

Analyzing Processes of Heroization. Theories, Methods, Histories

**Editorial: Analyzing Processes of
Heroization**

Nicole Falkenhayner, Sebastian
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Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms

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Imitatio heroica

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The Radiance of the Hero

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The Hero in the Eighteenth Century

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Heroism and Modernity

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Editorial: Analyzing Processes of Heroization

Theories, Methods, Histories

The collaborative research centre SFB 948 “Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms”

Often, prominent theoretical approaches to heroism have had a universalizing outlook. Examples include the lectures of Thomas Carlyle on heroes and ‘great men’, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s work on the heroic, and the influential model of the ‘hero’s journey’ by Joseph Campbell. Campbell’s model has been used in modern media products as a template to create hero quest-narratives (such as in the case of *Star Wars*) more often than it has been used to explain the existing heroic phenomena of the past. Another more contemporary approach of this kind is “Heroism Science” (Allison et al.), which models the heroic as a template for personal growth and leadership studies. In contrast, the interdisciplinary collaborative research centre (*Sonderforschungsbereich*) SFB 948 at the University of Freiburg in Germany is interested in the differences and similarities of the multifarious forms of the heroic, their uses and relevance, as embedded in concrete cultural and historical settings. The SFB is not concerned with “the hero with a thousand faces” (Campbell); instead, we are examining the many faces of the processes of heroization in connection with embedded socio-cultural and historical practices and contexts.

This special issue introduces to the international academic community several core texts on the heroic by the SFB. Most of the core texts were originally written in German. The SFB’s full title, “Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to the Modern Day”, encapsulates its aim: since its establishment in 2012, it has brought together more than fifty scholars from the disciplines of history, literary and cultural studies, visual culture, sociology, archaeology, Islamic studies, sinology and theology – all are developing trans-disciplinary approaches to studying the heroic in the *longue durée*. The research outline of the

first funding phase (2012 to 2016) focused on historical periods, its eighteen projects investigating case studies ranging from Graeco-Roman antiquity to the early twentieth century. The sixteen projects of the second funding phase (2016 to 2020) extended the period of investigation to include the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries and also widened the cultural scope of the case studies beyond Europe and North America, notably through case studies on China and the Middle East, as well as by emphasizing trans-cultural dynamics. The results of this research are documented in a broad range of publications (see the overview at www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/en/publications/). An ongoing, collective effort is being applied to the completion of the *Compendium heroicum*, an online encyclopedia that introduces the SFB’s basic concepts and theoretical approaches, as well as important heroic phenomena from specific cultural contexts (www.compendium-heroicum.de).

On the contents and methodological approach of the study of the heroic at the SFB 948

At the SFB 948, the object of research is the heroic in its multiple representations and expressions in cultural contexts (see von den Hoff et al.). These representations and expressions are analyzed, firstly, in the contexts of historical change and transformation; secondly, in trans-cultural and transnational comparison and thirdly, focusing on their forms of construction and representation in different media. Rather than formulating a singular definition, collaborative work at the centre has developed its research strategies out of multiple heuristics. These have been developed in close conjunction with the different case studies that present themselves in the various fields in which heroic phenomena appear in different forms, in different contexts of

production and reception, and with different cultural aims (see, for example, the historical constellation around 1800 that Asch studies).

In contrast to the essentializing notion that heroes are 'just there', and that one can or must describe them in their singularity, we claim that heroic figures are the result of cultural processes of meaning-making. Instead of re-narrating the singular history of a person or fictional character-type, or studying the psychic dispositions of heroic individuals, as in social-psychological approaches (see Franco et al.), the SFB's research is focused on the processual dynamics which constitute the 'hero' as an *effect* (see Schlechtriemen), and, to a certain extent, as a cultural *affect* constellation (see Zink). Special consideration is given to the multiple constellations of actors, the dynamic boundary work that heroic figures perform in cultural contexts, and the different forms of their mediated representation. Following from this, our approach regards heroization as a socio-cultural process and aims to analyze heroic figures and phenomena in their interactional relations.

Processes of heroization are fundamentally structured by collective ascriptions. These ascriptions stand in a relationship of contiguity with aspects of Max Weber's concept of charisma (see Ebertz) as that which predicates the affective charge of heroes by a collective of admirers (see Zink) that often try to imitate their role models (see von den Hoff et al., *Imitatio*). To a large degree, heroic figures are culturally active as representations, aesthetically shaped by various media and their genres, and readable in cultural sign-systems due to the knowledge of heroizing codes, narratives and the "structures of feeling" (Williams) they afford. This prefiguration by mediatized forms, their conventions and affordances, is fundamental for the shape in which we construct and encounter the heroic in culture. Literary traditions have a far-reaching influence in the context of heroizations, travelling across and through different cultures both temporally and spatially, as well as being subject to remediations and differentiations. It has been argued, in this context, that heroes "may only exist in real life because they are pre-figured in literature" (Korte/Lethbridge 2, referring to Bohrer 942). Similar aspects concerning the aesthetic construction of heroization also pertain to the (audio) visual arts and other material cultural products (see also Falkenhayner/Korte/Bensch/Hardt).

As an entry-point of research, two main approaches have proven productive in our collaborative work on the heroic since 2012. On the one hand, research can commence at any point where male and female 'heroes' are explicitly

mentioned, or in which, in an adjective mode, a 'heroic deed' is invoked. On the other hand, typological approaches have also been used. In this sense, the following five features can be employed as characteristics of the heroic: 1) extraordinariness, 2) affective and moral charge, 3) autonomy and transgression, 4) agonality, and 5) a strong, human agency (see Schlechtriemen). The analysis of anti-heroes also enables the identification of various types (see Bröckling, *Negations*). Typological approaches offer the advantage that aspects and forms of the heroic can also be found even when the semantics of heroic ascriptions are not explicitly used, but their structure and type point towards contexts of heroization. Our analysis focuses on how heroic figures are constituted, constructed and received within specific cultural, historical and mediated contexts. This approach resonates with Max Jones' proposal to investigate heroic phenomena "as sites within which we can find evidence of the cultural beliefs, social practices, political structures and economic systems of the past" (Jones 439). Additionally, this approach significantly broadens Jones' approach due to the large number of case studies investigated in the work of the research centre, and its breadth concerning different cultures and time periods – from antiquity to the contemporary globalized and mediatized cultures of the present, and from Europe and North America to the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and Asia. This approach aims to establish what Wittgenstein termed 'family resemblances' (32) of different processes of heroizations (as opposed to clearly differentiated categorizations of the processes). The approach was also influenced in part by the dynamics of the distribution of agency discussed in the "ideal typological field" that Bernard Giesen set up in his 2004 monograph *Triumph and Trauma*, in which he establishes the types of the triumphant and the tragic hero, the perpetrator and the victim. Giesen's concepts proved useful for discussing aspects of the agency distribution concerning heroes and their audiences, and the heroes' dependence on the ambiguous relationship with their admirers, who can turn against them. Similar to Jones' approach, Giesen describes heroes as "cultural imaginations of identity" (1) which have to be "enacted" in social practices (see Gölz). As such constructions of and for group identities and differences, approaches from the sociological study of "boundary work" (see Lamont/Molnár) have also been influential in establishing aspects of the cultural work that heroes and heroizations perform (see Schlechtriemen).

Not least, the analysis not only has to include the textual (narrative and rhetorical) forms by

which heroic figures are shaped. Research must take into account the canonized forms of the representation of the heroic in other forms of media, especially visual and audiovisual media (see Korte/Falkenhayner/Hardt/Bensch). This might include conventions of representation such as the *hero shot* or the *radiance* of the hero (see Gelz). This approach also enables the comparison of different liminal figures and their social embedding such as the victim, the martyr, and the hero within their social context (see Gölz).

