone and water they recollected, however vaguely, from the Mediterranean. The lighthouse replaced the temple on the promontory, but the moles, the quays, the fountains and the piazzas were much of a muchness.

Modernity, however, swept in through the Straits of Gibraltar and on its irresistible tide was also carried the flotsam of meanings which make for the other side of tourism. So far, I have spoken (from the bottom of my heart) for the noble settlement and sediment of Mediterranean life in our feelings and values. But here come the others, the boisterous, the gluttonous, the lecherous, the sociable, the reckless and the free, come, as the slightly priggish narrator in *The Great Gatsby* himself put it, "with a simplicity of heart which was its own ticket of admission" and "after that conducted themselves according to the rules of behaviour associated with an amusement park".

Until, let us say, the 1890s, the male halves of the *haute bourgeoisie* on tour had made no distinction between those places in which they would be assiduous in scholarship and culture, and those places where they would misbehave themselves with women, wine and a general class propensity to throw things about and break them. Tintoretto and Cicero, swimming or riding and falling in love with married women, went together just fine for Byron and Boswell.

That strain in the complex interminglings of the tourist's values which pulls our heroes towards tasty licentiousness began, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to find for itself a separate zone of practice. The undoubted attractions of fun and games had been happily indulged when the Grand Tourists arrived in Florence and Naples, for they hadn't looked around much on their condescending way through Provence. If they had, indeed, there was little enough for them to see; evil lodgings, wretched fishing villages, a mere glimpse of the Romans at Orange and St Remy, nothing of the magnificence with which they associated antiquity and its Renaissance restatement, and would find in the fountains of Rome. News got back home about their antics, of course, and angry fathers paid off betrayed

mistresses, met the cost of breaches of promise, and closed down allowances to their prodigal sons. But misdemeanours of this sort went, as they say, with the territory, and the territory in question was the big city on the tourist trail; Paris first no doubt, but above all, Italy.

Capitalism in general, and railways in particular brought a new moral tone to tourism. The respectable middle classes were on the move south, and while self-improvement by judicious contact with uplifting masterpieces was very much the point of the trip, drunkenness and fornication were not. Though there is no doubt from all they wrote that the young men and, beside them, the young women of the travelling *bourgeoisie* found the whole adventure to be, when the moment was right, exhilaratingly free and reckless, they were easily and, so far as one can tell, non-sensually satisfied. The tougher eggs among the women – someone like Mary Kingsley for instance – had stomped off into the wilderness to see (and understand) what the natives were up to. But for her sisters, to whom such travel was new, the excitements of art were quite thrilling enough. Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, in spite of her deep respectability and a temperament capable when things went wrong "of joining the vast army of the benighted, who march to their destiny by catchwords", is swept up by the appeal of young Mr Emerson to freedom, to spontaneity and the wise recklessness of the heart.

As this new middle class came into its mercantile inheritance, a new social group, born of revolutionary hopes and disappointments in France, began to define itself as being in all its actions and its semiotics only intelligible as *against* the bourgeoisie. Whatever would outrage them, pleased it. The new Bohemians, led by Baudelaire, the 'doomed poet' of the Parisian barricades, and his brother artist, the free, the dashing, the radical and utterly unrespectable Gustave Courbet, turned *outrance* into a way of life. *Epatant les bourgeois* was its own justification.

This class fraction led the way in restoring an agreeable licentiousness to being away from home, and sex being what it was for respectable Victorians, its members made much of breaking the sexual rules. Being an artist and sleeping with people to whom one was not married went happily together. The scenery of *La Bohème*, of not having any money and living in a top-floor attic studio comes from the same moment of *fin-de-siècle* as does Gilbert's and Sullivan's sardonically named *Patience*.

