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THE EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

There is commotion around the need of community mainly because it is less and less clear whether the realities which the portraits of 'community' claim to represent are much in evidence, and if such realities can be found, will their life-expectancy allow them to be treated with the kind of respect which realities command. The valiant defence of community … would hardly have happened had it not been for the fact that the harness by which collectivities tie their members to a joint history, custom, language or schooling is getting more threadbare by the year. In the liquid stage of modernity, only zipped harnesses are supplied, and their selling point is the facility with which they can be put on in the morning and taken off in the evening (or vice versa). Communities come in many colours and sizes, but if plotted on the Weberian axis stretching from 'light cloak' to 'iron cage',- they all come remarkably close to the first pole.

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2000a, p. 169)

… we have been living – we are living – through a gigantic 'cultural revolution' an extraordinary dissolution of traditional norms, textures and values, which left so many inhabitants of the developed world orphaned and bereft. … Never was the word 'community' used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense become hard to find in real life. Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.

(Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 1994, p. 40)

One transfixing image of late modernity is that of social dislocation, of broken narratives and unhinged structures: of a fragmented world where space and culture no longer coincide, an amalgamation where each point of space links elsewhere to some other place or time or figment of the individual imagination. The woman on the cell phone in the crowded subway talking elsewhere, oblivious to the bustling world around her. People being closer and closer in the city, yet seemingly further and further apart in reality. A wasteland of anomie, the disconnected, the uninterested: of free floating atoms unaware and unconcerned about each other. How, conceivably, can

social cohesion and a personal sense of coherence occur in such a fissile world of fragmentation and division?

Richard Sennett in two books, *The Conscience of the Eye* (1991) and *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), poses such questions. In the first book he uses the haunting phrase 'the maintenance of order among lightly engaged strangers'. How can an immense congregation of city dwellers who have little in common, and no small level of distaste for each other, hold together? In the second book he moves from the social to the personal, asking:

How can long-term purposes be pursued in a short-term society? How can durable social relations be sustained? How can a human being develop a narrative of identity and life history in a society composed of episodes and fragments? The conditions of the new economy feed instead on experience which drifts in time, from place to place, from job to job. (1998, pp. 26–7)

Both on the level of social cohesion and the closely related level of personal narrative, the late modern world offers precious little security or palliatives to vertigo.

The organic community

Before I examine the paradox of the turn to community noted by both Bauman and Hobsbawm, let us outline the attributes of the organic community of the past, albeit in a rather ideal typical fashion. The community of the post-war period was characterised by a sense of permanence and solidity. Placed there by the needs of capital around large-scale manufacturing industry or labour fixed to land for centuries it involved the following characteristics:

- Intergenerationality
- An embeddedness of the individual in locality
- Intense face-to-face interaction
- Much direct information with regards to each other
- High level of informal social control
- Provision of a localised sense of identity
- An identity of local space and local culture.

The obverse of the organic community is posited as an anomic community, the locality without norms and the inevitable consequence of this is seen as the proliferation of crime and anti-social behaviour. It is the 'lightly engaged' society of strangers where individualism and self-seeking takes priority over collectivity and shared values. As we shall see, I have serious reservations about this formulation: at the very least it underestimates *both* the malign and benign

effects of the shift to the late modern. But let us, for the moment, reflect on the process by which community is transformed. Sennett notes that:

> One of the unintended consequences of modern capitalism is that it has strengthened the value of place, aroused a longing for community. All the emotional conditions we have explored in the workplace animate that desire: the uncertainties of flexibility; the absence of deeply rooted trust and commitment; the superficiality of teamwork; most of all, the spectre of failing to make something of oneself in the world, to 'get a life' through one's work. All these conditions impel people to look for some other scene of attachment and depth.
>
> Today, in the new regime of time, that usage 'we' has become an act of self-protection. The desire for community is defensive, often expressed as rejection of immigrants or other outsiders – the most important communal architecture being the walls against a hostile economic order. To be sure, it is almost a universal law that 'we' can be used as a defense against confusion and dislocation. Current politics based on this desire for refuge takes aim more at the weak, those who travel the circuits of the global labor market, rather than at the strong, those institutions which set poor workers in motion or make use of their relative deprivation. (1998, p.138)

The decline of work as a source of expressivity and of narrative leads to a turn to community to provide identity and continuity. Yet as Hobsbawm has argued, it is precisely the self-same late modern capitalism which has destroyed community and rendered destitute the bank of social trust that underwrote it. The local community becomes increasingly more invoked as a place of identity and moves to become a major part of the rhetoric of political mobilisation just at the time that it is transforming and alienating. For the organic community is in decline affected by both the globalisation of the economy and of culture. Manufacturing industries shrink and in many instances disappear leaving areas bereft of work, service industries proliferate often with small sizes, commuting increases to and from work, local cultures become less self-contained, much more penetrated by the global. They become, in Giddens' graphic phrase, 'phantasmagoric', constituted by the ghostly presence of distant influences (1990). The paradox, then, the self-same capitalism which fuels the turn to community undermines the very organic community in which people seek meaning and solace. This, as we have seen, is the political paradox that Thomas Frank uncovered with regards to the dynamics of the last American Presidential Election. Rural and small-town Americans in search of the traditional values of small-town America voted in precisely the party of billionaires whose policies undermined local communities and whose unegalitarianism mocked meritocracy.

But there is more to it than this. First of all, the search for community does not end here: people do not remain passive in their quest for meaning. Secondly, as I have argued throughout book, the passions undercutting the search for identity are more intense and indignant than a mere confrontation

with anomie, a disappointed encounter with normlessness, would suggest. Lastly, the notion of society as anomic and an agglomeration of isolated individuals fundamentally misconstrues the nature of the late modern community.

