CHAPTER ONE

Celebrity and Celetoids

Although God-like qualities are often attributed to celebrities, the modern meaning of the term *celebrity* actually derives from the fall of the gods, and the rise of democratic governments and secular societies. This is no accident. The increasing importance of the public face in everyday life is a consequence of the rise of public society, a society that cultivates personal style as the antidote to formal democratic equality. The Latin root of the term is *celebrem*, which has connotations with both 'fame' and 'being thronged'. There is also a connection in Latin with the term *celere*, from which the English word *celerity* derives, meaning 'swift'. The Latin roots indicate a relationship in which a person is marked out as possessing singularity, and a social structure in which the character of fame is fleeting. The French word *célèbre*, meaning 'well known in public', carries similar connotations. In addition, it suggests representations of fame that flourish beyond the boundaries of religion and Court society. In a word, it ties celebrity to a *public*, and acknowledges the fickle, temporary nature of the market in human sentiments. These are prominent themes in contemporary social theory. Indeed, modernity is often understood as a condition defined by the spread of episodic, anonymous relations in culture, and the increasing speed of change in social and economic life.

In this book I treat celebrity as the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere. Several caveats must be added to this definition. First, glamour and notoriety are usually thought of in polarized terms. The Brazilian model Gisele Bundchen is glamorous; Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, is notorious. Glamour is associated with favourable public recognition. Notoriety is unfavourable public recognition. Notoriety is a sub-branch of celebrity culture, and, arguably, an increasingly important one. Leaving moral considerations aside, what connects Bundchen to McVeigh is cultural impact. We might reduce this to an admittedly rather crude equation: celebrity = impact on public consciousness. The equation will certainly have to be modified in what follows, but as a starting point it will help to focus the discussion on what, today, is justly described as the public addiction to celebrity. Why do so many of us measure our worth against figures we have never met? Why is the desire for fame so widespread among ordinary people? The answers have something to do with the way that public life is constructed. The media determine this idiom, although the content remains a matter of political and ideological exchange. The scheduling of emotions, presentation of self in interpersonal relations and techniques of public impression management, which employ media celebrities to humanize and dramatize them, permeate ordinary social relationships.

Second, the question of who is attributing celebrity status is moot. Celebrities are cultural fabrications. Their impact on the public may appear to be intimate and spontaneous. In fact, celebrities are carefully mediated through what might be termed chains of attraction. No celebrity now acquires public recognition without the assistance of cultural intermediaries who operate to stage-manage celebrity presence in the eyes of the public. 'Cultural intermediaries' is the collective term for agents, publicists, marketing personnel, promoters, photographers, fitness trainers, wardrobe staff, cosmetics experts and personal assistants. Their task is to concoct the public presentation of celebrity personalities that will result in an enduring appeal for the audience of fans. This holds good for the public presentation of notorious celebrities. The fiction of James Ellroy and Jake Arnott spins a mantle of glamour around notorious historical celebrity figures like Lee Harvey Oswald, Sam Giancano and Reggie and Ronnie Kray. In the 1990s, movie directors like Quentin Tarantino and Guy Ritchie, now Madonna'a husband, glamorized the Underworld in films like *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*.

Third, celebrity status always implies a split between a private self and a public self. The social psychologist George Herbert Mead argued that the split between the *I* (the 'veridical' self) and the *Me* (the self as seen by others) is the human condition, at least since ancient times, in Western society.[1] The public presentation of self is always a staged activity, in which the human actor presents a 'front' or '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. Cary Grant dealt with this ironically by remarking that he, like his audience, would love to be like Cary Grant, by which he meant that even he acknowledged the split between his public face and his veridical self. Other celebrities suffer a clinical or sub-clinical loss of identity. For example, Peter Sellers complained that he 'disappeared' once a film role ended. This suggests that his sense of veridical self was virtually extinguished. Contrarily, the veridical self may make increasingly desperate attempts to overcome the tyranny of the public face. This may result in a pathological slippage between the I and the Me, as the public face resorts to more dramatic attempts in order to alert the public to the horror, shame and encroaching helplessness of the veridical self. Keith Moon, The Who's former drummer, and the late film star Oliver Reed are examples of chronic identity slippage. This may be understood as a pathological condition, since the public face of both celebrities became increasingly dependent on alcohol and, in Moon's case, drugs too.

Of course, the desire to transcend the veridical self is often the chief motive behind the struggle to achieve celebrity status. Johnny Depp, during the filming of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), is reported to have attacked photographers at a London restaurant for their intrusion, complaining that 'I don't want to be what you want me to be tonight.' A notable paradox of fame is that this desire frequently culminates in either a sense of engulfment by a public face that is regarded as alien to the veridical self or, worse, a sense of personal extinction in the 'face' of others who treat the veridical self as 'inauthentic'.

Fourth, a distinction should be made between celebrity, notoriety and renown. *Renown*, in this book, refers to the informal attribution of distinction on an individual within a given social network. Thus, in every social group certain individuals stand out by virtue of their wit, beauty, courage, prowess, achievements or grace. Renown, you might say, depends on reciprocal personal or direct para-social contact. These individuals have a sort of localized fame within the particular social assemblage of which they are a part. In contrast, the fame of the celebrity is ubiquitous. One peculiar tension in celebrity culture is that the arousal of strong emotion is attained despite the absence of direct, personal reciprocity. Whereas renown follows from personal contact with the individual who is differentiated as unusual or unique, celebrity and notoriety assume a relationship in which the individual who is differentiated by honorific status is distanced from the spectator by stage, screen or some equivalent medium of communication. Social distance is the precondition of both celebrity and notoriety. This frequently leads to friction in the management of inter-personal relations between celebrities, spouses, children and kin. Those who command public acclaim and desire often suffer severe distress when approval is not demonstrated in private life. Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra, Jayne Mansfield, Ernest Hemingway, Richard Burton and Judy Garland all married and divorced several times, and appear to have experienced difficulties when seeking to establish a stable relationship.

Celebrity, the Media and Celebrification

I focus on attribution and distance rather than the innate qualities or characteristics of celebrity because I believe that mass-media representation is the key principle in the formation of celebrity culture. To us, celebrities often seem magical or superhuman. However, that is because their presence in the public eye is comprehensively staged. One of the best examples of this is also one of the first publicity stunts of the film age. In March 1910, the Biograph Film Company announced the tragic and untimely death of one of its brightest stars, Florence Lawrence. In fact, Lawrence was alive and well, and her subsequent appearance in St Louis won the film company unprecedented publicity.

The emergence of celebrity as a public preoccupation is the result of three major interrelated historical processes. First, the democratization of society; second, the decline in organized religion; third, the commodification of everyday life. Each of these three themes will be elaborated in what follows. It is sufficient to say at this point that the decline of Court society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved the transference of cultural capital to self-made men and women. As modern society developed, celebrities have filled the absence created by the decay in the popular belief in the divine right of kings, and the death of God. The American Revolution sought to overthrow not merely the institutions of colonialism but the ideology of monarchical power too. It replaced them with an alternative ideology, in some ways no less flawed and fantastic: the ideology of the common man. This ideology legitimated the political system and sustained business and industry, thus contributing immensely to the commodification of celebrity. Celebrities replaced the monarchy as the new symbols of recognition and belonging, and as the belief in God waned, celebrities became immortal. This is why, for example, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Gandhi and Winston Churchill retain an immense aura in contemporary culture. It is also why John Wayne, dead for over 20 years, is still regularly voted to be one of the most popular movie stars in America; and why Rudolph Valentino, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, John F. Kennedy, James Dean, John Lennon, Jim Morrison, Tupac Shakur and Kurt Cobain remain idols of cult worship. Politically and culturally, the ideology of the common man elevated the public sphere as the arena *par excellence*, in which the dramatic personality and achieved style inscribed distinction and grabbed popular attention. To this extent, celebrity culture provides an important integrating function in secular society.

At the same time, the desire mobilized by celebrity culture is abstract. The logic of capitalist accumulation requires consumers to constantly exchange their wants. The restlessness and friction in industrial culture partly derives from the capitalist requirement to initiate perpetual commodity and brand innovation. In such circumstances desire is *alienable*, transferable, since wants must be perpetually switched in response to market developments. The market inevitably turned the public face of the celebrity into a commodity. We will not understand the peculiar hold that celebrities exert over us today unless we recognize that celebrity culture is irrevocably bound up with commodity culture. In chapter Five I will take up the implications of this.