There are always plenty of people, however, eager to join in a little self-indulgence and flouting of convention quite without the prior qualification of artistic talent. The enthusiasm of the appropriate segments of the ruling class for a high old time was hardly diminished by the arrival of the censorious bourgeois, and indeed may have been confirmed by it. The rich were becoming, in this unprecedentedly money-making and mobile society, not only enviable but emulable. Plenty of novels and moralising anecdotes of the 1880s warned of the debauchery of younger sons wasting their fathers' new-made fortunes.

So there was a mutual pull towards one another of raffish aristocracy and artists. The division of labour being what it is, artists sought out other artists to talk to. Now that the art-patron had disappeared and stately old genre painting gone down before this new impressionist stuff, artists needed dealers, buyers and markets just as they urgently needed good light and cheap lodgings. Paris was expensive and rainy. The place to go for the light and the colours as well as much cheaper rooms to rent was the south. Van Gogh wrote on his arrival in Arles to his brother Theo:

One night I went for a walk by the sea along the empty shore. It was not gay, but neither was it sad – it was – beautiful. The deep blue sky was flecked with clouds of a blue deeper than the fundamental blue of intense cobalt, and others of a clearer blue, like the blue whiteness of the Milky Way.

He painted the bright yellow lights of the café, and the amazing blues, at midnight and midday, of the Provençal sky. And he painted the sun and its flowers.

This was a new kind of painting, familiar, domestic, cherishing the small details of sunlit life in the south. Cézanne had been down here for ever, doing the same thing of course, and together they established a local subject-matter – pine trees, fruit, chairs, unguarded, off-duty human bodies – which drew other painters, world-famous ones, after them, Bonnard, Matisse, Picasso. Quickly and involuntarily, the south of France became a place to play the quite new game of celebrity-spotting.

It wasn't the artists who invented the *Côte d'Azur*. (The phrase was coined by a guidebook in the literary manner published in 1887.) Money had to do it first. But as money did, it brought its different flush of colour to the Mediterranean passion.

Until the coming of the railroad, the coastlines of Var and Vaucluse provided only the hard and stony road to the Alpes-Maritimes and the crossing to Italy. Behind them reared mountain ranges, Maures, Luberon, Esterel, craggy enough to pass, less dramatic than the Alps. In front there was only Nice, where Smollett bathed in the sea in 1763, and the much smaller Cannes. Half a century after Smollett, a handful of wealthy English people became hibernators in the two towns, in the case of Lord Chancellor Brougham (he of the Brougham conveyance), building in 1834 a grand enough villa in Cannes, with the pillared marble portico and stone balustrades already fashionable north of Naples. He so launched the place into an orgy of hotel-building that by the time the town did him the honour of a centenary commemoration in 1879, there were fifty such hotels and grand villas along its seafront.

These were the years of the invention of the seaside. People with money and political power also took themselves away from the cold Parisian grey and, like Napoleon III's prime minister, Ollivier, built themselves Plinian villas in which to write and become leisured scholars and sages. For a long time Nice had been an anomaly, geographically in France but belonging to Italy (as not many people know, Garibaldi was born there). The chief ports of the coast had always been Genoa and Marseilles and it was not until 1860 that Cavour and Napoleon III struck a deal, the Niçois voted 'yes' in a referendum, and Nice, having always been either Provençal or Italian, became French.

More to our point, the railway arrived from Marseilles in Nice in 1864 and one François Blanc, a hugely successful casino-owner in the German spa of Bad Homburg, so oiled the wheels of railway development with cheap and enormous loans to the French exchequer that the trains from Nice began to arrive in Monte Carlo by 1868. Within two years, visitors to Monaco totalled 150,000 and in 1875 celebrity-spotters were gratified by the arrival of the then Prince of Wales, later and briefly Edward VII, a presence certain to encourage all big spenders, stout parties and genteel adulterers.

The colossal success of the Casino at Monte Carlo and its lesser imitator down the railroad at Nice, meant that the money pouring into the south of France had an agreeably risky, raffish, chancey savour to it. It lent the *Côte d'Azur* more of that daring perfume which separated it from the classical itinerary of the Tour and made this a place not only for *outrance* but also for gay abandon, kicking over the traces, sowing wild oats, all those touchingly dated phrases

to name the delightful risklessness of holiday impudences so easily deleted from one's experience when one gets back home to work.