Notes on the collection of texts

All texts have been conceived in the context of the research conducted at the SFB. The choice of texts was guided by addressing more general aspects of processes of heroizations, beyond singular case studies. The article by Gölz has been written (in English) for the present issue, while the article by Bröckling (*Modernity*) is an abridged translation of a chapter in a book that will appear in 2020. All other texts have previously been published in German in different contexts, hence their heterogeneity in terms of their length and form (see the overview of first publications). By minimalizing editorial changes, we wish to document the different phases of research at the SFB. It was also a prerequisite that the collected texts had not been published previously in English. Major English-language publications have developed from research work at the centre, including the edited volumes *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800* (Korte/Lethbridge), *Tracing the Heroic through Gender* (Hauck et al.) and *Heroism as a Global Phenomenon in Contemporary Culture* (Korte/Wendt/Falkenhayner).

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Overview of articles and places of first publication

Ralf von den Hoff, Ronald G. Asch, Achim Aurnhammer, Ulrich Bröckling, Barbara Korte, Jörn Leonhard, and Birgit Studt. "Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to Modernity. Foundational Concepts of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 948."	"Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen: Transformationen und Konjunkturen von der Antike bis zur Moderne. Konzeptionelle Ausgangspunkte des Sonderforschungsbereichs 948." <i>helden. heroes. héros</i> 1.1 (2013): 7-14. DOI 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2013/01/03.
Tobias Schlechtriemen. "The Hero as an Effect. Boundary Work in Processes of Heroization."	"Der Held als Effekt. Boundary work in Heroisierungsprozessen." <i>Berliner Debatte Initial</i> 29.1 (2018): 106-119.
Olmo Gölz. "The Imaginary Field of the Heroic. On the Contention between Heroes, Martyrs, Victims and Villains in Collective Memory."	First published here.
Ulrich Bröckling. "Negations of the Heroic – A Typological Essay."	"Negationen des Heroischen. Ein typologischer Versuch." <i>helden. heroes. héros</i> 3.1 (2015): 9-13. DOI 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/0102.
Michael N. Ebertz. "Charisma and the Heroic."	"Charisma und 'das Heroische'." <i>helden. heroes. héros</i> 4.2 (2016): 5-16. DOI 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2016/02/01.
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Ralf von den Hoff, Anna Schreurs-Morét, Christina Posselt-Kuhli, Hans W. Hubert, and Felix Heinzer. "Imitatio heroica. On the Impact of a Cultural Phenomenon."	"Imitatio Heroica. Zur Reichweite eines kulturellen Phänomens." <i>Imitatio heroica. Heldenangleichung im Bildnis</i> (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 1). Ed. Ralf von den Hoff, Felix Heinzer, Hans W. Hubert, and Anna Schreurs-Morét. Würzburg: Ergon, 2015: 9-33.
Andreas Gelz. "The Radiance of the Hero: Representations of the Heroic in French Literature from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century."	"Der Glanz des Helden – Darstellungsformen des Heroischen in der französischen Literatur vom 17.–19. Jahrhundert." <i>Französisch Heute</i> 49.2 (2018): 5-13.
Ronald G. Asch. "The Hero in the Eighteenth Century: Critique and Transformation."	"Der Held im 18. Jahrhundert zwischen Kritik und Transformation." Ronald G. Asch. <i>Herbst des Helden</i> (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 3). Würzburg: Ergon, 2016: 107-134.
Ulrich Bröckling. "Heroism and Modernity."	Abridged and revised translation of: <i>Postheroische Helden. Ein Zeitbild</i> , Chapter 3: <i>Heroismus und Moderne</i> . Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020: 77-119.

Ralf von den Hoff, Ronald G. Asch, Achim Aurnhammer, Ulrich Bröckling, Barbara Korte, Jörn Leonhard, Birgit Studt

Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms

Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to Modernity
Foundational Concepts of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 948*

From antiquity to the present time, “from Achilles to Zidane” (so the title of a recent exhibition; Falliu/Tourett),¹ heroes have represented key elements of the cultural imaginary and the symbolic knowledge system of communities with remarkable persistence. The heroic plays a role in the understanding of cultural systems of meaning both in their *longue durée* and in their specific historical, social, and cultural manifestations and conditions. Recently, it has often been claimed that, after the disastrous two world wars, a ‘post-heroic’ age has begun, especially in Western European societies, and most prominently in Germany.² In current discussions, scepticism towards and even a rejection of heroism predominate (Bohrer et al.); at the same time, the need for heroic leaders seems to persist, sometimes emerges anew, and is often taken for granted.³ But how can we explain these concurrent positions?

“Whenever ‘heroes’ are admired, the question arises of ‘who is this needed by, and why’” wrote Jürgen Habermas in 2002 (178; see Metz/Seeßlen). Not surprisingly, Habermas made this statement in reaction to the events of September 11, 2001. Indeed, 9/11 produced more controversial heroizations – from the attackers, to the passengers of flight United Airlines 93, up to the fire fighters – along cultural, political and religious lines of conflict than any other event in the recent past. Leaving such momentous international

events aside, heroizations are on the rise again, and this requires a historical perspective. Why and how do communities rely on heroes to negotiate their identities and controversies? Why has this been occurring for such a long time, and why does it still occur today? Since July 2012, the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 948 “Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms” has been exploring these and other questions, which we consider fundamental to the understanding of the conflicts between and cohesion of modern and pre-modern societies. The SFB’s project groups focus on this theme in history, visual culture, literature, music and sociology.⁴

Because of the current relevance of the topic, most recent academic studies on heroes have been geared towards the present – certainly more so than towards historical research.⁵ Often, recent studies do not consider periods before the nineteenth century, focusing their research instead on the time of grand ideologies, when national and war heroes were created, rediscovered and instrumentalized. This perspective is thus in danger of falling prey to retrospective causality, which works predominantly from results and tends to ignore older traditions and transformations, although the older traditions have as much impact on the present as current circumstances do. That the heroic still persists today seems to suggest a need for transhistorical, anthropological explanations for ideas about heroes, and hence a need for a more essentialist approach.⁶ However, relying on typologies runs the risk of overlooking the multi-faceted, competing, interdependent, and in parts contradictory concepts of the heroic and their historical and cultural manifestations. Studies that have primarily focused on periods in the distant past show a fascination for individual heroic figures and the history of their reception. However, these studies do not provide explanations for the foundation and figuration of these heroes in the context of their different systems of meaning, temporal and experiential spaces, or explanations for their construction as objects of veneration or

* This text summarizes the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the work of the SFB 948 as laid out by the authors for the group’s successful application for funding in 2011/12. It has not been further updated since that time. This is neither an account of the state of research, nor a presentation of current findings. Rather, it is an outline of the project’s starting points, which require critical review and adjustment throughout the course of research. The works cited and endnotes have therefore been kept to a minimum.

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rejection by different communities. More recent studies have begun to fill this gap by providing different perspectives – these, along with many productive individual research projects, provides a foundation for the SFB 948 to build upon.⁷ Nevertheless, the scarcity of comprehensive, comparative, transdisciplinary and synthetic research remains apparent.

This research situation can be best addressed by reviewing the historical foundations that are decisive for today's heroic discourses, beginning with antiquity and its wide-reaching impact, as a way of demonstrating continuities and discontinuities of traditions in the engagement with the heroic from a historical distance. This means that heroes must be studied as personified concentrations of social and cultural norm and value systems, and that their heroizations must be analyzed as complex processes involving different actors and media. The SFB 948 thus attempts to analyze heroic transformations, trends, forms and functions within certain communities from a *longue durée* perspective using a transdisciplinary approach (see Mittelstraß's *Transdisziplinarität* and *Methodische Transdisziplinarität*) paying special attention to ruptures, concurrent rivalries and formative historical traditions. The goal of the SFB 948 is to discover historical explanations for – and achieve a theoretical understanding of – the heroic from antiquity to the present.