But consumers are not merely part of a market of commodities, they are also part of a market of sentiments. Capitalist organization requires individuals to be both desiring objects and objects of desire. For economic growth depends on the consumption of commodities, and cultural integration depends on the renewal of the bonds of social attraction. Celebrities humanize the process of commodity consumption. Celebrity culture has emerged as a central mechanism in structuring the market of human sentiments. Celebrities are commodities in the sense that consumers desire to possess them. Interestingly, this point extends to notorious celebrity figures. The serial killers Ian Brady, Myra Hindley, Rosemary West, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, Harold Shipman and Timothy McVeigh were all deluged with fan mail while in prison. McVeigh, who was executed on 11 June 2001, had received four proposals of marriage. Far from being reviled and outcast, notorious celebrities are cherished as necessary folk devils by significant layers of the public.

It is easy to see why mainstream celebrities feed the everyday world with honorific standards of attraction that encourage people to emulate them, which helps to cement and unify society. *Prima facie*, it is less easy to understand the fan base for notorious celebrities. Except, perhaps, when one places the notorious celebrity in the context of democracy, with its equalizing functions, its timorous disdain for extremity and its grey affirmation of equal rights and responsibilities. In such a context, the figure of notoriety possesses colour, instant cachet, and may even, in some circles, be invested with heroism for daring to release the emotions of blocked aggression and sexuality that civilized society seeks to repress.

If celebrity society possesses strong tendencies to make us covet celebrities, and to construct ourselves into objects that immediately arouse sentiments of desire and approval in others, it also creates many more losers than winners. The celebrity race is now so ubiquitous in all walks of life that living with failure is oppressive for those of us who do not become achieved celebrities. In extreme cases, people who do not attain achieved celebrity resort to violent behaviour in order to acquire acclaim. Chapter Four examines the relationship between notoriety and celebrity. It examines the role of the celebrity race in the growth of stalkers and makes connections between the search for celebrity and some forms of murder and serial killing.

In the final chapter I introduce the concept of the 'celebrification process' to encapsulate the ubiquitous character of celebrity in everyday life. I argue that, with the growth of unified markets and a pervasive system of mass communication, culture has gradually become mediagenic. The evening news on TV brings together more people than all editions of the national newspapers combined. Everyday social and cultural exchange utilizes the styles, points of view, conversational prompts and steering agendas supplied by the media. Of course, these are inflected, revised and recast by the direct circumstances and relations of life in which we are located. None the less, it is reasonable to propose that media influence is a major factor in everyday inter-personal exchange; further, that celebrities are significant nodal points of articulation between the social and the personal. Hence, celebrity must be understood as a *modern* phenomenon, a phenomenon of mass-circulation newspapers, TV, radio and film.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is caustic about the power of media celebrities. 'Our news anchors', he complains, 'our talk show hosts, and our sports announcers ... are always telling us what we "should think" about what they call "social problems", such as violence in the inner city or in the schools.'[2] One might object that this view is too one-dimensional. The influence of media celebrities is more nuanced, notably in respect of replenishing democracy through informing the public and renewing public accountability, than Bourdieu allows. Even so, his point – which is that popular and, to a large degree, personal culture is now mediagenic, both in respect of the presentation of personality in everyday exchange and the setting of life goals – is valid. Celebrification proposes that ordinary identity formation and general forms of social interaction are patterned and inflected by the styles, embodied attitudes and conversational flow developed through celebrity culture. Celebrities simultaneously embody social types and provide role models.

The fact that media representation is the basis of celebrity is at the heart of both the question of the mysterious tenacity of celebrity power and the peculiar fragility of celebrity presence. From the perspective of the audience, it makes celebrities seem, simultaneously, both larger than life and intimate confrères. Staging presence through the media inevitably raises the question of authenticity. This is a perpetual dilemma for both the celebrity and the audience. Out-of-face encounters between celebrities and fans tend to produce three results. (By the term *out of face* I mean interaction between a celebrity and an audience in which the veridical self of the celebrity, or its lack, becomes ascendant, thus contradicting or disconfirming the pattern of expectations and reactions constructed around the public face.) The three results produced by this state of affairs are, first, *confirmation*, in which the public face of the celebrity is eventually regained and verified through direct interaction with fans. Second, *normalization*, in which celebrity status is rendered transparent through the articulation and recognition of common traits between the psychology and culture of celebrities and fans. By exposing the out-of-face side to personality, the celebrity momentarily becomes more like us. Recognition that celebrities are human after all often enhances public esteem. Elton John, Robert Downey Jnr, Boy George and Judy Garland each seem to have developed closer relations with the public after confessing to their battles with addiction. The third result is termed *cognitive dissonance*, wherein encounters radically conflict with mass-media images of celebrity, exposing the public face to critical condemnation as a calculated facade or prop.

Ascribed, Achieved and Attributed Celebrity

Celebrity status comes in three forms: *ascribed*, *achieved* and *attributed*. Ascribed celebrity concerns lineage: status typically follows from bloodline. The celebrity of Caroline Kennedy or Prince William stems from their line of biological descent. It is why kings and queens in earlier social formations commanded automatic respect and veneration. Individuals may add to or subtract from their ascribed status by virtue of their voluntary actions, but the foundation of their ascribed celebrity is predetermined.

In contrast, *achieved* celebrity derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual in open competition. For example, Brad Pitt, Damien Hirst, Michael Jordan, Darcy Bussell, David Beckham, Lennox Lewis, Pete Sampras, Venus and Serena Williams and Monica Seles are celebrities by reason of their artistic or sporting achievements. In the public realm they are recognized as individuals who possess rare talents or skills.

However, achieved celebrity is not exclusively a matter of special talent or skill. In some cases it is largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries. When this is so, it is *attributed* celebrity.

Why does celebrity follow from mere attribution? The main reason is the expansion of the mass-media. Sensationalism is the mass-media's response to the routines and predictabilities of everyday life. Daniel Boorstin coined the term 'pseudo-event' to refer to the arrangement of newsworthy events and personalities by publicists and newspaper editors.[3] Sensationalism aims to generate public interest with the object of galvanizing public attention. Thus, 'ordinary' people, like the British TV gardener Charlie Dimmock, Luciana Morad, the mother of one of Mick Jagger's illegitimate children, and Mandy Allwood, the British mother who was pregnant with octuplets, are vaulted into public consciousness as noteworthy figures, primarily at the behest of mass-media executives pursuing circulation or ratings wars. Later I shall introduce the term *celetoid* to refer to a media-generated, compressed, concentrated form of attributed celebrity.

It is frequently argued that media saturation means we now live in the age of the pseudo-event, with the result that the line between fact and fiction, reality and illusion has been erased. Perhaps this argument is hyperbolic, since its credibility rests ultimately on the exposure of many media topics as nothing more than orchestrated pseudo-events and the celetoid as an effect of media strategy. Once we recognize attributed celebrity as a category, we disarm the argument that the line between reality and illusion has been erased. Even so, the omnipresence of the mass-media require us to take the celetoid as an important category in contemporary culture.

One should add a caveat here. Of course, achieved celebrity pre-dated the rise of the mass-media. Bigots, forgers, criminals, whores, balladeers and thinkers have been objects of public attention since Greek and Roman times. They possessed what one might call *pre-figurative* celebrity status. That is, they were items of public discourse, and honorific or notorious status was certainly attributed to them. But they did not carry the illusion of intimacy, the sense of being an exalted confrère, that is part of celebrity status in the age of mass-media.

When strangers met John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647–80), for the first time, they were generally unaware that they were in the company of a rake, a compulsive womanizer and the author of obscene satires against Charles II and his courtiers. These elements of the veridical self were secreted from the public view. As with nearly every pre-figurative celebrity, the fame of Rochester, who died young at 33 from syphilis, was posthumous. Arguably, historical figures like Rochester, Pocahontas, Titus Oates, Guy Fawkes, John Dee, Nell Gwyn and Gerard Winstanley enjoyed a measure of metropolitan celebrity in their lifetimes. But it was unevenly distributed. Its indispensable conduits were kinship and friendship circles and the possession of literacy. In contrast, the celebrity of the present age is ubiquitous, and possesses *élan vital* for a ravenous public audience. Unlike pre-figurative celebrity, the celebrity in contemporary society is accessible through internet sites, biographies, newspaper interviews, TV profiles, radio documentaries and film biographies. The veridical self is a site of perpetual public excavation.