The mixture is well brewed by 1880. Monte Carlo for the gambling and the celebrities, St Tropez and Cannes for the artists; Nice for the lavish hotels and the *promenade des Anglais* – the splendid palm-clad seafront, overlooked by all those priceless, bulbous, Palazzo-style hotels, dominated by the *Palais de la Méditerranée*; lastly, Menton for the hypochondriac, the convalescent and those dying of tuberculosis. All those hotels sprang into such solid and towering reality in the same two or three decades as everywhere else, but on the *Côte d'Azur*, of course, they were covered in dazzling, icing-sugar-white stucco, still the ultimate sign of Mediterranean and Victorian luxury. The *Promenade des Anglais* is one long line of opulent wedding cakes, this one with a timely touch of Moorishness, that one pure Victorian Gothic, here a little further east, the arcaded, pillared, stained-glass monster Casino, the Palais itself, completed in 1929 as it were from the picture-palace recipe books, Odeon, Regal, Granada, of the day. The casino at Monte Carlo, antedating it by half a century, is a different sort of monster, colonnaded, domed, crenellated, minaretted, every kind of sumptuous ornament in and out, and surrounded by elaborate tropical gardens, but still sedately of its day, the home of the *haut ton*, king, electors, princes, counts, taking the kind of time out they would have called 'naughty'.

The new class of high livers had a short enough day beside the sea, dressed in the new clothes of glamour. By the time the Second World War came and the Mediterranean closed for a season, glamour had become the key commodity of this weird new *Stand* (Max Weber's word) whose outline one can see in Nice, Monte Carlo, St Tropez and Bandol by the late 1930s, and which now occupies so much of our publicly imaginative life.

A *stand* is a sub-class and the members of this one were the smart set, the *demi-mondaines*, the Bright Young Things, the Idle Rich, the fashionable writers, artists, film-directors, aristocrats, quondam princelings, bankers, playboys, millionaire titans and their innumerable hangers-on and *vivandières* who flocked to the strip of beach, sea-front, main street and scrubby hillside which was the Riviera. Scott Fitzgerald apotheosised them in *Tender is the Night* and saw, with bitter regret, how the Beautiful People turned flabby and mad, the devastatingly good-looking *ingénue* boiled hard, and the brilliant pyrotechnics burned out. Maybe Fitzgerald himself was much too apt to flourish his own metaphors – ones like

fireworks cascading and fading into darkness. It is a tonic instead to hear Martha Gellhorn tell Mary Blume roundly that when she hitchhiked there to stay with a college friend in 1930:

I just knew it was no good – a bunch of crooks and loonies, low-class American expatriates and filmy people like the Dolly Sisters. We went one night to the casino and I saw those claws coming out covered with rings and I thought thank God, I'm young and poor.

Applause for that. When you look at the rich vacancy, the preposterous nothingness of the life led on the Riviera by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor in amongst all those other deposits of the belated end of absolutism and *anciens regimes*, then you think, serve them right.

Yet that pointless, self-celebrating way of life made something enduring – horrible, perhaps, but still with us. It assembled the culture of glamour, cut its uniform, wrote its schedules, planned its manufacturing procedures, weighed its profits. The *Côte d'Azur* was, with Hollywood, a showcase for advertising and what was soon well called show business. Indeed, Nice and Cannes and the rest, warm and splendid as their front-of-houses are, became the lens through which we could see really close up the stars who make fashion and turn the wheels of its industry. The celebrity mixture of the 1930s – out-of-work royalty, film directors, film stars, gamblers, artists and gangsters, the awful motley of the international rich – prepared the ground for the big shows of the postwar boom to be thoroughly institutionalised. The Venice Biennale for painters, the Cannes film festival, the countless minor self-displays of related industries fix the French Riviera in a crucial spot for the functioning of the cultural industries now, as everyone puts it, at the leading edge of capitalism.