Earlier I discussed how one remedy for personal feelings of ontological security is a resort to essentialisation – to believe that one's identity is based on a fixed essence. The resort to identification with community or indeed nation is a powerful fixative in such a project. The dynamic of this process of reinforcing identity is the negation of the other either by characterising them as wicked/evil – the inversion of oneself as in conservative othering or as less than oneself, lacking in civilisation and the correct norms, as with liberal othering. The whole conception of community, of 'we', as Sennett puts it, 'becomes an act of rejecting "them".' Community becomes defined by its opposite – indeed the very idea of an 'inclusive community', Bauman notes, would be a contradiction in terms and, later on in *Liquid Modernity*, he is even more bitter, talking of how 'the inner harmony of the communal world shines and glitters against the background of the obscure and tangled jungle which starts the other side of the turnpike' (2000a, p. 172).

The building of community, its invention, becomes that of a narrative which celebrates and embraces one side and vilifies and excludes the other. Such stories of difference can be tragic in their consequence if banal in their conception. Let me first take two very dramatic examples, one from abroad in the Balkans, the other from nearer to home. Michael Ignatieff tells of sitting in an abandoned farmhouse in March 1993, in a village called Mirkovci in East Croatia, which has been cut in two by the Serb–Croat War. It is four in the morning and he is at the command post of the Serbs; the Croatians are about 250 yards away. Every now and then there is a burst of small arms fire and the odd bazooka round. These Serbs and Croats went to the same school, went out with the same girls, lived happily together. The rate of ethnic intermarriage was as high as 30% and nearly a quarter of the population before the war claimed their nationality as Yugoslav – not Croat, Serb or Muslim. Ignatieff cannot believe that there is a fundamental difference between them stretching back through history:

Theorists like Samuel Huntington would lead me to believe that there is a fault line running through the back gardens of Mirkovci, with the Croats in the bunker representing the civilization of the Catholic Roman West and the Serbs nearby representing Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and the Cyrillic East. Certainly this is how the more self-inflated ideologues on either side see the conflict. But at worm's-eye level, here in Mirkovci, I don't see civilizational fault lines, geological templates that have split apart. These metaphors take for granted what needs to be explained: now neighbors once ignorant of the very idea that they belong to opposed civilizations begin to think – and hate – in these terms; how they vilify and demonize people they once called friends; how, in short, the seeds of mutual paranoia are sown, grain by grain, on the soil of a common life.

On the bunk next to me, leaning against the wall, wearing combat fatigues, is a compact and dapper middle-aged man with bright, wily eyes and a thick, stylish mustache. With a certain false naiveté, I venture the thought that I can't tell Serbs and Croats apart. 'What makes you think you're so different?'

He looks scornful and takes a cigarette pack out of his khaki jacket. 'See this? These are Serbian cigarettes. Over there," he says, gesturing out the window," they smoke Croatian cigarettes.'

'But they're both cigarettes, right?'

'Foreigners don't understand anything.' He shrugs and resumes cleaning his Zastovo machine pistol.

But the question I've asked bothers him, so a couple of minutes later he tosses the weapon on the bunk between us and says, 'Look; here's how it is. Those Croats, they think they're better than us. They want to be the gentlemen. Think they're fancy Europeans. I'll tell you something. We're all just Balkan shit.' (1999, pp. 35–6)

Ignatieff delights in this exchange: for at one point the Serb claims that the difference is obvious, then cannot find much difference other than the Croats think they are different *and* better, and lastly consigns both Serbs and Croats to the Balkans, that time immemorial Other of Europe.

Othering in the Ardoyne: at holy cross school

The policewomen wear black Balaclava hats covering their heads and faces: their eyes looking through slits, their dark militaristic uniforms sinister, sadomasochistic like fetish dolls. Little girls, their hands clasped tightly in their mothers', hurry between the rows of police. In the background the full armoury of the British Army looking strangely absurd in a working-class street. There is cursing, swearing, heckling all the way (last week they threw plastic bags full of urine); the girls look at the ground, the mothers hurry on. Most disturbing of all is the hecklers shouting at the girls, working-class women – mums themselves, no doubt, whose greatest treasure is their children, girls just like this. Last week, I am told, a Bishop from the south of England came over to join the march, he broke down in tears before the end. 'Kill the nits before they grow into lice!' Unbelievable … Unbelievable, it is like the films of the civil rights marches but without any differences of skin colour. I can't tell the accents apart, neither can they I dare say, they have to ask what school you went to – whether you're Séan or John. It is like a savage satire on prejudice.

Later that day I talk to a community worker who lives on what is drolly called the Peace Line. His house backing onto the Protestant area of North Belfast. Identical houses, small back yards facing small back yards; the housing on each side adequate, a good public provision, tidy and well cared for. Last week someone threw

a pipe bomb into his back yard. It didn't go off but he is fearful for his little girl and doesn't let her play outside any more. He knows the old lady in the house behind his on the other side of the line. They get on alright – last week he helped her look for her cat.

That night I sit at the bar with a Guinness in my hand in the little pub-come-hotel where I am staying near Queens University – far away from the Ardoyne. A secular area, I think, away from the troubles. The kindly faced Irishman behind the bar tells rambling cat and dog stories. He asks me to sign the visitor's book. 'W.S.' he asks, 'what does that stand for?': 'William Stewart Young' I say (Jock is my nickname). He smiles. Later he begins to regale me with stories of Catholics with enormous families living on welfare. He rants on about his own parodied version of the underclass. It is as if he had totally changed. I suddenly realise that he has classified me as a Prod (after all, what could be more Protestant than Billy Stewart) – a fellow member of his tribe. Here I am a lifelong card-carrying atheist being classified by a bigot as a co-religionist whether I like it or not. In a society of binaries you have to be on one side or the other.