Of course, celebrities often find this intrusive and, occasionally, insufferable. The desire that they mobilize in others is alienable. Strictly speaking, the public faces that celebrities construct do not belong to them, since they only possess validity if the public confirms them. The relationship of esteem is also one of dependency. Perhaps this accounts for the higher than average levels of neurosis and mental illness found among the celebritariat. Celebrities are literally elevated in public esteem, which frequently contributes to personal problems as they struggle to be 'themselves' with their families. A celebrity whose public face is rejected may fall prey to feelings of anxiety and mortification.

The fact that celebrity status depends on public recognition is ironic. A regular complaint made by celebrities is that the public has no respect for privacy. At the height of her fame, Greta Garbo retired from film and justified her decision by repeating for decades the mantra 'I want to be alone.' John Lennon explained Beatlemania in Britain as a reason for moving to Manhattan in 1970. In New York he felt he could walk the streets without being mobbed, although not, as it happened, without being shot dead. The deaths of Garbo and Lennon licensed deeper excavations of the veridical self by the media, much of it questionable, and some of it unsavoury. However, like every celebrity in contemporary society, their private lives were already part of the public domain, part of the insistent cultural data that we use to comprehend ourselves and to navigate through the crashing waves of the cultural sphere. Those who are successful in following the path of achieved or attributed celebrity surrender a portion of the veridical self, and leave the world of anonymity and privacy behind.

Celetoids and Celeactors

I propose *celetoid* as the term for any form of compressed, concentrated, attributed celebrity. I distinguish celetoids from celebrities because, generally, the latter enjoy a more durable career with the public. However, I take it for granted that many of the representational techniques that present celetoids and celebrities for public consumption are identical. Celetoids are the accessories of cultures organized around mass communications and staged authenticity. Examples include lottery winners, one-hit wonders, stalkers, whistle-blowers, sports' arena streakers, have-a-go-heroes, mistresses of public figures and the various other social types who command media attention one day, and are forgotten the next.

Consider James Bradley, Rene Gagnon and Ira Hayes. Who remembers them today? They were the three survivors of the team of six who raised the American flag in 1945 at Iwo Jima, during the 36-day battle in which 22,000 Japanese and 7,000 American soldiers perished. Joe Rosenthal's famous photograph seduced the imagination of the nation. When Bradley, Gagnon and Hayes returned home they were treated like royalty. The photograph was the inspiration for the famous patriotic bronze statue commemorating the war that was afterwards erected in Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, just across the Potomac river from Washington, DC. Bradley, who died in 1994, never discussed Iwo Jima. When Gagnon died at 54 he was working as a janitor, and bitter that his former celebrity had not translated into wealth. Perhaps most tragically of all, Hayes, who lived on an Indian reservation in Arizona, died from alcohol-related disease ten years after the famous photograph was taken.

It is in the nature of celetoids to receive their moment of fame and then to disappear from public consciousness quite rapidly. British readers may recall Ruth Lawrence, the adolescent prodigy who was a permanent fixture of the UK mass-media in the mid-1980s. In 1980 Ruth, at the age of 8, was the youngest person to have passed an O level. Aged 10, she was the youngest person to pass Oxford University's entrance exam. At 11 she began her degree, graduating at 13 with first-class honours. At 17 she gained her PhD. Ruth then emigrated to the USA, and the British press lost interest in her. For much of the 1990s she was at the University of Michigan, where she has gradually faded from celebrity status, opting instead for a low-profile role as mother and teacher.

The public elevation of, and concentration on, celetoids often follows public scandal. For example, Jessica Hahn became a celetoid after her affair with the televangelist Jim Bakker was exposed in 1987. She went on to pose twice for *Playboy* and launched her own 900 (sex) phone line. Gillian Flowers and Paula Jones became briefly famous after they alleged sexual relations with Bill Clinton. Monica Lewinsky became a global celetoid even before Clinton actually confessed his sexual relationship with her. Lewinsky received lucrative high-profile interviews on American TV and went on a world tour to promote her book. Darva Conger, a former emergency room nurse and Gulf War veteran, shot to fame in 2000 when she married a millionaire on the TV game-show *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* The marriage soon ended in separation and Conger went on to pose for *Playboy*.

Celetoids are often constructed around sexual scandal, where they symbolize the hypocrisy or corruption of public figures. For example, the Profumo affair in Britain in the early 1960s, which twinned sexual intrigue involving a Cabinet minister with allegations of espionage, elevated the callgirls Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice Davies as fleeting celetoids, signalling the double standards of both prominent politicians and swinging London. More recently, the *doyen* of British publicists, Max Clifford, represented Antonia de Sancha, who claimed that the married Tory Cabinet Minister David Mellor made love to her wearing his beloved Chelsea FC strip. Clifford also represented the escort girl Pamela Bordes, who was alleged to have had affairs with Tory ministers as well as the newspaper editor Andrew Neil. In addition, Clifford organized luxury accommodation and the attentions of the *News of the World* for Mandy Allwood during her pregnancy with octuplets.

Evanescence is the irrevocable condition of celetoid status, though in exceptional cases a celetoid may acquire a degree of longevity. For example, Californians are used to the phenomenon of Angelyne, a pneumatic blonde, usually dressed in plunging leopard-skin, high heels and dark glasses, whose image was reproduced in gigantic billboards throughout Los Angeles in the 1980s and '90s. At first sight, Angelyne's image blatantly

panders to sexist stereotypes. On the other hand, her poses are also ironical and reflexive. She resists monolithic readings based on sexual inequality. She is not famous for being a sex goddess, rather she is, as the cliché has it, famous for being famous. Her publicity stunts have led to TV interviews, a fan club numbering thousands and a walk-on appearance in the movie *Earth Girls Are Easy*. Her fame might best be comprehended as an artefact of kitsch culture.

By kitsch culture I mean a culture in which the conventions of normative order are established by the operations of manufactured novelties and planned sensations orchestrated by the mass-media. In setting the constructed nature of cultural identity and interaction as an *a priori* of normative public encounters, kitsch culture tacitly denies reality. Thus, Angelyne presents herself as arbitrarily famous, and therefore parodies the general constructed character of all forms of public celebrity.

An important sub-category of the celetoid is what I will call the *celeactor*. The celeactor is a fictional character who is either momentarily ubiquitous or becomes an institutionalized feature of popular culture. Like celetoids, celeactors are adjuncts of the mass-media. They cater to the public appetite for a character type that sums up the times.

In Britain, during the 1980s, Harry Enfield's celeactor, 'Loadsamoney', was the gross embodiment of Essex Man, the vulgar, *nouveau riche* materialist from cockney Essex whose values were popularized by Margaret Thatcher's government. At the start of 2000, the celeactor 'Ali G' began to occupy a similar place in the mass-media. Outwardly, Ali G (created and played by the Anglo-Jewish comic Sacha Baron Cohen) is a black British 'yoof' from Staines near London, who has declarative, but equivocal, connections with 'gangsta' culture. Part of the joke is that Ali G presents himself as a hip black Briton, although, in reality, Cohen obviously is not black, and Ali G has a questionable familiarity with black British–Jamaican values and *patois*. The name 'Ali' suggests that the character may in fact be of Asian descent, thus embedding another layer within the comedy of role and status confusion. Cohen plays Ali G cleverly, sometimes dangerously, pricking at both racial stereotyping and the sanctimony of political correctness. The comedy lies not only in Ali G's strident sincerity but also in the jaw-dropping credulity of the powerful, often rich, people he interviews, who take the Ali G character at face value. Thus, a prominent, and notably right-wing, former Conservative minister and headmaster is quizzed on the virtue of the metric system in the school curriculum, apparently without realizing that Ali G's enthusiasm for metric measurement is driven entirely by his interest in recreational drug use. Similarly, a feminist academic is presented with outrageous, misogynist values, but cannot dismiss them as peremptorily as she might in a staffroom meeting because the personality uttering them is apparently only semi-educated, and is a representative of an ethnic minority to boot. Some sections of the media have criticized Cohen for perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes. Yet a careful reading of Ali G reveals that the comedy operates to deflate cant and humbug, whether articulated by racists and sexists or by those elected to serve as our moral guardians.

Celeactors are invariably satirical creations. Their purpose is to deflate the sanctimony of public figures or to highlight allegations of moral bankruptcy in public life. As such, they are the direct descendants of the figures depicted in the sketches, prints and paintings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century caricaturists such as William Hogarth, Thomas Rowlandson and Honoré Daumier, all of whom spiked the pomposities of their day.