The metaphors for such life lie ready to hand: 'frothy' maybe, 'scummy' even. One can only turn away in disgust at what all this parading and photographing and crowding-round-to-get-a-glimpse-of-the-star does to people on either end of the camera. When Roger Vadim made in 1957 his utterly harmless little movie about the prettiest girl he'd ever seen, *Et Dieu Créa la Femme*, Brigitte Bardot lost any chance of living a happy or even a sane life, and St Tropez finally lost any chance of remaining the neatest fishing village on the coast.

It won't do, however, just to wag one's elderly head over the deturpation of things. Movies are seriously judged at Cannes, paintings at Venice. Indeed, the Côte d'Azur is still a magnetic geography for painters joining the great, living tradition of impressionism and modernism. After all, Mont St Victoire stands exactly as Cézanne painted it so many times. Matisse settled down there for the second half of his life, paid little attention to the Germans, found his red room and his headland, painted the big pines overlooking the Cap d'Antibes and faded quietly away in the plain house with peeling shutters behind the closed iron gates. When Patrick Heron, fine English painter in his own right, came to pay homage in 1947 the old man was too infirm to see him, so Heron walked on down the road to the corner until he was suddenly certain he stood on exactly the spot from which Matisse had painted *Le Grand Pin*. Pressing up against the wall to fix the position for certain, his eye was caught by a smudge of colour on the dry stones. Scratching with his forefinger, Heron uncovered the oxidised smears of oilpaint left there by the artist as he wiped his palette knife during the composition of his masterpiece twenty years before.

And sure enough, there I found old palette scrapings of scarlet, ultramarine, violet, lemon and emerald, all oxidising deep in a small crevice. Thrilled, but not surprised, it was a discovery I still recall with intense emotion. To have the experience of standing precisely where the great painter once saw what I now also saw, but *through* his paint, *through* his brushstrokes, *through* his selected distortions of the visual data yielded at that exact point in the landscape ... this was an experience it was essential to have.

It's a marvellous tale, and it serves to remind us that great art retains its power, and so does a beautiful coastline, whatever the rich do to them. Moreover, people will always conceive new places for new self-conceptions. As vacations, holidays and tourism exploded into the vast new industry of the postwar Western world, the *Côte d'Azur* offered itself as the ideal spot to try out self-indulgence, excess, prohibitions, recklessness, all in the name of the hoped-for happiness and excitement this novel sort of excursion could bring.

IV

London, Paris, New York: the leisure timetable, window-shopping and *haute couture*, money and the gossip column – the mechanisms of celebrity take on their modern outline from these forces. They are then given mass and energy by two dramatic phenomena created by world war, its consequent technology and its fabulous reorganisation of society.

The first world war ended with governments confidently directing and unconsciously directed by their new instruments of propaganda; over the same years the momentous invention of Hollywood brought to birth the sacred infant of the century, the star. Celebrity, it is a commonplace to say, is the product of culture and technology. The new media of film and radio worked each in their different way to restore immediacy and intimacy to human narrative at just the moment when mass modernity made everything in city life seem so anonymous and fragmentary. In the cinema, for instance, the audience could see the stars in colossal close-up, could watch their gigantic lips meet and touch, but could only do so sitting in the dark, more or less solitary, and eerily without any physical propinquity to these intimacies. No wonder then that the stars became imbued with such magical emanations, especially at a time when people in their masses were struggling to find a politics and ethics capable of expressing this strange modern world. Cinema stars, like the political leaders who made themselves into similar stars, offered the reassurance of individual recognisability at a time when that was proving increasingly hard to find. Hence, whether you were a politician in 1919, or merely a millionaire investor in movies, you could have no doubt that these dazzling new media would do everything for your power or your pocket.