Definition of terms

Heroic figure: The heroic manifests itself in heroic figures, meaning it is a cultural construct that others ascribe to someone, or which can be self-ascribed. Because it is contingent on specific cultures, groups and periods, an essentialist definition does not apply. Nevertheless, heroes do require a definitional description – for heuristic reasons, if nothing else. We therefore regard heroic figures primarily as persons who are real or fictional, living or dead, who are designated and/or presented as heroes, Helden, héros etc., to whom heroic characteristics are ascribed, including the qualities of agonality and extraordinariness and whose actions are often transgressive. A heroic figure is represented in different media (artistic and otherwise), has a charismatic effect and is admired by a community of followers (Weber 654-661). However, heroic figures also have fundamental physical and emotional qualities in common with their admirers, including the ability to act and suffer. According to this basic preliminary definition, the heroic is therefore a network of relations. As further,

inconsistent and infrequent attributes – such as self-sacrifice, death, honour and glory – can be added in different combinations to this definition, we believe that the heroic can be best described as a network of “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein §66). The definition of the heroic only truly becomes clear in relation to and in distinction from other forms of exceptionalism – the superhuman, the outstanding, the exemplary, the divine, the holy, the generally admired, everyday people or the ‘anti-hero’. The heroic can therefore only be explained in the context of this complex interplay of interwoven family resemblances, which, in individual cases, requires detailed elaboration in terms of their historical contingency as well as their persistence.

Heroizations: The qualities ascribed to heroic figures are variable. The process of attribution, in which different actors are involved and through which the figure becomes a “*Gestalt*-like focal point” (Plessner 48) of a community, is what we refer to as *heroization*. Heroizations occur and are stabilized through social and communicative processes. These processes require a mediated representation and are affectively and normatively charged. The specific forms of the processes of heroization depend on the actors involved and their motivations. Another aspect is the question of how and why the heroic is used as an attribute, and how it takes effect in the first place. It is precisely these processes that we are investigating at the SFB 948, along with the complementary phenomena of de-heroizations, contra-heroizations and divinizations.

Heroisms: The SFB 948 relies on the processes of heroization as a basis for focusing on the interaction between heroic figures and the communities that create or appropriate them and that orientate themselves towards heroic models. We define a community's orientation towards heroic models as ‘heroism’. Unlike the everyday and, often, also the academic usage of the term (see Huizinga; Faber; Naumann), our definition does not describe the sphere of the heroic in general or the exaggeration of heroic forms. Instead, we understand heroism as a heuristic term describing a conventional system of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “internalized patterns” (143) with heroic connotations. By understanding heroism as a “socialized subjectivity” (ibid.), we are able to relate it to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus.

Heroisms point to the process through which individuals and/or collectives (usually in the contexts of certain social classes, or distinct political, religious and intellectual movements) acquire self-assurance by imitating and appropriating

heroic actions and behaviours. By analyzing different kinds of heroic self-fashioning, we are able to interpret certain gender roles or public presentations of rulers and elites as an *imitatio heroica* that serves as a marker of social distinction. In the history of Europe since antiquity, certain heroisms have defined the self-understanding, self-portrayal, and imagination of social groups – especially those in power – sometimes in distinction from each other, sometimes in reference to one another. The orientation towards heroes as human models is extremely important for the formation of heroisms as habitus patterns.

Transformations and conjunctures:[†] At the SFB 948, we analyze heroizations and heroisms based on systematic historicization, by which we mean political, social, cultural and media contexts. We rely on systematic historicization to explore transformations of the heroic and its manifestations, concepts and models. This means the research of dynamic processes played out between actors and traditions.⁸ Systematic historicization also allows us to study those periods when certain heroic patterns peak or undergo change, or to investigate the heroic in general over the *longue durée*. Which elements of the heroic are effective in the long run in the context of the family resemblances mentioned above? Which features compete with one another, which are replaced and which reappear? Which change, and in what way, and which are appropriated in what kind of form? All of these questions are addressed by the project groups of the SFB 948.

Theoretical starting points

Heroic figures, heroizations, and heroisms are characterized not only by their social, religious, political and aesthetic functions, but also by mediated expression, symbolization, and imaginative potential. Because heroizations and heroisms develop and unfold across tension-filled relationships and social negotiations, it is our goal at the SFB 948 to explore these constitutive elements in order to better understand the heroic. Therefore, the theoretical foundations of our research programme consist of the three elements listed below. The analytical potential of each will be tested in detail in the course of our working process and must

[†] Editors' note: In using 'conjuncture' as an abstract concept classifying duration, the authors follow Fernand Braudel, who distinguishes 'events', 'conjunctures', and the '*longue durée*'. Cf. Braudel 29-30; Santamaria/Bailey 78-83.

be developed further and adjusted with regard to the different perspectives of the individual project groups within the SFB 948.

Figurations from a social and personal perspective: In order to conduct a more precise analysis of those social processes that are constitutive for heroizations and heroisms, we rely on the term "figuration" as coined by Norbert Elias (139-145). Elias uses this concept as a way of replacing the juxtaposition between individual and society with a framework of interdependencies. We apply a modified version of Elias's notion of figuration in our analysis in order to better understand the connection between the personal perspective (with regard to heroic figures) and the social perspective (with regard to the actors involved in processes of heroization and heroisms). We define the mechanics of heroization as the interaction between the social figuration of a community and the personal figuration of the heroic figure. In this context, social figuration is considered as the network of relations between the hierarchies, rules and structures of communication within a social community. Personal figuration, on the other hand, is regarded as the set of qualities belonging to the hero that are also not independent of social position. When individuals are ascribed certain expectations by their social environment, they become a personal figuration – a surface on which social norms, frameworks for action and values can be projected. When understood as personal figurations, heroic figures represent an individual, 'Gestalt-like' offer to societies, a reaction to a collective need. They 'embody' this need in a literal sense in the form of a habitus profile, which is defined concisely by their deeds.

We are thus proposing an analytical approach that delineates the process of heroization as an ideal type. The ideal type is based on the interplay between the social figuration of a community and the personal figuration of a heroic figure, in which a human figure is ascribed a heroic role in a specific social figuration. A community constructs a type of figure – this could be a traditional model, or a newly developed type – and projects its expectations, wishes and fears onto this figure, regardless of whether the hero is imaginary or historical, dead or alive. However, it is important for a social figuration that the hero's qualities are grounded in reality, enabling the community to recognize itself and its own needs.

As social figurations, heroisms thus represent a collective re-appropriation of the projections entailed in a personal figuration. Why and how certain social groups attempt to symbolize themselves and their institutional orders through

certain heroic figures is one of the key questions of this research project. It is related to the question which distinctions, interferences and transitions exist between heroes and other personal figurations – for example, political rulers, saints, martyrs, prophets, ‘grands hommes’, geniuses, victims and gods.

This model alone, however, is not sufficient to explain the special power and effect of heroic figures – let alone their appellative, transgressive as well as imaginative qualities. We thus expand on it by adding the following two initial theoretical starting points.

Symbolic character and appellative power:

Within communities, the systems and institutions of social rule are only able to gain legitimacy and survive if they are symbolized. Symbolizations can occur in different forms: for example, through pure ‘representative symbols’ such as crests or certain terms, or through ‘symbols of presence’, which represent with greater immediacy that which is absent. Symbols of presence “do not merely define a sign of something, they are themselves a reality or part of a reality that is expressed in them” (Soeffner, *Symbolische Formung* 17). These symbols of presence consist not only of rites and rituals, but also of personality and habitus types, and they take concrete form in heroic figures, among other things. In a way, symbols of presence therefore belong to the “grand symbolism” (Schlögl 26) of a society that relies on them to assure itself of its identity and set of values. Symbols serve as way of identifying an affiliation (already implicated in the meaning of the Greek word *symbolon*; see also Soeffner, *Auslegung* 184-185). According to Gehlen’s theory of institutions, they also enable relief and a certainty of what to expect, thereby providing a stabilizing effect (Gehlen 204). Heroes could be understood as figures with this kind of symbolic significance, and heroization as the constitutive processes of this symbolism.