The cartoon form is an extremely effective medium for the presentation of satires of contemporary life. For example, the *Blondie* cartoon comic strip is published in 55 countries and 35 languages. It was introduced in 1930 by the cartoonist Chic Young at the outset of the Great Depression. It deals with the travails of the Bumstead family – Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead and their children, Baby Dumpling (Alexander) and Cookie. The success of this strip is usually attributed to its focus on universal themes: love, marriage, parenthood, work, relaxation, eating and sleeping.

Similarly, the successful British cartoon *Andy Capp*, which portrays working-class life in North-East England, is also widely syndicated throughout the world, and deals with similar themes, albeit from a working-class perspective. These characters certainly achieved cultural impact, and to this extent they can be considered as variants of the celeactor category.

Walt Disney's animated cartoon creations are also widely credited with achieving considerable cultural impact. Mickey Mouse exemplifies generosity of spirit and acceptable wholesome subversiveness. Donald Duck embodies the determination to do good, and his temper-tantrums reveal the enormity of this ambition. Pluto encapsulates stoicism and guilelessness. *Superman* and *Batman* also present idealized representations of American heroism and the defence of justice. In the 1980s and '90s, animated cartoons like *Beavis and Butthead*, *The Simpsons* and *South Park* satirized the orthodox values and institutions of the moral majority in America and utilized new stereotypes of disaffected youth, the strains of multi-culturalism and the casualties of the American Dream.

The development of cyber-culture has demonstrated the versatility of the cartoon form and extended the range of celeactor figures in popular culture. Lara Croft, the all-action cyber-heroine created by the British computer company Eidos, has achieved global popularity. Lara is perhaps the first clearly distinguished cyber-icon of the computer games world. The inspiration for the '90s game icon was drawn in important ways from Stephen Spielberg's 1980s *Indiana Jones* movie series starring Harrison Ford. Lara Croft is therefore a case of a cyber-icon born from the success of a celeactor, which appears to confirm Baudrillard's well known and influential argument that simulation has replaced reality.[4] By way of giving a twist to this story, the film star Angelina Jolie plays the part of Lara in a film version of *Tomb Raider*.

Celebrity construction and presentation involve an imaginary public face. In the case of celeactors, there is no veridical self, and the public face is entirely a fictional creation. The audience's connection with celebrities, celetoids and celeactors is dominated by imaginary relationships. The physical and cultural remoteness of the object from the spectator means that audience relationships carry a high propensity of fantasy and desire. The construction of celeactors is often designed to embody stereotypes and prejudices in popular culture. Alf Garnett, Archie Bunker, James Bond, Doug Ross (*ER*), J. R. Ewing, Frasier, Harold and Albert Steptoe, Harry Callahan (*Dirty Harry*), the Fonz, Carrie Bradshaw (*Sex and the City*), Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, to name but a few random celeactors from popular culture over the last 40 years, are imaginary constructions. Nevertheless, although they are imaginary figures involved in fictionalized narratives, they exert tangible and, in some cases, long-term influences over real social relationships and cultural formations. *Inter alia*, they operate as models for emulation, embody desire and galvanize issues in popular culture, dramatize prejudice, affect public opinion and contribute to identity formation. The deaths of the celeactors Inspector Morse and Victor Meldrew, who starred in the popular crime show *Inspector Morse* and the cult BBC TV sit-com *One Foot in the Grave* respectively, occurred within a week of each other. Both deaths were national events, trailed on TV and in the press. The broadcast showing the end of Victor Meldrew was preceded by a 45-minute obituary, an honour usually awarded only to members of the Royal Family.

Of course, the nature of celeactor influence is much debated. Celeactor types have been a major influence in representing 'cool' in post-war culture. In their recent book *Cool Rules*, Dick Pountain and David Robins define 'cool' as 'a *permanent* state of *private* rebellion' that 'conceals its rebellion behind a mask of ironic impassivity'.[5] They maintain that modern cool identity types influence all age groups, and have been a significant influence in post-war culture. The Fonz, Harry Callahan, Doug Ross and Mulder and Scully are obviously celeactors that embody cool. They deal with the complexities and challenges of modern life with insouciant aplomb and efficiency. As such, they offer identity types for appreciation and emulation

in popular culture.

Dallas, in contrast, demonstrates the relationship between the stereotypal roles played by celeactors and the articulation of social criticism and frustrated desire in the audience.[6] The conspicuous consumption and amorality of the Texas tycoons became a way of directing opprobrium against the *nouveaux riches* crudities of the Reagan–Thatcher years. They also provided a dramatized outlet for frustrated wish-fulfilment. Generally, audiences did not regard the Ewing family as role models for emulation. Rather, *Dallas* allowed viewers to vent their disapproval of trends in personality and society without engaging in overtly politicized actions. JR, Bobby and their wives, mistresses and misdemeanours were an escape valve for viewers caught up in the dehumanizing logic of advanced capitalism.

Some of the most influential characters in the genre have emerged from the soap opera format. Celeactors in the worldwide syndicated British soap *Coronation Street*, such as Ena Sharples, Albert Tatlock, Ken Barlow, Bet Lynch, Elsie Tanner, Mike Baldwin, Curly Watts, Jack and Vera Duckworth and Betty Williams, are accepted as 'real' people who embody and reflect the tensions of working-class life in Manchester. *Brookside*, *Emmerdale Farm* and *East Enders* are other examples of successful British soap operas in which celeactors have attained wider influence in popular culture. A notable example in the UK is the character of Grant Mitchell in *East Enders*, played by Ross Kemp. In the 1990s Grant Mitchell was widely perceived by audiences to personify real tensions in British masculinity. His aggression, frustration and pain were held to mirror the challenges posed to traditional masculinity through feminism and the emergence of the casualized labour market.

Soaps have a peculiar capacity to insinuate themselves into popular consciousness. As a staple in the diet of weekly TV broadcasts, they offer rich opportunities to develop narrative and establish an identifiable 'slice of life'. Soap celeactors grow with their audiences, developing nuances of character and incident as the ratings require. The success of comedy shows like *Friends* and *Frasier* reinforce the point. The celeactor characters of Rachel Green, Monica Geller, Phoebe Buffay, Joey Tribbiani and Chandler Bing depicted in *Friends* have achieved phenomenal global appeal. The actors that portray them, namely Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox Arquette, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc and Matthew Perry, have been so effective in their performances that they are in danger of being typecast. This carries with it a psychological tension for the actor portraying the celeactor: the public face threatens to stifle or suffocate the veridical self.

In this book I have chosen to concentrate primarily on achieved and attributed types of celebrity. This derives from the premise – which I shall attempt to substantiate below – that celebrity only becomes a phenomenon in the age of the common man. Two and a half centuries ago, ascribed celebrity was ascendant. People lived in a relatively fixed society of monarchs, lords and ladies. Court society in pre-Revolutionary France was a *monde* in which bloodline was unequivocally the root of social power and fame. Of course, this society did not exclude achieved celebrity. The international fame acquired by Dante, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Shakespeare was not a matter of birth, but of accomplishment. Nor was achieved celebrity confined to the arts. Financiers, merchants, inventors and other self-made men also experienced upward mobility and challenged the boundaries of traditional privilege and prestige. However, within the Ancien Régime they were always under strong pressures to conform to the established procedures and conventions set by the Court.

The French Revolution aimed to sweep away the old order and replace it with universal equality and freedom. It proclaimed the age of the 'new man'. This claim was hardly unique. Cicero had claimed it for himself in Ancient Rome. However, whereas Cicero's claim was an act of self-aggrandizement, in France the Revolution was undertaken with the aim of breaking forever with the tyranny, despotism and hierarchy of the past.

Judged by these exacting standards, the Revolution failed to achieve its objectives. Lineage survived as a source of ascribed status, and under Napoleon's rule many honorific positions based in bloodline were either revived or invented. Napoleon himself adopted the title of 'Emperor' in 1804. Yet it would be a massive over-simplification to infer that the execution of Robespierre and other Revolutionary leaders culminated in the restoration of the Ancien Régime. Robespierre declared a 'republic of virtue', and the metaphor proved to be an enduring and popular image of utopia in the West. Paradoxically, the move to eliminate privilege unintentionally laid the foundations for the emergence of new forms of distinction. Celebrity culture and the celetoid are the direct descendants of the revolt against tyranny. The celeactor is a symptom of the decline of ascribed forms of power and a greater equality in the balance of power between social classes.