The tale of the twenties and thirties is first of all, therefore, a story of how the great dictators and indeed the everyday victors of electoral politics – Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin, along with Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George, made themselves into stars on the world stage of politics, and corralled the public spectacles of celebratory propaganda – the rally, the armaments parade, the Olympic Games, the Cup Final, the tickertape-drive through Manhattan, the state openings, the royal weddings, the Mayday march – which then became essential adjuncts of power. All such occasions lent themselves, with the help of newsreels and hugely amplified martial music and megaphone rhetoric, to the public dramatisation of power. The mass political spectacle, no less sumptuously orchestrated at the 1937 coronation of King George VI than at Nuremberg – marching men, drums, banners, horses and the mute power of the crowd – is *the* feature of political life between the wars. It affirms for each society some of the most important of the social values and traditions, and makes the small public figures at the centre of such vast attention uniquely recognisable and still sacredly remote.

This is the powerful contradiction at the heart of our phenomenon. It combines knowability with distance. Political leader or cinema star are intensely familiar (one of the family) by way of the cinema screen, and (at first) by way of their voices on the living room radio, but physically and in terms of how we all need to feel the directness of experience, they have the remoteness of the supernatural. This is the compound which makes for the sacredness of celebrity, and may suggest the reason why people both worship *and* vilify the famous. The invention of stardom and the instantaneous mass publicity it released by way of the new media from 1919 onwards twined together in a strong rope of meaning some of the strongest and strangest passions of modern society. The irresistible shine of money was added to the new emphasis given by the advertising industry to physical desirability and youthfulness. The industrialisation of leisure offered new locations in which to display its conspicuous consumption – holiday attire, seaside games, expansive freedom, informal intimacy all as watched by the envious and their hired eavesdroppers, the gossip columnists and photographers.

All these ingredients come together in the compulsion of the new value, *glamour*. Our 19th century history prepares the ground, and the twin forces of propaganda and stardom join in completing the manufacture of celebrity as it will be constituted from the 1920s to the present. The early forms of celebrity life were lived in the public gaze but in the pretence of privacy. Conspicuous leisure enjoyment became the public action of the damned and beautiful people. Mind you, the leisure of the very wealthy which boiled over onto the beaches of the Riviera at this date was staffed by a very mixed bag: the politically unemployed (the Windsors), the big names in literature and art (the Fitzgeralds, the Lawrences, the Hemingways, Picasso, Segovia), the international sporting set (the Murphys, the Donald Camerons, the Richlugins), the latest thing in *haute couture* (Coco Chanel) and of course the film stars (too many to choose from just now). So it is that a brief history of the *Cote d'Azur* in the 1930s discovers the shape and meaning of the weird new value it will find on the beaches, in the bedroom, at the baccarat tables, the logic of its composition and the way in which such an odd assortment of candidates concentrated the attention of the publicity industry and, in its turn, held such fascination for its vast audiences.

The grave, careful and reflective prose of the great novelists from about 1880 to 1920 bears witness to a reconceptualising of feeling and emotion over the period, a process, moreover, given a horrible jolt between 1914 and 1918 when it became so difficult to know what to feel at all apart from horror, and when most feeling was in any case so painful. This strange process, fundamental to our historical movement, relocated emotion in what MacIntyre, my guide in this elaboration of his suggestion, calls "a patterned regularity of dispositional and occurrent feeling, judgement and action". By this, I take it, he means that the careful processes of reflection upon and revision of feeling chronicled by Henry James and his fellow novelists broke off a direct line from passion to action, and replaced it with an intermingling and integration of feeling with judgement, of both with reflection and deliberation upon both, until action itself is dissolved into a studious uncertainty about the place of rationality in the understanding of feeling and the object of emotion becomes emotion itself, while action is infinitely postponed.