The turn to the dark side

'Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged.

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1953, p. 16)

I have taken, of course, extreme examples, the horrors of the Serb–Croat War, the idiocies of communal hatreds in Belfast as well, as elsewhere in this book, the pathways to terrorist and the inter-ethnic riots of the Northern English towns. The day-to-day interactions in the city are not, of course, at all usually like that. But nor are they the relationships of 'slightly engaged strangers'. The anomic subway carriage, the urban street of disconnected strangers, are permeated by relationships of class, race, gender and age – often hidden, wishfully repressed, yet thinly concealed. The decisions of urban life, say the choice of school or neighbourhood, is fraught with tensions: the thin patina of rational choice all so frequently overlays the undersurge of avoidance. They are mediated by narratives of inclusion and exclusion. All sorts of tensions haunt the everyday world: erupting with regularity – the violence of race, of gender, of class and of youth, the slow riot of crime and violence, of insult and disrespect, dog the official visions of

calm and consensus. Georg Simmel, in his famous article 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' depicts the reserve the distance of the urban dweller, but then notes: 'Indeed, if I do not deceive myself, the inner aspect of this outer reserve is not only indifference but more often than we are aware, it is a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion which will break into hatred and right at the moment of a closer contact, however caused.' (1950, p. 275). I have tried to ground this repulsion, this uneasiness in the city in wider social processes; it is not so arbitrary as Simmel makes out nor as inevitable as de Beauvoir maintains yet, as I will argue shortly, it is only one side of things – only a fragment of the contradiction. I want to argue that this paradox of a search for identity in community when organic community is failing and whose failure to provide tradition and embeddedness is a core reason for the search for identity, is not nearly as cataclysmic as either Sennett or Hobsbawm would have it. In part this is because they cannot envisage the notions of association and trust outside of the image of the face-to-face, organic community. A key part of this is the emergence of virtual realities, of mediated relationships as a major source of personal narrative and social experience.

But first of all let us look a little critically at the idealisation of organic communities.

The fallacy of privileging community

Iris Marian Young has been one of the most ardent advocates of urban life as an ideal and, at the same time, effective critic of the privileging of the organic community:

> theorists of community privilege face-to-face relations because they conceive them as *immediate*. Immediacy is better than mediation because immediate relations have the purity and security longed for in the Rousseauist dream: we are transparent to one another, purely copresent in the same time and space, close enough to touch, and nothing comes between us to obstruct our vision of one another.
>
> This ideal of the immediate copresence of subjects, however, is a metaphysical illusion. Even a face-to-face relation between two people is mediated by voice and gesture, spacing and temporality. As soon as a third person enters the interaction the possibility arises of the relation between the first two being mediated through the third, and so on. The mediation of relations among persons by the speech and actions of other persons is a fundamental condition of sociality. The richness, creativity, diversity, and potential of a society expand with growth in the scope and means of its media, linking persons across time and distance. (1990, p. 233)

She has no doubt about the oppressive nature of many relationships in modern urban societies and the real dangers of the city nor that the closest relationships are those of immediate intimates. But the city in its anonymity allows deviance, freedom to develop (of which more later), its difference offers a frisson of excitement and entertainment, its access to such a huge bulk of people via the mediation of telephone and mass transit allows for the creation of vibrant new communities of difference. Frank Webster puts this well:

We have emerged from a world of neighbours and entered what has increasingly become one of strangers. Here we have the old theme in social science of a shift from *community* (crudely, the familiar, interpersonal and village-centred life of pre-industrialism) to *associations* which involve the mixing of people unknown to one another save in specific ways such as bus conductor, shop assistant, and newsvendor (crudely, the urban-oriented way of life of the modern). Ever since at least Simmel we have appreciated how disorienting and also often liberating the transfer from closed community to a world of strangers can be. The city may fragment and depersonalise, but in doing so it can also release one from the strictures of village life. with the shift towards town life comes about a decline in personal observation by neighbours and, accompanying this, a weakening of the power of community controls that are exercised on an interpersonal basis. Entering urban-industrial life from a country existence one is freed from the intrusions of local gossip, of face-to-face interactions, from close scrutiny of one's everyday behaviour by neighbours. … By the same token, in the urban realm one can readily choose freedom, to be as private as one likes, to mix with others on one's own terms, to indulge in the exotic without fear of reprimand, to be anonymous … (1995, pp. 56–7).

The breakdown of the organic community, the deterritorialisation of the local, is, on the face of it, an immediate gain in terms of personal freedom. Freed from the constraints of control of the organic community people become more free to change. Narrow chauvinisms, conceptions of masculinity rooted to industrial plant and local pub, respectabilities which were once policed by gossip and sanctioning all crumble.

It is conventional, particularly in liberal political philosophy, to think of that which is public as good and that which is private as concealed and possibly reprehensible. But such liberalism which sees freedom as bringing private problems into the light of public debate, however commendable, forgets the sociology of resistance and subterfuge (see Fraser, 1997). For the public world, whether it is the local community or the wider polity, consists for the powerless of distinctly unequal partners and fellow citizens who can be potentially both censorious and coercive. Youth culture, for example, would be moribund and conformist, if it did not learn to manoeuvre the restrictions of family by the device of deviance and half truth. Likewise from the black diaspora (see Gilroy, 1993) to the gay community (see Plummer, 1995) subcultures develop in the freedom of the urban landscape

and spread into a virtual community of mass media and cultural artefact. The privacy, therefore provided by the late modern city permits the exercise of freedom – it is surely more possible, here, to develop genuine identity and sense of self than in the stifling atmosphere of the organic community?