At the same time, heroizations do not generally go uncontested, but are the object and result of hegemonic struggles. They are subject to de-heroizations and to counter-heroizations by competing groups and/or within their own group, meaning that re-evaluations can occur. It has long been assumed that heroic figures emerge especially in crises of adaptation, when social orders erode or are not yet fully established (see Hegel 236-252; 340-341). This is especially the case when collective systems of interpretation – such as morals, beliefs, or gender norms – fail to offer a convincing range of meanings in reaction to changed situations. As symbols of presence (in the sense mentioned above), heroic figures

‘embody’ contradictions in such a way that they simultaneously and paradoxically represent “an isolated contradiction and the process of its harmonization” (Soeffner, *Symbolische Formung* 37). They allow “the dissonances of contradiction to be transformed into aesthetic consonances” in an especially effective way (Soeffner, *Protosoziologische Überlegungen* 58). From a terminological perspective, it is difficult to establish a single unifying term for this aesthetic effect; rather, the reference to heroes aims to “revoke the privilege of terms and arguments” (Soeffner, *Auslegung* 163). Like other symbols referring to normative orders, heroic deeds and heroic figures bestow “their own language on what cannot be conveyed argumentatively or expressed discursively” (Soeffner, *Protosoziologische Überlegungen* 60).

Unlike many other symbolizations, heroes also oscillate between acting as human individuals and being ascribed superhuman achievement, between confounding and stabilizing social order, between exceptionalism and the transgression or reassurance of norms. Within this suggestive field of tension, heroes possess a notable ability to motivate, inspire and lend meaning to the behaviour and actions of people. They encourage imitation or counteraction. One reason for this is that heroes are also human individuals with their own conflicts and emotions. The suggestive presence of heroes who are ‘Gestalt-like’ and active can suspend questions of meaning and reduce complexity because their presence prompts actions that no longer require reflection (Langbein 158; 161-163). In this way, orientation towards heroic figures achieves the status of ultimate justification. According to Max Weber, this represents the very charismatic effect that causes people to follow them (Weber 140; 654-661).⁹ The symbolic power of heroic figures is connected with the especially appellative character of their appearance and actions, which they acquire through their physicality and an often pronounced emotionality. Both their auratic presence and their performativity, which focuses strongly on public appearance, are important for their effectiveness; as a result, the special charisma of heroic figures is also an aspect of their medialization.

The constitution of the heroic by media and communication:

The heroic only actually becomes present in a society through its representation and communication via different media. In other words, “heroes need to be talked about” (Münkler 742). Following approaches of media theory, we propose that medialization develops a dynamic of its own in the composition of the meaning of the heroic (see, for example,

Fohrmann/Schüttpelz). The representation of heroic figures in different media has an institutionalizing power. We therefore analyze the mediality of the heroic and its foundation in social and personal figurations as mutually dependent factors in the creation of meaning.

For the analysis of the media-related conditions and communicative processes of heroization and heroisms, additional theoretical elements are required. The semiotics of culture, which understands and describes cultures as 'systems of semiotic systems',¹⁰ focuses on those agencies, cultural memories and archives, and processes of communication that are involved in heroizations within a society. In this context, codes function as rule-based connections between meanings and medialized forms of articulation. Within a given society, ideas of the heroic are coded by cultural conventions in a certain way and at a certain time; they can be passed down to following generations as traditions, which might then be transformed (see, for example, Nyíri). However, codes of the heroic do not exist in conceptual isolation; instead, they create overarching systems of reference, or discursive orders and 'languages of the heroic', which also belong to our scope of research.¹¹

Additionally, it is essential for the (impact of the) heroic that meanings emerge outside of linguistic and conceptual codes and become part of languages that are not clearly 'interpretable'. The appellative and affective character and the 'radiance' of heroic figures is based on such semantic excess, after all. It is certainly characteristic of the ability of the heroic to create meaning that it oscillates between conceptual comprehensibility and the ineffable (Fischer-Lichte 186). Heroes make an impact through 'embodiment' and through their 'aura'. Their influence unfolds through their immediate 'presence' (see also Gumbrecht; Scherer) and aesthetic intensity, rather than through conceptual signification. It is therefore one of our research goals to determine the nature of the intersection between media – the communicative constitution of the heroic – and the interpretation of heroic figures as 'symbols of presence' as outlined here. The heroic is essentially performatively constructed, in two ways: First, in the *actual performance* of a deed, and second, in the staging of the performance for (and by) others. As habitus patterns, heroisms are especially pronounced in staging the heroic; they are what allows communities to orientate themselves towards heroes.

Equally fundamental for the semiotics and performance of the heroic is the question of mediality and media contributions to the formation of meaning.¹² Our research project also works

on the assumption that different media can influence which qualities of the heroic may be represented poignantly (and to what degree), while also determining how heroic patterns are communicated and passed on in social contexts – one example being the comparison between verbal, pictorial and musical heroic narratives. This is why we incorporate a multitude of media and intermedia contexts, and this allows us to rely on a broad understanding of media. This understanding also includes the above-mentioned performative 'embodiment' of the heroic in heroic figures – in other words, the mediality of people and the body as a medium with its own forms of articulation (Faulstich 30-31).

The formative potential of the mediality of the heroic is especially pronounced in imaginative and artistic representations. Such representations, which constitute an important field of our investigation, not only include media of social self-observation and cultural self-interpretation (Bachmann-Medick); they also have the potential to remodel notions of the heroic or imagine them in a completely new way. As such, they make a significant contribution to transformations of heroizations and heroisms.

Because heroes are discussed in media, or 'narrated' in another way, thereby constituting their connection to cultural reality in the first place, we analyze these media and communicative processes according to Paul Ricoeur's model of a threefold (figurative) mimesis (Ricoeur 87-129). Ricoeur describes narrative practice as the connection between the three stages of the lifeworld context, formation and appropriation of the narrative. This corresponds to the following three forms of figuration: *Prefiguration* is the narrative's fundamental rootedness in the real world, real experiences and real conditions; *configuration* is the experiential formation of the narrative as a whole; and *re-figuration* describes the narrative's connection to, and appropriation in, the recipient's world. In our research thus far, the processes of heroization and heroisms, as well as the formation and appropriation of heroic figures, can be fundamentally described in this manner. It remains to be determined how sufficiently Ricoeur's model maps the notion of the social and personal figuration of the heroic as outlined above, and whether the semiotics of culture, hermeneutics and the social meaning of the heroic can thus be brought together at yet another intersection.

Goals of the collaborative research centre

With this in mind, the overall goals of the SFB 948 are as follows:

1. We understand and study the heroic as a socially contingent phenomenon that undergoes various historical transformations in a multitude of different experiential spaces. Heroizations and heroisms are the result of complex interactions between social and personal figurations, which is why we analyze their impact on the legitimization, stabilization and destabilization of social order and value systems. It is therefore important to investigate actors and their motivations and rivalries; the significance of categories of gender, generations, social status and class; as well as media and practices of appropriation.

2. We understand heroizations and heroisms as constitutive for the comprehension of systems of cultural meaning-making. The planned research of the semantics, forms of expression and cultural memories and archives of these systems will contribute to our understanding of how social communities function, cohere and erode. This is also true regarding the relationship of the hero to other figures, which are often similar – gods, saints, anti-heroes and negative heroes – in terms of their typologization, codes and their mediating function between normativity and exceptionality.

3. The heroic and its appropriations are categorically formulated in media and communication. This mediality, with its intrinsic dynamic and logic, resulting in a surplus of meaning and imaginative potential, is responsible for the particular effectiveness and suggestiveness of the heroic in cultures. The SFB 948 explores the formation, appropriation, traditionalization, and transformation of heroic models. We also study the unique potential and performativity of these models, as well as their aesthetics, their suggestive and emotional power. Most importantly, we focus on instances where the media-communicative and social contingency of the heroic intersect and the consequences of this intersection.

4. As phenomena of the *longue durée*, heroizations and heroisms must be analyzed and explained in a diachronic manner from antiquity to the present, i.e. through their transformation processes and conjunctures. In our research, we focus on long-term historical developments, cycles, and breaks; on heroic models and their semantic and media-related changes; as well as on the historical contexts of these phenomena

and the relationship between traditions and new configurations.