For an intelligent gentleman in 1900, Henry James shows us the diffidence as well as the tenacity with which his hero moves between an evaluation of his feelings, a correction of the evaluation, an aligning with these of his tentative judgement about each, and a pause while indistinct entities swirl together and commend to him a possible course of action, perhaps never to be taken. By the time we come to Scott Fitzgerald thirty-odd years later we find him giving life, in *Tender is the Night*, to people whose emotions have disintegrated into moments of pure consciousness, divorced from the productive world, unavailable as guides to what one should actually do, and not even considered for that purpose. The point of the novelist's reflection is to watch how feelings gleam and flash and dislimn into subsequent feelings. The only significant action is the love affair. Excitement replaces moral purpose; sexual attractiveness substitutes for character and presence.

In part, one supposes such a quandary besets us all, two generations later. It is very hard in the modern world to discover forms of rational and significant action. One reason for the popularity of ludicrous TV action games and the grotesque car crashes and high explosions of thriller movies is that thereby eager (male) spectators can briefly escape into a world in which physical strength and personal decisiveness about killing other people win the day. Back in 1920, as E M Forster remarked of T S Eliot's *The Love Song of J Alfred Pinfrock*, it was just a relief, the war just over, to find a poem concerning an ineffectual American intellectual worried about his bald spot.

Emotional rumination and staccato theories of action as commended by both the Bloomsbury group and Fitzgerald's very rich, international nomads of the 1930s have to be said for them. Anyway, one cannot doubt that they help us towards our contemporary stage of the history of feelings. What they did was to plot the manifold matrix of emotion, evaluation, reflection and (doubtful) intention which is the moral foundation of the present day. The world of personal therapy, of the admirably careful protection of small children, of domestic self-analysis and family democracy,¹ was founded then.

As far as the confection of celebrity was concerned, this radical tendency may be said to have done three things. It made the criterion of worthwhileness the private realm; intimacy became the space of judgement. Thus the private life of the film stars turned into the stuff of fame; their acting only signified as a point of access to the truth of their feelings. The abdication of Edward VIII in Britain was a testing ground of the process, and his intimate life failed the test, while that of his kindly, pallid and helplessly stammering brother and his wife came up to scratch.

The second thing the Bloomsbury settlement brought slowly about, at least across Europe and North America, was the entire rejection of the Great Dictator as a tolerable type of political leader. Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, celebrities like no other, had mean, vicious or paltry intimate lives, and in the end even the Russians came to welcome Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev.

The third contribution made by the delicate emotional reckonings of such as Fitzgerald, D H Lawrence, Michael Arlen, even Waugh, was to settle the idea of the *individual* at the centre of modern ethics, and that individual is defined as such in virtue of the self-possession of his or her feelings. These feelings express the moral preferences of the person,² and there is no arguing about how those preferences are arrived at. Each individual is defined as such by being in possession of preferences arising from his or her feelings and held as a matter of right as well as accorded the respect due to rights.

¹ A tale well told by Anthony Giddens in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

² The different designations are important as to whether one claims status as an 'individual', a 'character', a 'person' and so on. See the concluding essay by the editor in *Identities of Persons*, Amelie Rorty (ed), 1985, where she distinguishes between the different uses of person, character, individual, etc.

Long before the twentieth century turned, this version of a new character role, the individual, clarified and moved centre-stage. The colossal swirlings of what we now generalise as 'globalisation', the obvious delights brought to enough people by consumer capitalism for it to count as victorious over a longish season, softened social ties, eroded cultural identity for better and worse, obliterated neighbourhoods, and cancelled old tokens of social class.

We come therefore to a historical moment at which community and membership are constituted by individuals vigorously defending their individuality, largely in terms of their feelings. This has led to a political world of citizens each standing on individual dignity for recognition of the preferences and wants of each. Nor is there any agreed mode of argument for determining which wants, arising from which feelings, should take precedence over which others. The business of the democratic polity is to devise ways of ordering the wants so that the most popular may be satisfied. The common good is now separated utterly from its earlier meaning as just that, and becomes instead the good ranked first in the order of preferences by electorates, governments or committees. Politics can retain no vision of a polity in these conditions, but must confine itself to the dictum of utilitarianism, and discover agreement on the greatest good of the greatest number, as discoverable by way of elections, social survey, focus groups and national media.