Understanding Celebrity: Three Approaches

In positing a close link between social construction and celebrity, I am underscoring the value of an approach to contemporary celebrity that privileges history. This approach has not always been championed in the academic literature on the subject, which is dominated by three contending positions: Subjectivism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism.

SUBJECTIVISM Subjectivist accounts of celebrity fasten on the putative singularity of personal characteristics. In these accounts, celebrity is explained as the reflection of innate talent. Thus, orthodox subjectivism maintains that no one can sing like Caruso, just as no one can replicate Samuel Beckett's dramatic insight into the human condition, emulate Walter Matthau's grumpiness or achieve Kurt Cobain's remarkable artistic angst. Talent is understood to be a unique, ultimately inexplicable phenomenon. While it may be refined and polished through discipline and practice, its singularity is presented as a wonderful gift of nature. Orthodox Subjectivism maintains that the reasons why audiences are intensely affected by the particular gait of a celebrity, the form of face, the manner of reacting and speaking, are matters of unique chemistry. That is, they cannot be rationally explained. Since what confers celebrity status on someone is ultimately regarded to be a mystery, appreciation is privileged over analysis. One should, so to speak, let celebrities 'speak for themselves', and marvel, not meddle, at the reasons for their fame.

Despite this, Subjectivist accounts are not in themselves, so to speak, 'natural'. On the contrary, they reflect a level of human understanding about causality that is achieved by a detachment from both nature and superstition. The first people of singularity in human history were doubtless marked out by their physical or mental power, or, as a sceptic might say, by their capacity to hoodwink others. Perhaps the first coherent audience to bestow distinction on persons regarded as singular projected supernatural powers onto them. Certainly, there is a link between celebrity, religion and magic, a link I shall comment on at greater length in chapter Two.

For the moment, however, consider the case of Alexander the Great. He probably has superior claim to be numbered the first unequivocal *pre-figurative* celebrity in history. The son of Philip, king of the Macedonians, Alexander regarded the ascribed celebrity of monarchial lineage as unduly limiting. He aimed at a higher pretext to explain both his corporeal glory and brave deeds. Through his military triumphs, and his employment of Callisthenes, perhaps the first spin doctor to influence a global audience, Alexander aimed to become a universal, unquestionable 'presence' in everyday life. He sought to inscribe himself on public consciousness as a man apart, a person without precedent. Via the mouthpiece of Callisthenes, Alexander claimed direct descent from the gods of Homeric legend.

The Roman emperors also proclaimed kinship with the Gods. Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune and Mars were the spiritual fathers of Julius Caesar, Mark

Antony, Augustus and other prominent leaders. Yet the distinguishing feature of the Roman tradition of celebrity is the subsumption of individual vanity under the higher authority of the state. Caligula and Nero were notorious figures in Roman culture because they sought personal aggrandizement above their responsibility to the state. In Ancient Rome the celebrity was viewed as the perfect representation of the values of his class and all that was honourable in the imperial capital. Religion and state honour were more enmeshed with politics than they had been in the Alexandrian tradition. The pomp and splendour of the Emperor reflected the might and glory of Rome. Public accountability was implicitly part of celebrity status. By flaunting public accountability, Caligula and Nero invited recrimination.

Here it is perhaps worth making a technical distinction. Notoriety is akin to celebrity in operating through impact on public consciousness. However, whereas celebrity functions within a general moral framework that reaffirms paramount order, notoriety usually connotes transgression, deviance and immorality. Later I will modify this distinction somewhat, for I shall argue that today celebrity often involves transgressing ordinary moral rules by, for example, excessive conspicuous consumption, exhibitionist libidinous gratification, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, violence and so on. As such, a celebrity might be thought of as tapping the surplus material and symbolic value that is inherent in the economic and moral frameworks governing everyday life. On this reckoning, celebrity is, so to speak, the embodiment of surplus, since it radiates greater material and symbolic power than non-celebrity. If the embodiment of surplus means higher status, it also allows for a greater latitude of excessive behaviour. Celebrity is, in fact, often connected with transgression. The fact that celebrities seem to inhabit a different world than the rest of us seems to give them licence to do things we can only dream about.

In both the Alexandrian and the Roman traditions, pre-figurative celebrity status was affirmed and reaffirmed in the public arena. It was associated with exhibitionism, drama, conspicuous consumption and acclaim. The theatre of public life was the stage on which reputations were made and unmade. In ancient society, ostentation, tribute and excess were prominent traits of celebrity culture. Therefore, the exhibitionism that is frequently associated with contemporary celebrity was anticipated in ancient society. One might say that when Britney Spears, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Robbie Williams, Bruce Willis or Caprice cultivate acclaim through public presentation, they affirm that the gods have come down to earth.

Max Weber, a notable critic of unalloyed Subjectivism, none the less devised the concept of charisma to apply to special or unique qualities attributed to the individual.[7] He argued that charismatic authority is, by definition, inspirational. It depends on apparently miraculous or semi-miraculous occurrences, such as prophecies that come true, battles that are always won, powers of healing that never falter, artistic performances that succeed time and again. All these features have overtones in the modern concept of celebrity.

Weber argued that charisma is vested in a person by virtue of popular belief in extraordinary personal qualities. Supernatural forces are often attributed as the cause behind charisma. Perhaps supernatural and theistic explanations of singularity are older than Subjectivist accounts. Faced with a choice between divine inspiration and human fallibility to explain behaviour, one can see why an Alexander, a Cicero or a Nero desired divine kinship. Nor is it the case that supernatural or theistic responses to celebrity have been entirely outmoded. John Lennon complained that disabled people often sought out The Beatles at concerts as divine miracle-workers.

Much of the popular biographical literature on celebrity is based on Subjectivist assumptions. For example, popular chain-store biographies regularly claim that there will never be another John Lennon, that we shall not see the like of Marilyn Monroe again, and that Eva Peron and Princess Diana were matchless in human experience. Pure Subjectivism therefore holds that celebrity is unique. The cultural intermediaries that link a celebrity to an audience are recognized as catalysts in communication. However, the seat of celebrity is the matchless, God-given, creative gifts of the performer.

STRUCTURALISM Unlike Subjectivist accounts, Structuralism concentrates on the interrelations between human conduct and the context that informs conduct. Explanations that assign pronounced significance to putative, singular or unique celebrity qualities are rejected. Instead, celebrity is investigated as the expression of universal structural rules embedded in culture. Broadly speaking, three social structures are usually distinguished in this approach to understanding celebrity: the culture industry, governmentality and type theory.

The culture industry thesis is associated with the Frankfurt School of social criticism. The thesis holds that organized entertainment is a type of social control. The Hollywood machine, Tin Pan Alley and the specialized corporations of the entertainment industry are portrayed as moulders of social conduct. Their ultimate aim is to reinforce and extend the rule of capital. Celebrities are conceptualized as one of the means through which capitalism achieves its ends of subduing and exploiting the masses. They express an ideology of heroic individualism, upward mobility and choice in social conditions wherein standardization, monotony and routine prevail. Thus the identification of the masses with celebrity is always false consciousness, since celebrities are not regarded as reflections of reality, but fabrications designed to enhance the rule of capital.

Capitalism originally sought to police play and pleasure, because any attempt to replace work as the central life interest threatened the economic survival of the system. The family, the state and religion engendered a variety of patterns of moral regulation to control desire and ensure compliance with the system of production. However, as the forces and relations of production developed, consumer culture and leisure time expanded. The principles that operated to repress the individual in the workplace and the home were extended to the shopping mall and recreational activity. The entertainment industry and consumer culture produced what Herbert Marcuse called 'repressive desublimation'.[8] Through this process individuals unconsciously adopted the values of alienated culture, so that they unwittingly subscribed to a degraded version of humanity.

Celebrities appear to enable audiences to gain a sense of release from the privations that beset them in everyday life. However, because of the generalized conditions of alienation that obtain under capitalism, this release can never assume anything other than an estranged and transient form. At the high-water mark of Marcuse's influence in the 1960s, he proposed that repressive desublimation entirely co-opts the power of the masses to resist. He later modified this view, and argued that within the ranks of what might be called 'antinomian' elements in society, notably artists, bohemians, students and the unemployed, a challenge to the rule of capital might be attempted.[9]

A contrasting Leftist tradition argues that capitalism and socialism were merging to create a new system of repression in which celebrity culture mesmerized the masses. For Guy Debord, industrial culture was, above all, a culture of signs.[10] The purpose of celebrity culture is to shepherd the populace into imitative consumption. A system organized around the semiotics of control eventually eliminates the requirement for physical repression. Domination is universal, and operates through signs of achieved celebrity and the society of the spectacle. But this account has been heavily criticized for being over-fatalistic. It identifies no escape from the domination of celebrity and the spectacle. Indeed, this position was corrosively dismissive of contemporary counter-culture on the grounds that it would inevitably be absorbed by celebrity culture.