5. Different social, political, media and cultural influences result in phenomena and functional modes of heroizations and heroisms whose differences go beyond their location in different historical eras. Their specific manifestations should therefore be investigated not only diachronically, but also synchronically in comparison to different experiential spaces and competing concepts of the heroic. With this comparative perspective – which also incorporates the transfer between and interconnectedness of societies, states, and communities – we ultimately aim to avoid the restriction of our research focus to a single era, society, national state, national literature, or hero, which has dominated research in the past.

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¹ See the exhibition website, accessed 28 August 2019, <http://classes.bnf.fr/heros/>.

² For example, Münkler has been an important promoter of this.

³ See Körper-Stiftung, Klonovsky, and *brand eins*. See also ZEIT Online, Schulz, Schilling for the debate from February 2013 about the “hero without victims” and medals in the ‘drone war’.

⁴ For more information about SFB 948, please visit our website at: <http://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/en/>.

⁵ See, most recently, Gerwarth, Jones, Osses, Schinkel, <http://www.helden-ausstellung.de> (accessed 28 August 2019); as well as van Marwyck, Imorde/Scheller, Reiling, Aurnhammer/Pfister.

⁶ For more on this, see Carlyle as well as Campbell.

⁷ See, for example, Immer/Marwyck. Allison/Goethals also offer a different approach with a focus on the present.

⁸ See Böhme, VII-IX, as outlined in SFB 644 “Transformationen der Antike”, accessed 28 August 2019, <http://www.sfb-antike.de/>.

⁹ We owe many key discussions about Max Weber’s notion of charisma to Michael N. Ebertz. See Ebertz in this special issue.

¹⁰ See, for example, Posner *Kultursemiotik* 55, and *Kultur als Zeichensystem*; as well as Robering/Seboek.

¹¹ In reference to “language of discourse”, a term coined by J. G. A. Pocock in *Concepts and Discourse* 58; see also Pocock, *Concept of a Language*.

¹² For comparisons to such positions, see, for example, Fehrmann/Linz 81-82.

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Tobias Schlechtriemen

The Hero as an Effect

Boundary Work in Processes of Heroization

Introduction

Heroes and heroines demand to be regarded as unique individuals. A deed is only considered heroic if it is singular and thus elevates the hero above the crowd. If many or even all people were able to accomplish the same feat, the achievement would instead be considered normal or mundane. Heroes have to achieve what has never been managed before, set entirely new standards, or acquire a greatness that is altogether incomparable.

It is important that the scholarly analysis of heroes and heroines should not be limited to the mere description of their uniqueness, however. The point of departure for research should therefore be the identification of heroic qualities, the comparison with other types of important cultural figures, and the analysis of their conditions of development.¹

For this purpose, I propose an analysis of processes of heroization based on a heuristic approach.² My theoretical reflections are problematizations intended to illustrate phenomena of the heroic in their specific historical and medial contexts. I use theoretical arguments as a way to shed light on certain aspects of heroization. My primary focus will be on processes of boundary drawing. Due to the constraints of this publication, I will focus on a few representative examples. However, this heuristic method can be applied to all forms of heroic figures: both those regarded as fictional, and those who are regarded as real heroes and heroines.³ Heroic figures need to be represented in some way and have to be socially recognised. Accordingly, they only exist within social communication, stories and other medial representations. These various

forms of representation may then be analyzed by means of the heuristics suggested here. The analytical perspective thus shifts away from the heroized individual and toward the processes by which heroes with their respective qualities are generated. I will begin by outlining the approach used by Thomas Carlyle in which the individual hero serves as the starting point. This model will serve as a contrast for my proposed research approach to processes of heroization using a heuristic method to typologize heroic figures according to five main qualities. By turning the perspective of analysis around, I explore the processes of boundary drawing that generate these heroic qualities. Finally, I will summarize the different forms of “boundary work” (Lamont 11) and discuss possible uses for this approach in a more general context.

The perspective of previous research on heroes

Scholarly engagement with heroes and heroines has a long tradition. In most cases, the focus has been on the heroized individual. A single hero – or much less commonly, a heroine – or several heroes were the subject of analysis, yet research nevertheless focused exclusively on their heroic qualities and individual behaviour.

Thomas Carlyle’s famous study *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* from 1841 is especially representative of this and was very influential in the nineteenth century (von Zimmermann 138-143). In his book, Carlyle presents an unusual line-up of heroes, spanning from Odin, Mohammed, Dante, and Shakespeare, to Luther and Rousseau, all the way to Cromwell and Napoleon, all of whom he refers to as “Great Men” (Carlyle 5).⁴ In contrast to war heroes, Carlyle’s great men distinguished themselves primarily through intellectual achievements. They were innovators, founders, and rulers, and they served the common good during their lifetimes.⁵

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Carlyle states,

In all epochs of the world's history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable saviour of his epoch; – the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt. (21-22)

For Carlyle, great men are inspired by nature, or by God (21). Even from a historical perspective, they appear to have conjured their revolutionary ideas out of thin air. Their motivation cannot be traced back to current social circumstances or to historical development.

Unlike Hegel, Carlyle does not have a teleological view of history, but instead regards it as a cycle of ascending and declining in which each era can be distinguished according to how much it appreciated its heroes (60).⁶ However, he argues that the actual subjects of historiography are the great men themselves: “The History of the world is but the Biography of great men” (42).

As a result, Carlyle focuses only on the few great men who in his view have proven their greatness over the centuries and whose lives and extraordinary achievements therefore deserve describing. Hence, his collection of lectures mostly concerns heroes' biographies. Once in a while, Carlyle addresses the common qualities shared by all of his heroes, and he works with the fundamental assumption that all great men are made of the same stuff (60). He attributes honesty, keen insight, and a resilience to corruption as key characteristics.⁷ However, Carlyle does not explore these shared qualities further; rather, he is more interested in each great man's *special* qualities, and not in a comparative perspective. Understanding history from Carlyle's perspective means studying great men, for history is written around and explained by great men and their extraordinary deeds.

Typological approaches and their application

While typological approaches explore the qualities of a heroic figure, they do so with the goal of analysing these *in comparison* to other figures. The goal here is to establish the criteria for determining whether someone is a hero or heroine or not and to distinguish the hero as a type, as for example opposed to a martyr or a saint.

Accordingly, Bernhard Giesen developed “an ideal typological field” (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 7) in which he distinguishes between four figures: the triumphant hero, the tragic hero,

the perpetrator and the victim. While the triumphant hero and the perpetrator are both active subjects who master whatever life decides to throw at them, the tragic hero and the victim suffer as a result of the state of the world. What distinguishes the triumphant hero from the perpetrator is social recognition: the triumphant hero – and sometimes the tragic hero and the victim – receives recognition from society, while the perpetrator does not. All four figures represent “cultural imaginations of identity” (1) that do not exist on their own, but which must be remembered, told, and “enacted” in social practices (10). Because they are mediators for the sacred, they are also liminal figures.

Giesen is not primarily interested in individual heroic figures, but in the identification of the typological qualities that define a heroic figure in general.⁸ Typologization is always connected to a field of other figures that define each other mutually. Heroic figures should thus be regarded as embodying their culture and as figures through which fundamental social and sometimes anthropological boundary experiences (like birth and death) are addressed and processed. By looking at how certain cultural figures are represented, we can determine what social roles are available to them, how these are judged by society, what boundary experiences are articulated, and how these are dealt with. However, Giesen tells us very little about the *processes* that lead to a person or a figure becoming a hero. Instead, he refers to the general adoration of the heroes through their followers and the necessity of maintaining a social distance to a heroized figure (19).

Although Giesen regards the figures he describes as cultural constructs, he occasionally appears to believe they can be found somewhere ‘out there’. His anthropological references and hypotheses enhance this impression. In contrast, a typology can be understood as a heuristic method if it is based on Weber's understanding of ‘ideal-types’, which he defines as artificially condensed figures that may not exist in real society, but which enable us to focus, clarify, and explore certain aspects through scientific analysis (Weber 89-112). A typology in this sense thus means applying a method of study that is well aware of its own limitations to grasp all aspects of a phenomenon.