The individual himself or herself is meanwhile increasingly in a hole. He or she scrutinises and revises the available states of feeling, and not infrequently is at a loss to know what to feel. This gives birth to a familiar figure in our time which is the educated, intelligent person withdrawn from all social contact and commitment, frozen in a fearful condition of non-feeling, locked into inaction. When the same condition repeats itself in a sensibility with fewer intellectual resources and in a person without even a job to provide a daily patterning of time, then the frozen sensibility may well break out into violent rages or uncontrolled hilarity precisely to force feeling of some kind into its veins.

Mostly, no doubt, the individual keeps up the defence of individuality by feeling something. But it is a feature of the modern sensibility and its regulated circulation of feeling, reflection, revision, evaluation, that this orderly sequence, while to itself seeming perfectly rational, need lead to no consequent action. Carefully considered, inaction is the daily condition of modernity, accompanied by those feelings we find appropriate to our dispositions, all this

largely confirmed by the sheer difficulty of discovering significant forms of action in the corporate and institutional routines of bureaucratized life.

In these particular times, celebrity serves as a kind of magnifying screen onto which these doubts, aspirations and predicaments are projected. The screen, of course, is television, and television is so magical a theatre that it sits intimately in the family's main room. Often it remains unswitched off, ignorable, omnipresent, repeated in several rooms of the house and then, when people are gathered round in attention to its garish fairground effects and costume, its revelation of intimacy, of the bodies and spirits of those it pictures, it serves to mimic significance and action merely by being there. The audience then comes to suppose that the dream of successful action is best, even only, realised on television. To be on TV is the pure form of the successful, fully realised individual.

Those who make it are enviable. It has been an imaginative as well as a revoltingly seedy development by programme planners to invent so-called reality TV. It is cheap – inexperienced newcomers get sudden money and then the sack. It is flagrant and intimate – its characters practise the analysis of their feelings, so familiar to the audience, not exactly in public but in colossally visible intimacy. Far from being feelingless, feelings are worked up to a high temperature by the hothouse lights and the millions of glass windows through which the victim victors are watched and derided. These petty quarrels and reconciliations are recognised and repeated in miniature by audiences not so much rapt as distracted.

To be on television is to be enviable. But envy is a tense, psychotic passion. It revolves through desire to fulfilment to disappointment to dislike. The great satisfaction is to see those who are enviable humiliated. This is a primary rhythm of celebrity, easy to see in the accelerated psychosis played out in *Big Brother* and suchlike.

In the further galaxies of stardom, the psychosis has its way, no doubt, as psychoses will. But the earlier frames of feeling are still embedded in the new ones, and the quadruple frames of feeling as enumerated here are still detectable in the manufacture of today's celebrities.

The British Royal Family, the American Presidents and their First Ladies, can still play the fraternising game of will and interests, of condescension met by deference. But they are also figures in the psychosis of envy and disappointment, playing it up or down as best they can.

The continuing power of the love story, "Still promising to solve and satisfy, / To set unchangeably in order", as Philip Larkin has it,³ is still in force, if shorter lived. The companion idea of art and nature as together a cathedral of true and good feeling thrives busily in opera houses, art galleries, literary prizes and for the thousands of people, ourselves among them, walking the hills of the Lake District and picnicking in the National Park beside the Pacific.

The celebrities who project these ideas and the feelings they express onto the screen of the national imagination, which is to say, artists, writers, actors and the mystery class of television's moral commentators ('the experts') enjoy a longer life in the public gaze than the wretches who take the cheque and the abuse of reality TV. The further from good art they are, the more liable to the destructive whirl of the psychosis, as expressed on behalf of the people by the unspeakable yellow press. Then gossip, scandal, mere mendacity and brutal, phoney condemnation fill the entrails of the audience with brief satisfaction.