By and large, according to Edgar Morin, celebrities do fulfil the functions required of them by entertainment moguls.[11] In this sense they are the servants of capital. Nothing illustrates this more starkly than the tendency of the entertainment industry to drop celebrities once their grip on the public is judged to have diminished. Kenneth Anger's inventory of the suicides, crack-ups and narcotic addictions of downwardly mobile Hollywood stars between the 1920s and '80s offers cautionary data.[12] Our own day has witnessed the examples of public humiliation and career decline suffered by O. J. Simpson and Gary Glitter following revelations about their unsavoury private lives and the highly publicized court cases that accompanied them.

Morin's work is significant for subverting the proposition that celebrities are created by the culture industry. According to him, celebrity impresarios do not create celebrity appeal. Nor is this appeal to be explained in terms of the innate talent of the celebrity. Instead, Morin favours an explanation of celebrity that explores celebrity power as a projection of the pent-up needs of the audience. On this reckoning, celebrities are akin to transformers, accumulating and enlarging the dehumanized desires of the audience, and momentarily rehumanizing them through dramatized public representation and release. Morin therefore overturns the Frankfurt School's emphasis on the dominant class as the motive force behind celebrity appeal. In its place he holds that we are attracted to celebrities because they are presented as the antithesis of a generalized psychological lack in ourselves.

For Morin and others, life relations under capitalism constitute an illusory state of affairs. That is, ideology and commodification operate to mask and corrupt human nature by alienating person from person. It is because capitalism estranges us so thoroughly from one another, and from our own natures, that we project our fantasies of belonging and fulfilment onto celebrities, i.e., idealized forms of the self that is routinely degraded in commodity culture. As for the autonomy of the celebrity – that autonomy is always imaginary. True, for the Frankfurt School celebrity is presented as the conducting rod of dominant power, whereas for Morin it is the expression of the frustrated desires of the audience. Yet, in both, the celebrity is finally analyzed as the embodiment of ideology.

Marcuse, Debord, Morin and other writers are critical of many features of Marxian theory, but they remain loyal to Marxian concepts of ideology, class and transcendence. This is not true of those approaches in Structuralism that view celebrity through the prism of governmentality. Whether explicitly expressed or not, the decisive influence here has been Michel Foucault. His contribution to the question of governmentality can be stated quite precisely. The Marxian tradition favoured the metaphor of enveloping canopies of oppression and control over individual behaviour; class, alienation, ideology, commodification are just some examples that come to mind. Against this, Foucault's application of governmentality emphasizes *régimes* of control and fragmentation of order. He argued that social order is produced by discourses of power.[13] A discourse may be thought of as consisting of a distinctive rhetorical language, associated symbolic capital and rules of practice, and a template of social realism, which establishes some forms of behaviour as relevant and authentic and casts others as insignificant and trivial.

Discourses are the means through which regimes of power are enunciated. For example, the New Right's proposition, developed in the 1980s and '90s, that there is 'no alternative' to market organization, prioritized one form of ontology (the theory of being) and epistemology (the theory of science or criteria of knowledge) and sought to consign others to the dustbin of history. Note that discourses do not rely primarily on physical power to achieve their effect. Rather, they deploy symbolic devices and rhetoric to achieve their hold over social practice. Further, since order is conceived as a regime of power in which varieties of specialized discourse co-exist in a state of perpetual tension with each other, Foucault recognized a provisional quality to social and cultural reproduction. Discourses are challenged, and discourses resist. Thus, governmentality is always a question of action and reaction, in which social forces are located and reconfigured in strategic combinations.

Within the study of celebrity, this approach has been most fully developed by David Marshall who argues that celebrity has a political function.[14]

It operates to articulate, and legitimate, various forms of subjectivity that enhance the value of individuality and personality. Through these means, order and compliance are reproduced. For example, the pre-eminence enjoyed by sports celebrities, such as Pete Sampras, Magic Johnson, Martina Hingis, Lindsay Davenport, Tiger Woods, Michael Owen and David Beckham, underlines the connection between self-discipline, training and material success as 'examples to us all'. These sports celebrities are typically portrayed as superlatively talented and hard-working individuals who contribute to the pre-eminence of the dual ethic of individualism and personal competitiveness in society. At the same time, the emphasis on luck in celebrity sporting achievement encourages the masses to adopt a fatalistic attitude to life, rather than to question the distributive logic of a system that allocates life chances so unequally.

Movie plots starring celebrities are caught up in the same general process. Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* (1986), Harrison Ford in the *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars* series, Liam Neeson in *Schindler's List* (1993), Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* series, Mel Gibson in the *Lethal Weapon* series and Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump* (1994) essentially enact morality tales in which good triumphs over evil, merit is rewarded and justice prevails.

Marshall argues that celebrity is emphatically a social construction, in which the mass-media play a leading role in governing the population. Government is accomplished by providing suitable role models, morality tales that either reconcile ordinary people to their subordination or provide escapism from the hardships of life. However, he wishes to incorporate the notion of the audience as productive agents in developing the meaning of celebrity. To this end he introduces the term 'audience-subjectivities' to refer to the constant negotiation around the public face of celebrity, between types or forms of audience and particular cultural industries. Marshall's shift is intended both to deflect analysis from attributing omnipotence to the mass-media and to propose that audiences must be regarded as sophisticated, creative agents in the construction and development of the celebrity system.

Marshall's account links the emergence of the celebrity system to the main problem of governmentality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely control of the crowd. Citing the classical works on urban policing by Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon,[15] Marshall argues that the concentration of populations in urban–industrial settings inevitably produced public anxieties about the possibilities of civil disobedience and social disorder. Both Tarde and Le Bon developed a social psychology of crowd behaviour that was a seminal influence on law and order policy. One facet of their work was to recognize the value of symbolic power in regulating mass behaviour. Psychoanalytical method, which emerged at roughly the same time, reinforced this by assigning a pronounced significance to symbols, signs and metaphors in the conduct of social life. Marshall connects the celebrity system with the origins of governing urban–industrial populations. He contends that 'celebrities are *attempts* to contain the mass' (emphasis in the original).[16] They do so principally by symbolic means. That is, they present preferred models of subjectivity with which audiences are encouraged to identify. They are, so to speak, 'the star police' of modern democracies. In other words, they radiate glamour and attraction, and, in their achieved form, they automatically demonstrate that the system rewards talent and cherishes upward mobility.

Marshall does not discount the proposal that celebrities have transformational power. On the contrary, by identifying achieved celebrities as men and women 'of the people' who have dramatically made good, he acknowledges a critical capacity in celebrity power. For example, Noel and Liam Gallagher have the capacity to criticize the discursive regimes that subordinate the masses, just as Lennon, McCartney, Dylan and Townshend did in the 1960s and The Clash, The Sex Pistols and The Jam did in the 1970s and '80s. However, in privileging the containing role of celebrity power, Marshall indicates that co-option into established regimes of power is the

orthodox course of events. In other words, his analysis predicts that the fate of young radicals is to become figureheads of the establishment, and that audiences are finally docile and obedient.

An interesting parallel can be found in Peter Biskind's study of the rise of the *auteur* director in Hollywood in the 1960s and '70s.[17] He describes how directors like Peter Bogdanovitch, Francis Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, Dennis Hopper, Mike Nichols and, later, Martin Scorsese, Stephen Spielberg, Paul Schrader, Brian De Palma and Terence Malick emerged to break the studio system. In the Golden Age of this system, roughly between the late 1920s and the end of the '50s, the producer was king. Moguls like David Selznick, Jack Warner, Louis B. Mayer and Sam Goldwyn presided ruthlessly over the industry, making and breaking stars, cutting scripts unilaterally and firing directors who resisted. Their power turned them into celebrities in their own right, feared by the Hollywood intelligentsia and recognized by the public as the true pharaohs of film. For a while the *auteurs* succeeded in overturning this system by producing unorthodox, counter cultural box-office hits like *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie & Clyde*, *The Last Picture Show* and *Chinatown*. Biskind's absorbing account reveals how the grandiose hopes of some of the leading *auteurs*, and bickering and in-fighting among their ranks, gradually culminated in the renaissance of corporate studio power in the 1990s. A new generation of producers, including Don Simpson, Jerry Bruckheimer, Michael Eisner, Joe Roth and Barry Diller, became ascendant, and entertainment corporations like Disney, Sony and Dreamworks now bankrolled and shaped movies.