In its emphasis of certain qualities, the typological method maintains a distance to actual historical and social reality. Nevertheless, there is still a proximity to the issues being addressed. This is why Ulrich Bröckling locates typologies on “a middle ground between definitions (or the theoretical systematizations which build upon

them) on one side, and exempla or case studies on the other” (Bröckling, *Negations* 42). The difficulties presented by typological approaches consist in their synchronic ordering of semantic fields and their inability to capture historical processes. Laid out as a typological set, these approaches also suggest a sense of completeness that they cannot achieve due to their heuristic character. Furthermore, they imply a certain clarity that often does not do justice to the many simultaneous meanings of reality, because there is “a place for everything in the table, but only *one* place” (43, emphasis in original).

I argue that the typological approach is an indispensable first step to analyzing processes of heroization. When conducting research, it is important to establish the point of departure of the investigation. We can therefore use typology to determine whether a figure is heroized or not. For this purpose, I am proposing five heuristic qualities that generally define a heroic figure.⁹ These characteristics can help us to identify heroic figures in different socio-cultural contexts – even when they are not explicitly designated as such. Another advantage of the typological approach I describe here is that it allows us to compare several heroic figures with each other and to other important cultural figures as well.

According to a typology of characteristic qualities, heroic figures may be described as (1) *extraordinary*, (2) *autonomous and transgressive*, (3) *ethically and affectively charged*, (4) *agonistic*, and (5) *having a high degree of agency*. Heroines and heroes are exceptional figures, far beyond average – and thus extraordinary. They measure their own behaviour by their own laws while transgressing other laws, becoming transgressive figures in the process. They exert influence over others, display an appellative character and are therefore affectively charged. They are combative, i.e. willing to risk their lives; and furthermore, there can be no hero without a heroic *deed* – without him or her having to make an active appearance, even if their only act is to wait heroically.

Because the method outlined here allows us to identify and typologically define heroic figures in fictional and non-fictional texts, the focus of analysis is no longer exclusively on describing the particular features of an individual figure. Instead, we can determine both the common and the distinguishing features of heroes and other cultural figures through comparative analysis. However, the underlying perspective of this analysis is still directed at the figures and their qualities.

The hero as an effect: Constitutive processes of culture

Instead of concentrating on heroic figures and their characteristics, I will focus on the *processes* that produce these qualities. In other words, I will analyze heroes and their specific qualities as the effect of material and socio-cultural constitutive processes, which can be studied from a social science and cultural studies perspective. I will explore the different forms of boundary drawing that play an essential role within these processes using the approaches of Andrew Abbott and Thomas Nail, both of whom work with a reversal of the scholarly perspective.

Abbott and Nail attribute the development of social entities to processes of boundary drawing. They do not regard these boundaries as secondary phenomena deriving from existing social entities, however. Quite the opposite: Social entities such as ‘nation’ or ‘society’ are formed through social processes of boundary work. According to Nail,

a border seems to be something created not only by the societies that divide them within and from one another, but something that is required for the very existence of society itself as ‘a delimited social field’ in the first place. In this sense, the border is both constitutive and constituted by society. (4)

Delimited societies are thus not the initial but the final or intermediary stage of social processes. Although created by boundary drawing themselves, they have an effect on other boundaries once they have achieved a certain level of stability.

The processuality of the social does not mean, however, that everything fixed dissolves and there are no longer any perceivable distinctions. If this were the case, we would no longer have any boundaries (Abbott 859). Instead, what we are discussing are the processes of stabilization and destabilization. The existence and persistence of social entities and institutions only need explaining if they have not always been there. We can therefore analyze the factors that stabilize this or that institution – or that bring them down – according to the “conditions under which social entities can be said to come into or leave existence” (ibid.).

Because boundaries emerge between different social actors and sometimes dissolve again, these processes are *relational*. This approach therefore marks a shift in the analysis from a static setting to *processes*, which leads to a consistently relational and processual perspective.

Using a heuristic method based on boundary drawing allows more participants to become involved who are constantly changing. In the following, I will explore how each of the five heroic qualities evolve in more detail.¹⁰ I will moreover focus on what questions arise when we reverse the perspective of analysis and what role boundary work plays in this.¹¹

Extraordinariness: Extraordinariness is a quality that is usually ascribed to heroes and heroines, because they *are* extraordinary and stand for something special. If we disregard this essentialist point of view and take the reverse perspective, however, we can demonstrate how the heroic figure's extraordinariness develops within the context of a specific constellation of figures in the hero's story. Generally, narratives combine a few elements from a complex and diverse world in a way that gives them meaning within the story (Koschorke 29). Although there are comparatively few figures in narratives, they play a decisive role and mutually affect each other.

The constellation of figures in heroic narratives is primarily organized around the opposition between the heroic figure and the opponent. While their polarity clearly distinguishes these two figures as adversaries, both are important for the dynamic of the story. This is because heroes prove their extraordinariness primarily through their struggle with a strong counterpart or by facing a great challenge. That is why Batman 'needs' his Joker. After all, the extraordinariness of heroes partly is indebted to the strength and power of their adversaries.¹² This dichotomy therefore generates tension within the constellation of heroic figures.

A second case of boundary drawing can be found between the heroic figure and all the other figures, who are not considered extraordinary. As an exceptional individual figure, the hero stands apart from the uniform masses: Average people act only as a backdrop against which the heroic figure can stand out. The uniformity of the collective and the extraordinariness of the individual figure are mutually constitutive.

If we focus on these cases of boundary drawing, it becomes clear that there is not just one central figure in the representations of heroes and heroines, but an entire constellation of figures, and that their qualities mutually constitute each other.¹³ The hero and the antagonist are distinguished from one another through positive-versus-negative value judgements. A clear distinction is also drawn between the individual and the masses, but here in the sense that a sharply defined, coherent, unified figure contrasts with the faceless, featureless many.¹⁴

We began this analysis of the heroic figure's quality of extraordinariness by looking at how that quality develops in relation to the constellation of figures internal to the narration. However, we can also approach heroes through the attributes assigned to them by a community of admirers. This demonstrates that extraordinariness – like all five qualities mentioned – is not permanent, but subject to a temporal dynamic. Considering this aspect in particular, we may apprehend the quality of extraordinariness via Weber's concept of charisma: Charisma can be attributed to, but also dissociated from an individual (Ebertz). For a person to have a charismatic effect, a social distance must exist between them and their supporters that is the result of social practices of boundary drawing (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 19; Zink 61). Too much proximity would lead to the decline of charisma. Hegel aptly describes this in the figure of the servant, who takes off the master's boots, helps him into bed and makes a mental note that he prefers to drink champagne – all the while overlooking his heroic greatness (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 47).¹⁵

Autonomy and transgressivity: The qualities of autonomy and transgressivity also rely on fundamental boundary work that is decisive for the structure of meaning – or in Jurij Lotman's words, for the 'space' of a text as a semiotic unit (Lotman 229-244). According to Lotman, the boundary separates two semantic fields, or two worlds, from each other. For example, one field can be characterized by such images as house, home, friends, the living, and so forth, while the other is characterized by the forest, the Other, the enemy and the dead (230). The essential quality of the boundary according to Lotman is that it is impenetrable and it defines the world of ordinary people, with their habits, norms and laws. Heroes, on the other hand, are characterized by the fact that they alone can cross this boundary. They are autonomous and follow their own rules, they transgress established norms, and they are able to do things that 'normal' people cannot do – even to the ultimate consequence of sacrificing their own lives if need be.

The transgression is often followed by a turning point, during which it becomes clear whether the boundary crossing will be regarded as unlawful and hence be penalized, or whether it will be heroized and acknowledged as a heroic deed.¹⁶ For example, El Cid surprises the enemy Moor troops when they arrive at the harbour without waiting for the king's orders, ultimately securing victory. After the event, it is unclear whether the king will punish him for insubordination or reward him for his audacity (Corneille 9-118; Willis

149-151). At this point, it is equally possible that the transgression will be considered a crime or a deed that is heroized and admired, although these readings are mutually exclusive. As in the optical rabbit-duck illusion, the bistable image, both variations are embedded within *one* situation. However, they can only be evaluated in terms of either/or, because we cannot see both images in the illusion at the same time (Binder 17-18), and the crossing of the boundary must be either penalized, or it must be rewarded. Societies rely on these boundary transgressions as a way to debate what they consider legal, which moral goals are worth striving for (even if they are currently illegal), and what goals are not.