Enter virtual reality: elsewhere in the east end

It is nearing Christmas, I am at a dinner party late evening in East London, in Dalston E8. Everyone is talking about issues of the day: reality TV, the war; an elegant 1860s Victorian house in this gentrified enclave deep in working-class Hackney. I make an excuse, go out to get some fresh air. Wander towards London Fields and notice that I am a few hundred yards from the mythical setting of the soap opera <u>EastEnders</u> with its million is of viewers a night. It is not actually filmed here, of course, but miles away in Elstree, Hertfordshire, but this is its spatial point of inspiration. I notice a pub on the corner, the temptation is irresistible: step in and sample a real slice of Cockney life.

There are about 12 or 13 people in the saloon, it is quiet, traditional, unchanged completely unlike the dim lights and neon of the city bars two miles down the road in Hoxton. The barman, Australian I think by his accent, serves me a pint: he is neither friendly nor unfriendly, halfway through his shift. I turn to look across the bar and wonderful coincidence: <u>EastEnders</u> is on the television, the console just above the heads of the seated viewers. Nobody is talking to each other except for two bar flies in the front: eyes are on the television, people are seated separately, a couple sit together silently watching the screen.

After the episode people began talking, I was struck by the fact that people seemed to know more about the characters of EastEnders than they did about their neighbours. Indeed, they knew more about the lives of the actual actors for that matter. It was not that they did not know each other, but rather this knowledge was shared between them and it was, in a way, more intense. I began to think about being bemused at the extent of the public grief at the funeral of Lady Di ten years previously and thinking how they probably cried more over her than, say, the decease of their Aunt Lilly. This was, I now realised, because they knew more – or at least thought they knew more – about Lady Di than they did about their Aunt Lilly.

How does one interpret this? Some dystopians, such as Jeremy Seabrook (1984) in his *Idea of Neighbourhood* (and in this case he talks about the soap opera *Coronation Street*) see it as a frozen unreality which gives us continuity, a shadow community which generates reassurance for a substance now departed and with the working class now cast as atomised spectators. Others more optimistically (not surprisingly), like Mal Young (Head of Drama Services for the BBC) in his 1999 Hugh Weldon Memorial Lecture, claims:

As real life communities, and the traditional family group has deconstructed, so our reliance on the virtual communities of soap has become more important in our lives. The TV audience may be going through massive changes but the soaps are the sole remaining shared experience.

Now I do not think that this is true and indeed, when Anthony Giddens writes that 'in the sense of an embedded affinity to place community has indeed largely been destroyed' (1991, p. 250), he is exaggerating a trend which may be true of some places and some people – at least for part of their lifetime – but it is not a generalisation that can hold its ground. Indeed let me talk of personal experience: I was happily writing about the death of community at least in terms of postcode and contemplating the fact that my circle of friends lived across London or indeed across the world when our son Joseph, then 5, entered primary school. In the subsequent months I found that I could no longer walk down the street without encountering numerous fellow parents and sharing their anxieties with regards to local schools and community. Three years later we moved to Brooklyn and I was surprised to find that all my generalisations about anomie and living in large cities were based on my experience of London. Community may be dead if one thinks of Lowry's Salford, with matchstick workers clustering around factory and neighbourhood, but community and identification with neighbourhood is far from dead, albeit patchy and attenuated.

Stars, celebrities: guiding narratives for a shifting world

But let us pause for a minute to examine the role of these virtual reference groups. The soap operas are the most intimate: they provide narratives for a late modern world. They are multicultural,and multilayered here is the single mother, the small businessman, the couple growing old, the villain, the lad gone wrong, the couple living on the edge – they deliver a host of narratives which are followed by millions. They have the continuity of a nineteenth century serialised novel – say Charles Dickens or Thomas Hardy – but the audience is much less an observer, the story much less certain, the characters less rounded, yet they are easy to enter into, to identify with. In a world of tenuous identities, fictional mundane narratives as tentative and hesitantly written as reality have a great attraction. But the soaps also make stars: and contribute to the myriad of sources that celebrity springs from: sport, music, television presenters, the movies, the world of fashion and at times even weather presenters. There is something innovative about celebrity. The role of these new stars is not merely to shine, they do not simply glisten, they are there to guide. They are not just part of aspiration, but sources of narrative. As such they become important points of orientation. Of course, the reference groups of next door neighbour, colleague at work,

fellow-parent at school do not disappear, but such reference points are now, as I have suggested, more chaotic: they no longer present themselves as if in serried ranks arrayed for comparison. They have become more horizontal, more jumbled. They have become supplemented with the new reference group of celebrity which has, as I touched upon in Chapter 3, several defining features. It is a focal point of intense interest where the life narrative is followed as a point of reference rather than an object of adulation. And, just as the underclass, as I have documented, provides a guiding narrative from below, a negative orientation point, the celebrity provides one from above: a point of fantasy and identification The celebrity epitomises the new dream of expressivity, a job which carries with it personal development and realisation, where wealth is a platform for individual take off and future projects rather than a successful end in itself. It has a universal purchase, celebrity cuts across audiences of class and indeed very frequently the boundaries of the nation state. It is remarkably democratic, not just in the backgrounds of those called to celebrity but in the talents which brought them there. Some are immensely gifted, some are famous for being famous, some are just like us but had a lucky break: the kid with the drum kit in the right place, the catchy tune that struck in everyone's mind, the actor who stumbled into the movies,. Everyone should have 15 minutes of fame, said Warhol, famously, in his manifesto for an expressive democracy. They are our delegates (by virtue of their class, gender, age and race) *our* representatives in the spotlight. They are democratic in their relationship with their fans and their fans with them. Laurence Friedman re-tells the tale about Mae West. She was being interviewed in a restaurant and a man came up to interrupt and spoke to her very familiarly. When he left, the interviewer asked who he was and she told him she had simply no idea. "He sounded as if he knew you", the interviewer persisted. "They all do dear", she responded. (1999, p. 31). Their narrative is open to us, followed by us, parallel to ours: the same but, of course, very different. Finally and, needless to say, the birth of Big Brother and reality TV is a logical conclusion of such a notion of the democratic celebrity.