What Biskind has described is in actuality a classical process of celebrity co-option, in which the independence of the leading *auteur* directors and stars is slowly redefined and reabsorbed by the established regime. This is not to say that new entertainment corporations in Hollywood simply reprise the Golden Age of the Hollywood mogul. Biskind is concerned to show that the new regime of power has learned from the innovations and success of the *auteurs* in creating novel audience subjectivities. However, in doing so he ultimately confirms Marshall's proposition that co-option to corporate control is the dominant, long-term tendency in market society.

Joshua Gamson's work broadly confirms Marshall's connection between celebrity and governmentality, but without the latter's rather jaundiced political sensibility. Gamson's is, in fact, a quintessentially liberal, progressive reading of celebrity. While he recognizes that processes of manipulation, mystification, artificiality and control are integral to the celebrity system, he maintains that 'when audiences play with celebrity, they are playing with the dilemmas of democratic power'.[18] Show business is thus presented not only as a mirror of commercial culture but as part of the pedagogy of citizenship. By studying show people, the citizen understands more about how the entire system works, or could work, in a redeemed world.

This is not an objectionable position, but arguably it is a facile one. The questions are: How does the celebrity system educate the masses? Why do some forms of artifice persuade, and others fail? What kind of ambivalence does the celebrity system make transparent, and what types does it occlude? To be fair, Gamson touches on all of these questions. The difficulty is that he never seizes on any of them in a coherent, solid or consistently critical way. Even so, his observation that the conventions of celebrity collude with those of party politics is a stimulating one. Political success requires that leaders like Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Tony Blair must play at being their public face. When this goes wrong, as it did catastrophically with Clinton in the Monica Lewinsky affair, it raises damaging questions about both the veridical self and the public face.

The third variant of Structuralism postulates that celebrity is the extension of what might be called foundational types of character and embodiment in society. According to Orrin Klapp, all social groups devise character types that function as role models of leadership.[19] In antiquity the gods laid down mythical narratives and criteria against which concrete

instances of human character and behaviour were evaluated. Many of the role models and behavioural standards of antiquity continue to shape our perceptions of courage, nobility, wisdom, beauty and integrity. Hence, the heroic, gallant masculine role cultivated by Hollywood film stars like John Wayne, Harrison Ford, Kevin Costner, Mel Gibson and Clint Eastwood draw on these models and standards.

Klapp does not postulate ancient roots for contemporary foundational categories. Indeed, a significant weakness of his argument is the absence of a tenable historical dimension. Thus, his account provides no explanation of the origins of social types and no discussion of the historical variations in their composition and influence. Instead, he confines his task to an analysis of the primary foundational types in contemporary society, the popularity of which he relates to the success of the mass communications industry. Among the social types he identifies are the hero, the good Joe, the villain, the tough guy, the snob, the prude and the love queen. Celebrities are theorized as the personifications of these foundational types. In Klapp's reading of 1960s America, Perry Como, Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, Bing Crosby and William Holden represent the good Joe; Zsa Zsa Gabor, Grace Kelly and Katherine Hepburn embody the snob; Ernest Hemingway and celeactors like the film gangster Little Caesar and Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer incarnate the tough guy; while Marilyn Monroe and Ava Gardner are personifications of the love queen. Klapp argues that the celebrity system provides important sources of cultural leadership, social emulation and psychological reinforcement.

Although he does not make the connection, there are parallels to be drawn between Klapp's work and the sociology of Erving Goffman.[20] Goffman applies a dramaturgical approach to the analysis of everyday life. Interaction is explored in terms of 'scripts', 'roles' and 'performances'. On this account, celebrity may be read as a concentrated, idealized form of generalized traits or aspirations of embodiment and character. However, Goffman's approach is more successful in demonstrating how presentation is manipulated and mythologized by economic and cultural forces in order to manufacture social impact. In contrast, Klapp's version of foundational type theory inclines towards a naturalistic approach in explaining celebrity. Although celebrity is presented as the reflection of foundational social types, the operation of economic, cultural and political power in the construction of celebrity is a missing dimension in his work, and this severely limits its use. It also fails to tackle the growth of notoriety and sensationalism in the celebrity race, which, I maintain, is a paramount feature in the celebrification process today.

The popularity of screen idols in the 1920s, such as John Barrymore, Douglas Fairbanks and Rudolph Valentino, has also been explained in Structuralist terms. That is, they are regarded as constructed responses to the crisis in masculine identity wrought by the liberation of women and economic uncertainty. Gaylyn Studlar's central proposition is that the established, normative constructs of masculinity were decomposing in the 1920s.[21] The media of the day were obsessed by worries that the greater public presence and power of women in society would create 'woman-made masculinity'. This was associated with epicene, physically passive characteristics. Traditional ideals of masculinity were under intense pressure, and men were confused about their new role in post-patriarchal culture. In this cultural context, masculine celebrity identities in the 1920s can be interpreted as calculated cultural reactions to a perceived crisis in sexual politics. Thus, the popularity of Douglas Fairbanks is explained as a retreat into the escapism of childhood romanticism that reaffirmed the 'natural' masculine values of adventure and action. Barrymore and Valentino were idealized versions of super-heroes, gloriously free of the sexual and economic anxieties that encumbered the audience. In contrast, Valentino's calculated 'foreign' exoticism challenged cinemagoers by insinuating effeminacy in the character of the American male. The celebrity construct developed by the actor Lon Chaney is perhaps an interesting variant in this analysis. The estranged, bitter, grotesque characters that

became Chaney's trademark might be read as radical negations of the escapist, idealized types of masculinity represented by Fairbanks, Barrymore and Valentino, and, by extension, American consumer culture. Chaney's roles testify to the mutilation of the ideal of normative masculinity and dramatize the alienation of the audience from both idealized role models and the everyday anxieties of sexual politics.

Structuralist approaches to celebrity were highly influential between the 1960s and '80s. They appeared to offer the prospect of a scientific understanding of celebrity, and they avoided the naturalistic fallacies of subjectivism. Instead, the aetiology of celebrity was explained in terms of determinate, totalizing structures of influence: the culture industry, capitalism, masculinity. It would be unwise to minimize the rhetorical power of these explanations compared to the accounts offered by fanzines, authorized biographies or self-reporting by celebrities. On the other hand, Structuralists rarely took the trouble to test their propositions empirically. In many cases, this exaggerated the importance of the designated structure of social control and neutralized the knowledge, skills and power of social actors to resist. For example, in the strongest versions of the culture industry thesis, celebrity is explained as a triumph of the manipulative influence of entertainment moguls, PR specialists and image makers. The knowledge, desire and judgement of the audience are sidelined.

Structuralist accounts also possess a tendency to exaggerate the uniformity of structural forces. The cultural capital of the entertainment industry, and the state apparatus, does not resemble a uniform and undifferentiated whole. Rather, it is more accurate to view it in terms of taste cultures, cleavages and contingent, negotiated settlements. By viewing structural influence in this way, a more compelling analysis emerges of social change and the politics of celebrity management.

POST-STRUCTURALISM Instead of focusing on the relationship between concrete celebrities and the historical structure behind them, Post-structuralist accounts concentrate on the omnipresent celebrity image and the codes of representation through which this image is reproduced, developed and consumed. Richard Dyer is probably the principal exponent of this approach, someone for whom 'stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society'.[22] This appears to follow the argument that celebrities are the representation of foundational types of character and embodiment, but Dyer is convinced that foundational types must always be examined in relation to historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts. There is, then, an interplay between the narrative of celebrity and the historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts to which celebrity is attached. To use a term from Post-structuralism, celebrity is 'inter-textually' constructed and developed.

Contra Structuralism and Subjectivism, Dyer maintains that neither structural determinism nor 'the raw material of the person' are sufficient explanations of achieved celebrity. Rather, the psychology and body of the person constitute a set of resources that have to be polished and refined by the mass-media – the agencies of the culture industry charged with the task of designing celebrities for public consumption.