From the socio-cultural perspective of boundary research, it is worth pointing out that the essence of a heroic figure is constituted through the *act* of crossing a boundary. This boundary not only fundamentally structures the semantic field of the text; the movements of figures along this boundary also essentially constitute the plot.¹⁷ The hero or heroine transgresses the boundary in a key event, but they do not remain on the other side; instead, they return as a more mature person due to this experience.¹⁸ Thus, this dynamic can only be described if we pay attention to the boundary work, and focus on the processuality of events. While movement primarily refers to the transgression of the boundary by the heroic figure, the constitution of the boundary is itself a process. Where the boundary is drawn, how it is maintained – by what social practices and material arrangements –, and who is allowed to cross it all constitutes “*bordering*” (Nail 9) as a process of boundary work.

Ethical and affective charge: Because heroes stand out, the masses can project their collective values and affects onto them. The process of projection and attribution is similar to the scapegoat dynamics described by René Girard (1987), although here qualities are attributed to heroic figures that are positive (and not negative). According to Girard’s theory, groups ‘solve’ social conflicts by projecting all negative aspects onto the excluded figure of a scapegoat:

But suddenly, the opposition of everyone against everyone else is replaced by the opposition of all against one. Where previously there had been a chaotic ensemble of particular conflicts, there is now the simplicity of a single conflict: the entire community on one side, and on the other, the victim. (Girard 24)¹⁹

In the process of heroization, positive collective attributes are concentrated on a *single* distinguished figure.²⁰ In Girard’s theory of the scapegoat, however, this mechanism explains the emergence of a figure who is charged with extremely negative emotions. What is interesting is that he ascribes an integrative function to the scapegoat: The individual members of the group no longer turn on each other, but are united against one person. This ‘organizing’ of affects simplifies the situation, because the many different conflicts no longer overlap, but all become aligned as fundamental opposition instead.

This concentration of attributes is what generates an affective charge in the hero. Émile Durkheim describes this process as the collective attribution of a ‘religious respect’:

Let a man capture its [society’s] imagination and seem to embody its principal aspirations as well as the means to fulfill them, and this man will be set apart and considered nearly divine. (Durkheim 160; Zink 58)

As a result of this setting apart and collective projection, the heroic figure is transformed into an ideal image that people want to imitate, while unfolding an emotional and appealing effect toward which it is difficult to remain neutral. Because of this charge, heroic figures are regarded as serving an integrative function that stabilizes the collective.²¹

Thanks to the heroic figures, a social group is able to thus articulate and discuss their wishes, values and aspirations.²² In this sense, heroes and heroines represent a “*Gestalt-like focal point*” of social self-understanding (Plessner, quoted in von den Hoff et al. 10). Ethical questions play an important role here, because heroes are presented as active and hence as encouraging people to identify with them and let their own actions be guided by them (for more on the different forms of identification, see Jauß). Furthermore, because they are ethically charged, heroes are not only models as well as identification figures; they invite distinction and rejection. They are controversial, and the heroes of one group are the traitors of another (Giesen, *Ausnahme* 87).

Due to these collective identifications and counter-identifications, heroic figures contribute to the formation of identity and hence to boundary drawing between social groups or societies (Lamont/Molnár). The heroic figure is an affectively and ethically charged core of social relationships. The hero’s affective and ethical charge is the result of collective attributions (which are

based on the distinction between the individual and the masses) and itself enables identifications and imitations that initiate the drawing of new social boundaries.

Agonality: Heroes acquire an agonistic quality through the tension between themselves and their counterpart, or opponent – in other words, through the central relationship in the constellation of heroic figures described above. The juxtaposition between these bipolar figures occurs in a semantic field that is structured by a process of *polarization*. At the end of this process, two sides are opposed and clearly separated from one another. Polarization and boundary drawing thus go hand in hand.

Abbott helps us to understand better how a boundary develops, and how a collective identity emerges on one side.²³ The process begins with the de facto, local, and partial differences that develop into a distinct boundary of a social entity (Abbott 863):

The making of an entity is simply the connecting up of these local oppositions and differences into a single whole that has a quality which I shall call 'thingness'. (870)

The constitution of a social entity is thus the result of events and social interactions that ultimately form what Stephen Mennell calls "we-images" (Mennell 176).²⁴ The 'we' is usually opposed by a form of the 'other' that is not equal, meaning

boundaries not only create groups; they also potentially produce inequality because they are an essential medium through which individuals acquire status, monopolize resources, ward off threats, or legitimate their social advantages. (Lamont 12)

Boundary work and the formation of social entities are thus ethically and affectively charged. This is because, in the hero's story, not only the others are juxtaposed with the 'we', but the entire situation is agonistically charged.²⁵ The simplification process that characterizes the scapegoat mechanism can also be found here in the intensified, dichotomous relationship with what is outside oneself: The 'we-image' is opposed by a group marked as the 'enemy' from which it is separated by a clear boundary. In place of complex and interwoven interactions, we have a polar and binary formation of camps.

The core model of this political constellation is the duel. On the character level, heroes fight for the community by facing their enemies, who represent the cause of the opposing group. Each

community identifies with its heroes accordingly.

The hero or heroine can also prove his or her ability to fight in sports or hunting – in other words, in competition with their peers:

Competing and striving for honour are connected with the identity of the hero and define their nature, and in a society in which the ostentatious presentation of the individual's status to the outside world has such great significance as in Homeric society, the competitive element is understandably omnipresent. (Horn 51-52)

The primary reference in the argument here, however, is war.²⁶ Heroes move in a dichotomous field in which they risk their lives. They do not calculate; they go all in.

In the context of post-heroic societies, however, there are different areas in which agonistic behaviour can be tested.²⁷ Hegel already refers to the impossibility of achieving heroic deeds in societies that are democratically organized by a division of labour (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 182-194). Although fighting is invoked only metaphorically, war, fight and battle remain important references in the descriptions of heroic figures. The processes of polarization, boundary drawing and affective charge set the stage where the heroic action takes place, where heroes risk their lives for the community in combat with their adversaries. The action and the structure of this field thus bring out the fighting qualities of the heroic figure.

A high degree of agency: Heroes are ascribed a high degree of agency through the story's narrative form which revolves around them as protagonists (for more on agency, see Schlechtriemen, *Heroic Agency*). In the narrative, they are presented as the centre of action, as the ones who have a decisive influence on the course of events through their decisions and actions.

When such a heroic story is based on historical facts, another boundary is needed in order to attribute the quality of special agency to the hero – which does not in equal measure apply to fictional literary narratives. This is done for the purpose of the *exclusion* or omission of others. A situation in which diverse actors were involved, all of whom had an impact on events in their own way, is thus transformed into the hero's story in which the action centres around a single human being. This process of concentrating the action on one person can be revealed in the way a story is passed down and becomes part of tradition, thus resulting in a heroic narrative. Agency is concentrated on and attributed to the key figure,

while the contribution of all other figures involved appears less important in comparison, or it is omitted altogether.²⁸

In the course of the story's transformation from the original complex network of actors into the story of the hero, people and objects gradually become more distinguished. However, of the original mixed constellation, only the active human agent remains in the end. The role of objects, technology and so forth is also kept distinct and separate from the acting person,²⁹ because an essential part of heroization consists of the hero or heroine being presented as a human being with a face, a gender and a name – as someone who takes action and is the main subject of stories about their lives. Therefore, what happens here is a process of anthropomorphization in which the hero takes on a human form and acquires human features.