The Cronus effect and broken narratives

If images of the underclass represent narratives of individual failure and failed communities, those of celebrity carry with them tales of dreams realised, individuals fulfilled, ideal communities, beautiful lifestyles. *Or at least they should …* A while back (1981) I coined the phrase 'the nemesis effect' for the way in which the media portray deviants as inevitably getting their come-uppance, that their dissolute lives are seen as inevitably leading to misery. A little later I was toying with the parallel phenomenon of how

the media stalks and character-assassinates celebrities. Thus precisely the people they put on a pedestal as beacons for us all are very frequently portrayed as blowing it all, of achieving their own nemesis. I called this tentatively the Cronus effect. That is, we destroy those that we give birth to. I noted at the time that this was a recent phenomenon. It didn't happen at the time with J.F. Kennedy, despite his methyl amphetamine and his whores, it didn't happen with Elvis despite his gargantuan eating and his pharmacopoeic appetite for drugs, it did with Clinton despite the comparative minorness of his sexual peccadillo and it happens every day to Kate Moss. Every move they make is watched, from the slightest sign of flab on the beach, the illicit smooch in the club, the line of cocaine in the toilet. No wonder the stars wear dark glasses. But I was not sure of the reasons for this narrative of decline so strangely paralleling that of the underclass and the deviant at the bottom of the pile. But now it seems to be much clearer.

The paradox of adulation and *schadenfreude*, a perverse desire for emulation yet delight in the fall of the object of desire needs no recourse to some speculative psychology say of thnatos and Narcissus. Rather it lies in the structural position that celebrity finds itself in. For late modernity has upped the *ante* of surveillance and obsession. Think for one moment the problems of walking down the street, entering the restaurant – all eyes upon you, never being incognito – worse being a walking script, a narrative for others which is detached from you yet which others feel they know intimately. Think of the problem of making friends. Think of wealth beyond scarcity: the homes in London, New York, the South of France. Imagine the card that Elton John sent to John Lennon on Lennon's 40th birthday:

> Imagine six apartments,
> it isn't hard to do.
> One is full of fur coats,
> the other's full of shoes

Durkheim, in *Suicide* (1970 [1887]), famously talks of the sickness of infinity, the remorseless anomie at the top of society, 'and the search for nameless sensations'. It is no wonder that hard drugs such as heroin which cocoon and insulate from the outside world become so attractive. Just think of the paradox of Bob Dylan, a master of personal invention and reinvention, a man who started off in rock and roll, playing Fats Domino and Buddy Holly, reinvents himself as a latter-day Woody Guthrie and then metamorphoses into an underground hero, shades of Gregory and Allen Ginsberg. Think of the great betrayal, Dylan being taken up in the 1960s by so many round the globe as a stellar narrative, an artist of constancy, and emblem of all that is progressive and forthright, going electric and rescinding on stage during the 1966 tour. The linear songs of struggle and progress becoming replaced by

the elliptical and the disjointed from *Only a Pawn in their Game* to *Visions of Joanna*, the stout certainty and direction of the acoustic guitar by the electric scmech of the Yamaha. Then at the Manchester concert, the shout of 'Judas' from the audience so graphically depicted in C. P. Lee's *Like the Night* (1998): the howl of personal betrayal at a narrative broken. Indeed in *Chronicles* (2004) Dylan describes his anguish at being cast in the role of leader, of representing the zeitgeist: for rather like something out of *the Life of Brian*, the counter-culture pursued him climbing over his roof in Woodstock, demonstrators parading up and down outside his house in New York City asking 'the conscience of a generation' to lead them somewhere. His attempt to break the narrative that he had become borders on the hilarious: he records an LP of extremely bland tunes entitling it *Self-Portrait*, he visits Israel and pretends to be a Zionist, he perpetually circles the globe on tour, Moby Bob, destroying his legend, a narrative breaker: generating more devotion, anxiety and scorn than any singer of his age …

The extraordinary rise of celebrity is a product of the search for narrative: it is propelled by the ideal of expressivity and self-development, the First World dream, it is fuelled by the insecurities of work, community, family. And the paradox is that celebrity, like many of the other strategies in the portfolio of guiding narratives, is a thing of fragility and brittleness.

The deterritorialisation of community and the rise of the virtual

Numerous cultural commentators have noted the fashion in which the late modern community has lost its mooring in the locale – in the coincidence of the social and the spatial. Thus Mike Tomlinson (1999) talks of its 'deterritorialisation', while John Thompson (1995) refers to the notion of 'despatialised commonality' and, perhaps a little more elegantly – as we shall see – Joshua Meyrowitz (1989) talks of 'the Generalised Elsewhere' and 'the erosion of space'. Important here is the way in which people through the various media can share experiences and identity despite the separation of physical distance. This is not to deny locality, people after all must live somewhere, but it is to point to the diminution and transformation of the local community and the rise of the virtual community.