These are the sewerish manifestations of celebrity; they were there in the 19th century, they are here now. But as the feeling-formation of history made its turn by way of the novelists towards our deliberative matrix of feeling, reflection, revision and judgement, then 'the talking cure' (as the Freudians came to call therapy) coloured the representation of celebrity and perhaps tempered for some the sheer inhumanity of political celebrity as circulated by despots.

However that may be, deliberative feeling gradually took priority over rational action, and the celebrity, offering to act as a magnified projection of ourselves and our dominant, most cherished meanings and feelings, is set, by film, television, press, the whole spectacle of modern life, to dramatise the best and worst of our passionate puzzlement. Insofar as we are at a loss without the help of traditional customs and culture, neighbourhood, local long-standing jobs – all that is gestured at by 'community', that wistful value – then the tale of our celebrities may be presented as the primary tale of our times, long prepared in the making of modernity, now come not to a conclusion but to our kind of apotheosis.

³ Philip Larkin, 'Love songs in age', *Collected Poems*, London: Faber, 1988, p113.

Addendum

Hidden in *Tender is the Night* is an unacknowledged theory of the emotions. Fitzgerald saw what was plain enough on the beaches of the *Baie des Anges*, the composition of a new international elite the point of whose leisure was to be beautifully visible and exclusive. They would be watched but not joined.

It is well-known that he found a curious magnetism in the very rich. Hemingway is always awarded the prize in their famous exchange: "The rich are different to us," "Yeah, they have more money", but Fitzgerald was intent on finding and rendering the thrilling alchemy which (he believed) courses along the veins of the stupefyingly wealthy, and glows with a radioactive flush in the heat of their harmlessly empty endeavours: shopping, dinner parties, cocktails, sex, sun, sand, sea, snow, all tinged with a little art. The Riviera in summer, Chamonix in winter, became the stages on which the rich made themselves watchable and sovereign over other people's desire and, as Fitzgerald's dramatised theory of the historical development of the emotions implies, the 1920s provided the moment at which old English formalities collided and gave way before new American excitement. The settled power of class and land and prose disintegrated under the detonations of liquidity, freedom from dreary old politics, the public enchantments of and with youth and sex and physical prowess.

No doubt Fitzgerald is complicit in this. His plangent prose bewitches the utter banality and pleonastic freshness of the film actress in his novel, Rosemary Hoyt. It lends the commonplace domesticity of sunbathing on what was then the empty beach along from the *Promenade des Anglais* and the ordinariness of lighted dinner tables *en plein air* on balconies above the Mediterranean a sorcerer's magic with which to conceal the coming disappointments and transfigure an enviable experience into a purchasable commodity.

This is the psychosis of advertising. Like all psychoses, it is circular and unstoppable. It moves through longing to envy, to acquisition to disappointment to rage or resignation, and back to longing. Fitzgerald recreates the power of the psychosis in his prose. He tries to break it by making his hero first a diagnostic psychiatrist and then, like himself, a drunk. But he is in thrall to it, and his vision of happiness and fulfilment belongs to the irresistible travel brochures of today.

He sees, nonetheless, how celebrity will constitute the elite. His motley assembly of artists, writers, rich Americans, film star, brutal mercenary, minor royalty and Italian princelings, money piling on money of itself rather than by way of work, career, production, completely presages the power elite of Wright Mills's day in 1956 and our own. Their pastimes were formed and dictated on the French coast between 1920 and 1939. If we add to the hard glamour of Fitzgerald's celebrities ⁴ the sheer hardheartedness and stupidity of Waugh's Bright Young Things in *Vile Bodies* we find art performing, as it should, its task to discern the future in the present.

⁴ Their historical chronicle is well told by Mary Blume in *Côte d'Azur: inventing the French Riviera*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992.