Superficially, this may be taken to confirm the culture industry thesis, since it appears to posit that the producers who manage and present a celebrity to the public have ultimate power. However, central to the Post-structuralist approach is the notion that star images are inflected and modified by the mass-media and the productive assimilation of the audience. Thus a dispersed view of power is articulated in which celebrity is examined as a developing field of intertextual representation in which meaning is variously assembled. Variation derives from the different constructions and inflections vested in the celebrity by the participants in the field, including agents, press officers, gossip columnists, producers and fans.

Richard deCordova also argued for an inter-textual approach to stardom.[23] The meaning of stars is organized by their repertory of films, and by publicity in the form of biographies, autobiographies, interviews, critical

studies, newspaper articles and fan responses. For deCordova these aspects of stardom are an essential part of the production and consumption of celebrity. Simultaneously, then, Post-structuralism both centres consciousness on the performer and decentres that consciousness by relating the presence and meaning of celebrity to a developing field of interests.

Post-structuralist approaches therefore treat notions of the individual and individualization as inherently problematic. By addressing celebrity as a field of production, representation and consumption, they move away from Subjectivist accounts that prioritize the meaning of celebrity in the character, talent and embodiment of the subject. Similarly, by pursuing celebrity as the emerging property of interactions in a determinate field of interests, Post-structuralism transcends the problems of monolithic, static analysis frequently associated with Structuralism. Dyer's analysis of the iconic status of Judy Garland in the gay community illustrates the processes of inflection and reappropriation in the consumption of the celebrity image.[24] The public face of Garland as a bruised, battered, misunderstood talent suggested parallels with gay and lesbian experience in articulating identity and desire. This public face, which in many ways invalidated the image of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* that Garland cultivated as a child star, emerged from the resonance her personal problems had with a considerable element in her fan base, and the calculations of her managers, publicists and career advisers. Above all, the Post-structuralist approach confirms the importance of understanding celebrity as a developing, relational field of power, and it emphasizes the versatility and contradictions of the public face.

Surface Relations and Celebrity Involvement Shields

All three dominant approaches in the study of celebrity emphasize the centrality of the mass-media, and with good reason. The relationship between celebrities and fans is typically mediated through representation. As we have seen, out-of-face encounters may conflict with how fans regard the public face of the celebrity. However, despite the increasing profusion of celebrities in society, such encounters are comparatively rare. The mass-media constitute the prime channel of contact between fans and celebrities. Stage, screen, audio transmission and print culture are the main institutional mechanisms that express the various idioms of celebrity culture. Each presupposes distance between the celebrity and the audience. Celebrity culture is, in fact, overwhelmingly a culture of surface relations.

With respect to the relation of the celebrity to the fan, celebrities usually develop what Goffman called 'involvement shields', which hide the veridical self from the public face. These 'shields' can be raised when celebrities attend conventions, public celebrations or other ceremonies held in their honour. Notwithstanding this, the general attitude celebrities cultivate in relation to their fans is that of negotiating with an abstract other. This attitude necessarily predisposes unfocused physical encounters between the celebrity and the fan to be conducted on a surface level, since the celebrity's veridical self is concealed on *a priori* grounds. By 'unfocused physical encounters' I mean chance contacts, in which the celebrity has been unable to prepare and polish a tenable public face for a scripted occasion. In these circumstances, mediation between the veridical self and the audience is, perhaps understandably, apt to be one-sided, glancing and unsatisfactory. This is not to say that Uma Thurman, Matt Damon or Tony Blair will be anything other than civil to you if you bump into them on the street. But it perhaps reinforces the common-sense presupposition that the idiom of such encounters rarely permits them to go deeper than surface pleasantries.

What of the relation of the fan to the celebrity? Here reciprocal relations are constructed around an anonymous consumer and a public face.

The boundaries of attachment between the public face and the fan are not clearly delineated. Consuming celebrity products, and generally reinforcing the image of the public face in ordinary social interaction, are merely the outward manifestations of attachment. At deeper psychic levels, fans may adopt the values and style of the public face and, in some cases, develop unmanageable obsessions. This is particularly likely where fans are isolated or detached from significant others in family and kinship networks. Isolation may produce over-identification with the public face and engender the desire to possess the celebrity or deprive the public face of volition. I examine stalking and celebrity in chapter Four. Here, it is perhaps worth noting that, in 1990 Rebecca Schaeffer, the star of the sitcom *My Sister Sam*, was murdered by an obsessive fan who forced his way into her home. In 1999 Jill Dando, the popular BBC TV presenter, was shot dead on her own doorstep by a stalker. These violent acts point to the strength of the fantasies and obsessions that some fans nurture for celebrity figures.

These fantasies and obsessions may turn inward, so that when a celebrity dies the fan decides that his or her own life is no longer worth living. Following the deaths of Rudolph Valentino, Elvis Presley, Kurt Cobain and John Lennon, some suicides were reported.

The audience responds to the celebrity through abstract desire. This desire is alienable in as much as it switches in response to commodity and brand innovation. This is particularly evident in youth culture. The history of Pop music is littered with has-been teenybop sensations: Sweet, The Bay City Rollers and David Cassidy from the '70s; Bros, Adam Ant and Andrew Ridgeley from the '80s; Chesney Hawkes, Kriss Kross and Vanilla Ice from the '90s. It is also evident in the cases of suicide that accompany the death of a major celebrity. Here the desire of the fan overwhelms personal well-being. Abstract desire is the only reason to live, and when the referent of this desire – the celebrity – dies, life for the fan becomes meaningless. This radical division between abstract desire and embodied well-being is also evident in examples of fan self-mutilation, drug dependency and alcohol abuse, in which the fan seeks to negate the pain of unconsummated desire.

These examples suggest that there is considerable fuzziness between the public face of celebrity and fandom. Further, fandom can be as frustrating as it is exhilarating, and psychically damaging rather than fulfilling. However, the psychic attachment that a fan develops for a celebrity seldom culminates in physical attack, murder or suicide. Even so, psychic attachments may be a significant element in identity formation and the ordering of personal and subcultural history.

Research into collective memory and the British royal family has found that royal events like births, marriages and deaths provided frames for the recollection of personal experience. Identity formation in this case is not necessarily founded in the introjection of the values and style of the public face. People may be openly cynical about the royal family, and mock their gravitas and apparent innate sense of superiority. Role distance is built into the majority of fan relations with celebrities. The popular notion of the adoring audience has limitations, and fans are capable of withdrawing attachment as well as affirming it. None the less, it remains culturally significant that collective memory is influenced by celebrity history, so that *temps perdu* in personal biography are recalled by reference to external events in celebrity history.

The surface character of celebrity culture is oddly illuminating. Other than religion, celebrity culture is the only cluster of human relationships in which mutual passion typically operates without physical interaction. The general form of interaction between the fan and the celebrity takes the form of the consumer absorbing a mediated image. Similarly, celebrities may meet fans at conventions and public events or through out-of-face encounters, but they typically relate to fans as an abstraction, which is also translated through the mass-media rather than direct or prolonged face-to-face interaction.

It may seem beside the point to compare celebrity with religion. Religion, after all, refers to the formulation of belief in a general order of existence, in which powerful, durable attachments are invested in spiritually relevant objects or persons. A famous strand within academic study holds that religious belief is based on a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Objects and persons belonging to the sacred level are conceptualized as spiritual entities possessing purity and power that contrasts with the profane level of mortal life. Some celebrities have indeed laid claim to sacred and spiritual qualities. Napoleon and Hitler were worshipped in their day as saviours of their respective nations. But the belief invested in them was conditional. They exemplified the form of charisma, identified by Max Weber, in which faith derives from a belief in extraordinary attributes. When Napoleon and Hitler began to suffer military setbacks, their charismatic status waned. In any case, the charisma of these figures never approached the general, unconditional faith that is the primary quality of Christianity and Islam.

There is much, then, to caution against over-zealous comparisons between celebrity and religion. None the less, Christianity is adopting many of the devices of consumer culture in branding belief and communicating faith. Thus, religious crusades have been held in Disneyland, with Christian artists performing on stages and salvationists preaching the gospel message. Email websites have been constructed to promote e-spirituality. Religious belief is being reconfigured to provide meaning and solidarity as responses to the uprooting effect of globalization. Because these responses are communicated through the mass-media, they borrow the style and form of celebrity culture. We need to examine whether there has been a partial or total convergence between celebrity culture and religion.