John Thompson usefully classifies social interaction into three sorts:

1. Face-to-face interaction: the dialogical basis of the traditional community.
2. Mediated Interaction: which is two-way and dialogical like face-to-face interaction but occurs over space and time by telephone and e-mail.
3. Mediated Quasi-Interaction: the conventional mass media which is monological, yet where there is audience selection, interpretation and interaction. (Thompson, 1995, p. 85)

What is new is the rapid and perhaps revolutionary developments in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century of the second two. Let us note that mobile telephone companies are presently the fastest growing firms and that e-mail communication has, in a short space of time, become part of everyday life. But even before this: the old fashioned landline telephone has had a major impact on people's lives. Thus Barry Wellman and other social network analysts have long pointed to the way in which social technology has liberated people from dependence on spatial locality. Thus, he argues that it makes more sense to perceive of *personal* communities and networks rather than communities of neighbourhood (Wellman, 1982). Indeed as Meyrowitz wryly comments: "access to nonlocal people is now, via the telephone, often faster and simpler than access to physical neighbors." (1989, p. 331). It is now very easy for *anywhere* to be *elsewhere*. At its most banal you never need be alone for lunch, on a more profound level you are no longer dominated by the culture of the locale physically around you, you continuously link back to people like you, whether they are or not physically located in one place. It allows people to connect up horizontally in a disembedded world, it is an aid to a new and closer embeddedness, a Spiderman's web of support in urban structures which now seem flimsy and phantasmagorical.

Elsewhere in an elevator, john jay college, october 2004

I am in an elevator in college, a student stands beside me with heavy headphones: a tiny, tinny, crackly sound of rap is all that can be heard. He stands, incongruously with a bandana and low slung baggy hip hop jeans, a cell-phone in his hand peering mesmerically at the text; wherever he is, he is not here, in fact his social bearings are fixed as anywhere but here. He is elsewhere back in the hood, back in the burbs – all of the places that the college represents an exit from. He punches automatically the lift buttons, there is no response: he is in an up elevator and wants to go down. He comes to … looks around, for the first time he takes cognizance of the other two people in the lift: relaxes, readjusts his phones. My companion is a black man, extremely tall, a basketball instructor – looks at me in anguish and amusement, shrugs his shoulders and gets out at the sixth floor.

The rise of multi-media and the uninvited guest

Furthermore within the more traditional mass media the rise of multi-media and the vast expansion of choice in radio and television allows the development of niche audiences and subcultures (see McRobbie and Thornton, 1995). Indeed the mass media takes up a surprisingly larger and larger proportion of people's lives. Such avid consumption should not be

viewed so alarmingly, however, for as David Morley (1986) showed in his studies of television audiences: the television provides topics of conversation for those who, often very intermittently, watch it. The serried family ranks, mum, dad, two children and the dog, dutifully (and quietly) watching television in the post-war period has been replaced by the visual flaneuer, the bricollager and the disrespectful. The audience now has conversation which sometimes includes the television, the audience is not simply subject to a monologue from the box.

Similarly Taylor and Mullan (1986) in their witty study of television viewing, *Uninvited Guests*, deny any passivity in viewing patterns noting that it may have been true in the past that television was watched with reverence and respect, that it entranced the audience. But with multiple channels and pre-recorded tapes this is hardly true today. Moreover, people used the television to make sense of their lives. Thus the characters on soap operas such as *Coronation Street* and *Brookside* were talked about as real people, their triumphs and vicissitudes related to the everyday life of the viewers. To this extent despite the title, they are *invited guests*: they are talked about as real but they can be shown the door and turned off at will.

So, on one side the local is penetrated by the global in terms of distant events, consumer choices, values (such as those emphasising lifestyle choice, feminism, meritocracy, etc.), on the other, virtual communities develop on the back of the local which incorporate images, reference groups, favoured characters and celebrities from a global repertoire and which involve both mass media and mediated interaction. Indeed as Ulrich Beck puts it:

> the persons we experience as significant others are no longer restricted to those we know from direct encounters within a local community. Some persons, or perhaps even media-constructed and reproducible homunculi, serve people as mirrors of themselves. (2000, p. 156)

From generalised other to generalised elsewhere

From a neuroscience perspective we are all divided and discontinuous. The mental processes underlying our sense of self – feelings, thoughts, memories – are scattered through different zones of the brain. There is no special point of convergence. No cockpit of the soul. No soul-pilot. They come together in a work of fiction. A human being is a story-telling machine. The self is a story.

(Paul Broks, 2003, p. 41)

Thus Paul Broks, in his brilliant and disturbing study of human consciousness *Into the Silent Land*, describes his search for a site of the soul, for a physiological locale to base the self. But he cannot find one: instead he

unwittingly moves towards the position of a humanistic sociology. That the self is a storyteller, that the most profoundly human activity is creating stories about oneself. The sociologist, John Thompson, influenced greatly by hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism, arrives at a similar position:

To recount to ourselves or others who we are is to retell the narratives – which are continuously modified in the process of retelling – of how we got to where we are and of where we are going from here. We are all the unofficial biographers of ourselves, for it is only by constructing a story, however loosely strung together, that we are able to form a sense of who we are and of what our future may be. (1995, p. 210)

But he then points to the fact that in a world of highly mediated communication the whole foundation of the self becomes totally changed:

If we adopt this general approach to the nature of the self, then we can see that the development of communication media has had a profound impact on the process of self-formation. Prior to the development of the media, the symbolic materials employed by most individuals for the purposes of self-formation were acquired in contexts of face-to-face interaction …

   These various conditions are altered fundamentally by the development of communication media. The process of self-formation becomes increasingly dependent on access to mediated forms of communication – both printed and, subsequently, electronically mediated forms. Local knowledge is supplemented by, and increasingly displaced by, new forms of non-local knowledge which are fixed in a material substratum, reproduced technically and transmitted via the media. (ibid., p. 211)

The notion of who you are becomes constructed on a much wider stage in late modernity. To understand this one must look at the late modern self and its reference points. Joshua Meyrowitz (1989), in a seminal article, develops the work of Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead on the generalised other. The self according to the symbolic interactionist tradition, is given reality by its reflections in the significant others around us. Cooley calls this the looking glass self, Mead 'the generalized other – we see ourselves through our perceptions of others' perceptions of us. Now the relative decline in community and rise in the media has:

extended the generalized other so that those who we perceive as significant others are no longer only the people we experience in face-to-face interaction within the community. People from other communities and localities also serve as self-mirrors. The 'mediated generalized other' weakens (but surely does not eliminate) our dependence on locality and on people in it for a sense of self. (p. 327)

Let me expand this a little further, for the series of other reference points against which we judge ourselves fairly or unfairly treated in comparison with others, widen out as does our knowledge of what is fairness and

unfairness and its distribution. Reference groups are much less attached to locality in late modernity, for instance, as Bottoms and Wiles (1997, p. 351) point out, the culture of Australia or the west coast of America can be as 'real' to British youth as anything else. Similarly Donna Gaines, in her wonderful book *Teenage Wasteland* (1998), focusing on youth in Bergenfield New Jersey, has kids who are simultaneously into Led Zeplin, Lynyrd Skynard, Slayer and The Dead. They are in Britain and America, retro and today.

I want to develop this concept of elsewhere in the context of our new multimediated world by first of all differentiating between horizontal and vertical media. The horizontal media – such as e-mail and the mobile 'phone – allow the individual to link back to his friends, family and community wherever he or she is. They allow us to traverse the city yet to be elsewhere back in our community. In a real sense these examples of mediated interaction to use John Thompson's term *compensate* for the dislocation of the organic community, the erosion of culture and space. They continue to provide the traditional generalised other – and at times even more intense than the locally focused community – after all, what for example could be more controlling than the mobile 'phone? You can never easily get away – you are always in earshot – and presumably with technological advance being what it is will soon always be in eyeshot.

By vertical media I refer to those media such as television, radio, the press and more recently, the internet, which carry both factual and fictional stories and which are much more monological. Here a generalised elsewhere occurs which provides a whole series of guiding narratives and orientation points outside of one's own directly known community. I have already talked of the guiding narratives of celebrity and of underclass, of reference groups and comparison points. But most importantly these stories carry with them vocabularies of motive (see C. Wright Mills, 1940), unending techniques of neutralisation which provide reasons for and justifications for action, whether social or anti-social, charitable or predatory.

All of these reference points can of course shore up any particular community, but it can also do this by creating social divisiveness and misperception between communities. For, as we have seen, many of these narratives are ones of othering, allocating virtues and vices, making sharp lines of delineation and essentialising difference. But, as we shall see, there is also a progressive side to the vertical media for whether by net-surfing or channel hopping they have the potential of exposing the individual to a pluralism of views. This elsewhere has a *porosity* whereas the horizontal elsewhere of mobile 'phone and e-mail serves rather to maintain the boundaries of ingroup, the continuities of community.

How does this relate to order and disorder? What has happened is that people's notion of their self (and hence their sense of shame, of losing self-respect when certain norms are transgressed), the actual norms

themselves – the informal mores which structure behaviour, the feelings of discontent which provide the wellsprings of criminality and transgression and the vocabularies of motive and justifying circumstances, all to a greater extent than ever before are a product of discourses which are of a global rather than a local nature. Relative deprivation, for example, is global in its comparison points: aspirations jump frontiers. For example, discourses about crime (including notions of fear, risk and danger) are a free floating commodity of a world media, the informal mores of everyday life (including the introduction of new and more or less stringent definitions of deviance) are constituted within public cultures which are global in their reach.

From community to public sphere

Having discarded the notion of a series of organic communities either actually in existence or, as in the communitarian dream, to be greatly regenerated and refurbished, as nostalgic and impractical can we, therefore, substitute a series of virtual communities with some territorial basis – a multiculturalism of a late modern sort? Thus we have the gay community, the Sikh community, the Irish community, the black community, women, etc. Such a formulation is a currency of contemporary politics and the media: events are publicly examined and debated by turning to representatives of various 'communities'. There can be no doubt that such a formulation has some foundation. A whole series of what Nancy Fraser calls 'subaltern public spheres' occur where genuine debates occur and which can by careful argument and presentation influence the debate within the more general public sphere. A key example which Fraser gives, is that of second wave feminism which as a new social movement has elaborated extensive networks, journals, activist groups and discussion centres. Furthermore, such activism has produced wide debate in the wider public sphere over a whole series of issues concerned with crimes against women: sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence etc., many of which has resulted in changes in public attitudes and a broad raft of legislation. But it would be wrong to see such sections of the population as late modern equivalents of the organic community.

Nancy Fraser in her essay 'Sex, Lies and the Public Sphere' discusses the 1991 struggle over the confirmation of Clarence Thomas as an associate justice of the US Supreme Court who was passed to be only the second African–American on the Court in US history. Thomas was accused of sexual harassment by Anita Hill, a black female law professor who had served as Thomas' assistant at the Equal Employment Commission in the 1980s. Fraser takes us through a fascinating account of the discourses surrounding

this struggle: for discourses of gender, race and class each entered the public arena as the debate developed. What became clear was that there was no clear line from women, from blacks, from the middle or working class white males. It was not that self-conscious 'communities' of a sort existed, particularly in this context of American multiculturalism, but that each divided and crossed in their alliances. A result was what Nancy Fraser called 'the fracturing of the myth of homogeneous "communities"', (1997, p. 117). As a result, she continues, it would be better to consider:

> 'replacing the homogenizing ideological category of 'community' with the potentially more critical category of 'public' in the sense of a discursive arena for staging conflicts ... In these respects, the concept of a public differs from that of a community. 'Community' suggests a bounded and fairly homogeneous group, and it often connotes consensus. 'Public', in contrast, emphasizes discursive interaction that is in principle unbounded and open-ended, and this in turn implies a plurality of perspectives. Thus, the idea of a public, better than that of a community, can accommodate internal differences, antagonisms, and debates. (ibid., p.118 and p. 97, n.33)

Indeed we can go further than this, for the notion of distinct communities pivoted on one dimension of ethnicity, religion, gender, age, class or sexual orientation assumes some sort of miraculous uni-vocal cohesion around one human attribute of many. It is unlikely in any society, let alone those of late modernity, despite the fact that the mass media frequently makes recourse to such fictions and community 'representatives' hasten to lay claim to be their spokespersons. Take for example the frequent mission of the British press, seeking to discover the opinions of the Muslim community. What could this be? If it means Muslim background it includes those who go daily to a mosque and those who would not be seen near one. It includes Saudis and Turks and at least 20 other nationalities. It includes old people and young people, men and women, the very poor and members of the bourgeoisie. It is a glimmer in the eye of would-be spokespersons, it is a cardboard piece played decisively in the opinion columns by the media commentators. But if there is a Muslim community then surely there is a Christian community? But no, we know this is a nonsense unless we mean members of a particular church and even here witness the Anglicans. Where there deep, one might say *fundamental* divisions. As a creature of opinion polls it will give us tendencies and shadowy figures of use up to a point, but these are things constructed out of random surveys of atomised individuals – the very opposite of community.

It is, of course, slightly surprising that such a distinguished political philosopher should be surprised at finding heterogeneity of opinion. A clue

THE EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

to this is that Fraser's notion of community links to her concept of identity politics. As a political philosopher she is quite understandably concerned with political foundations rather than the more sociological notion of community incorporating actual socially interacting individuals. And here, as we have seen in Chapter 4, she is happier with well organised political identities rather than those which are below the radar of the educated public. Even here, of course, as with second wave feminism, the discovery of dissent from a given line and of a vast heterogeneity of opinion outside of the world of middle class, educated, white women was a great trauma, greatly transforming and developing debate (see Barrett, 1988).

Let us then stick with the notion of community as involving at least a base of socially interacting individuals, however varied and vertical may be their reference points, and let us take on board from Fraser that heterogeneity of opinion is the expected norm rather than a high degree of unity or cohesion of position. Indeed it is precisely the attempt to achieve such an illusory unity that fundamentalist spokespersons and community 'leaders' attempt to mobilise, the rhetoric of othering whether it is around issues of race, gender, nationality or religion.

The community in late modern times

> Organic communication, where communities communicate within themselves and then outwards, sending messages about their conflicts, oppressions and material conditions of existence, is breaking down. 'Community walls' now zigzag wildly around the urban mass. Immediate next-door neighbours may know nothing about each other's work, workplaces or wider kinships. Often they share only their postcodes. Organic communities and organic communications are slowly disappearing.
>
> (Paul Willis, 1990, p. 141).

> Now, physically bounded spaces are less significant as information is able to flow through walls and rush across great distances. As a result, *where* one is has less and less to do with what one knows or experiences. Electronic media have altered the significance of time and space for social interaction.
>
> (Joshua Meyrowitz, 1985, p. viii)

We start then from noting how the notion of 'community' has changed remarkably in late modernity but, further to this, that what takes its place is not simply a series of discrete multicultural communities with both local and virtual dimensions, which both criss-cross and are contested. The community loosens its mooring in the locality and the various public discourses no longer have any one to one relationship to a specific section of the population.

For the single entity has long gone and any notion of fixity has disappeared – there is no reified community out there to mobilise or repair, no fixed thing in need of incorporation. Nor can this situation be solved by adopting the conventional language of multiculturalism and communitarianism. Namely, that there is now a series of communities to reinvigorate and galvanise. That is to replace the fallacy of a single fixed entity with the chimera of the multiple community. None of this fully captures the fluidity and plurality of late modernity.

Let us delineate the basic features of the late modern community:

1 *Difference* It is pluralistic not just in terms of ethnicity but in terms of age, gender and class.
2 *Fragmentation, crosscutting and hybridisation*: Such a pluralism by combination of ethnicity, age, gender and class offers to create on the one hand fragmentation, on the other crosscutting alliances, e.g. gender across ethnicity and class. Furthermore such subcultures bricollage from one another creating hybrids of crossover and reinterpretation.
3 *Intensity* It is pluralistic in terms of intensity. The same locale can contain high intensity, disorganised and atomised groups. For example, single mothers around the school can create intense coherent subcultures at the same time as unemployed men can be atomistic and withdrawn.
4 *Transience* Such subcultures change over time in composition, intensity and coherence. Individual biographies are experienced as shifts backwards and forwards from a sense of embeddedness to disembeddedness.
5 *Mediated* It is highly mediated, the global penetrates the local, creating a series of virtual communities some of which are territorialised and rooted in the locale some which are considerably deterritorialised.
6 *Actuarial*: Relationships are wary and calculative because of low information about a large proportion of the 'community'.
7 *Internecine conflict* There is a heterogeneity of opinion. Wealth and status is perceived as distributed in a chaotic fashion with no clear rationale or fairness. Relative deprivation both materially and in terms of status is widespread.
8 *Reinvention* The history of the 'community/ies' is constantly reinvented and the boundaries redrawn and redrafted.

Thus gradually our concept of community becomes less territorialised, less tethered to locality, for the social and the spatial, once soldered tightly together, begin to drift apart. When we use the word we begin to speak of the black community, the Asian community, women, teenagers, the Irish. Each step less moored to any specific place. We must take on board that many of the new communities have not only a considerable non-territorial basis in terms of telephone and internet friendships but have large components where the individuals concerned have never (nor probably will ever) meet each other, have significant reference points, which cannot be underestimated, which are fictional (e.g. soap opera) or artistic

(particularly musical), and can actively create coherence and identity in their lives by reference to favourite news channels, newspapers and, indeed, newscasters. Further we begin to realise that the values of such 'communities' are rarely transmitted in a quasi-passive, traditional sense, as were those of the organic community, but are subject of constant contest and reinvention.