This process of concentrating agency also depends on different kinds of media to enhance the attribution of various active qualities to a single human actor at the centre of the story. Essentially, there are no heroes or heroines that are not represented in some form or other. Each medium has its own way of conveying heroic stories (Jäger). One example is the many monuments dedicated to heroes. A main feature of these monuments is the elevation of a heroic figure, meaning a beholder must look up to see them. Monuments are also often placed in special areas within a city and are sometimes sites of festive gatherings, creating a performative connection to the present. Each medium offers its own specific possibilities of representation, including limiting the focus to the heroic figure, while others who were involved are omitted.

The role of different media in heroization is often overlooked, however. The media doing the representing are not part of what is represented.³⁰ This is an important aspect, because the role of the actors in the events and the influence of the media in conveying a story can be reconstructed in the analysis of heroization processes. When exploring processes of heroization, we can thus trace how the dynamics of concentration and omission have developed in the course of a story's being passing down and how these have resulted in the heroic figure acquiring strong agency. This method allows us to understand the process in which the hero or heroine becomes a human being. Similarly, after heroization has taken place, omissions can be 'reversed', and the other actors involved in the original events can be reconstructed, along with the media-specific translations.

Conclusion

By focusing on constitutive processes, we are able to determine how different kinds of boundary drawing are involved in the creation of a hero or a heroine and his or her special qualities. Bordering and boundary work can take many forms in this context. In the first case, regarding the clearly distinguished opponents in the constellation of figures (hero and adversary) and the political identification of two collective social actors (friend and enemy) who are distinguished by a boundary, boundary work is clearly characterized by a dichotomy, or polarization. Both sides become affectively charged (one positive and the other negative), repelling each other as opposite poles. Out of a complex social constellation with mixed feelings, a simple opposition develops around which collectives can form their identities and, most importantly, their affects.³¹

The second form of boundary work is the development of a distinct figure (the heroic figure) against the backdrop of a uniform mass of people, which is another kind of contrast. This boundary does not separate two sides, but rather emphasizes the heroic figure's contours, enabling the hero to stand out from the faceless rest. While the first type of boundary drawing primarily concerns emotions and collective identifications, this form of distinction occurs in the field of perception and the attribution of qualities.

The third type of boundary work describes the act of crossing a boundary and is based on the distinction between the two worlds that structure the narrative space. Heroes' constitutive development depends on them being the only ones who can cross this otherwise insurmountable boundary and thus distinguish themselves as heroic. Therefore, drawing a boundary that structures the (narrative) space and the temporal act of crossing that boundary are closely related.

The fourth form of boundary work reveals how the hero develops certain qualities through other figures' being denied the exact same qualities. The heroic figure's agency only seems prominent if everyone else in the narrative is denied theirs. The distinction between the hero and objects, animals, technology and so forth also makes it possible to present the hero or heroine as an acting human being. Finally, the heroic figure's high degree of human agency is also the result of omitting the notable contribution of various media in generating heroic effects. In another case of simplification, out of a complex network of actors with different degrees of agency, a sole, active, human hero emerges as the protagonist of the story.³²

We have thus arrived at the opposite conclusion of our starting point – namely, Carlyle’s approach. While Carlyle analyzed the dynamics of history using great men as a basis, I have demonstrated how a hero or great man is produced as an effect of different constitutive socio-cultural processes in the first place.

The analysis of processes of heroization and boundary work is based on concentrating not just on a single individual or on a few already existing figures, but on reconstructing different *processes*, *practices* and *media effects* that generate the heroic figure from a *relational* perspective. Research in this direction could demonstrate that heroic figures are not special, isolated cases, but are embedded in far-reaching, socio-cultural dynamics that apply to many cultural figures. The approach applied to heroic figures and their development presented here could thus potentially be applied to many different cultural phenomena.

It should be noted, however, that research based on a social ontology that takes social processes or “social motion” (Nail 24) as a starting point faces a methodological problem. The formation of social entities like heroic figures cannot be predicted, and their development is difficult to observe in real time. That is why I combine a typological with a constitutive approach: Because my starting point is a social entity – heroes and their qualities – that is already stable, I use the typological approach to identify the research object. This enables us to reconstruct the development of the heroic figure (and other social entities) *retrospectively*. The argument presented here should therefore not be judged according to its predictive ability, but according to whether it can help us to gain a better understanding of the complex constitutive processes of heroic figures and the many different forms of boundary work.

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¹ I will be relying on a narrow definition of heroic figures here and will explain how they can be categorized according to types. I will therefore not discuss the broad definition of heroes, which Aristotle describes as the character (*ethos*) of a play, such as a tragedy.

² This research perspective was developed within the Collaborative Research Centre 948 “Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms” at the University of Freiburg. I owe many

suggestions and clarifications to the discussions in the SFB’s working group on theories, especially to Ulrich Bröckling.

³ Ansgar Nünning (25-27) cites a variety of textual signals suggesting either fictionality or factuality, such as the communicative situation (e.g. paratexts including the title, personal details etc.), a broad or narrow range of methods of representation (theme selection, coherence of plot and of temporal and spatial structures) and the referential frame (references to real or fictional entities).

⁴ For more on the idea of the “great man,” see Bonnet; Gamper.

⁵ Carlyle emphasizes the ability of Dante and Shakespeare to portray people (125-128), arguing that they both had the ability to recognize essential qualities in people and objects and to represent these aptly in their writing – also in terms of narrative composition (140). These are exactly the same skills Carlyle expects of his own portrayal of these great men. Carlyle thus indirectly heroizes himself through the description of his heroes and their special abilities.

⁶ For more on Carlyle’s notion of history, see Momm 72-96.

⁷ “I should say *sincerity*, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic” (Carlyle 63, emphasis in original). For more on the qualities of great men in Carlyle, see Momm 158-173. Von Zimmermann also refers to the loneliness and agonistic quality of Carlyle’s heroes (142-143). Because ‘normal’ people can also be sincere in their adoration of heroes, they can have heroic qualities as well (see Carlyle 171).

⁸ Ulrich Bröckling’s typology of the counter-hero, anti-hero, non-hero and no-longer-hero is based on a negative reference to the field of the heroic. He combines three modalities of negation with the following four dimensions of the heroic: morally regulated deviation, honour and admiration, agency, and the willingness to make a sacrifice. See Bröckling on anti-heroes in this special issue.

⁹ Ulrich Bröckling and I developed this catalogue of qualities based on an analysis of early sociological texts in the project “Der Held als Störenfried. Zur Soziologie des Exzeptionellen” (The hero as disturbing element. Regarding the sociology of exceptionality) at SFB 948. Depending on the subject of analysis, the catalogue can be expanded or modified.

¹⁰ The scope of this paper does not allow for a precise analysis of individual constitutive processes based on examples. I have elaborated on the development of a high degree of agency elsewhere (see Schlechtriemen).

¹¹ Boundary work is a concept that has been used primarily in the context of the study of science (see Gieryn). I apply this concept to processes of heroization, because these concern different forms of distinction, border crossing and boundary drawing, which are the results of cultural effort and performative action and can thus be regarded as ‘work’. In a broader sense, this also refers to Lamont and Molnár (168).

¹² For now I am merely focusing on interrelations between figures. The hero can also achieve extraordinariness by engaging with other forms of (external or internal) obstacles or challenges. These include the crossing of boundaries as addressed in the part on transgressivity.

¹³ The heroic constellation of figures also includes minor and accompanying characters, like sidekicks, guides, boundary mediators, and mentors. Figurations of a group like the community of admirers or the audience can play a decisive role too.

¹⁴ This is similar to Fleck’s descriptions of ‘thought style’ or ‘gestalt-seeing’, which is about the selective perception of a distinct, unified gestalt that a thought-collective only sees because the thought style has gained prevalence and has been practiced by those involved. These no longer see their contribution to this construction, however, but perceive the gestalt as objectively existing.

- 15 According to Weber, the concept of charisma refers only to the admiration of people who are actually present, and not to posthumous heroization or adoration of fictive figures. The concept can further be problematic because it is used for analyzing all forms of extraordinariness or authority (Eßbach 30-34).
- 16 The heroic deed brings together aspects of transgressivity and agency, which will be discussed later.
- 17 Regarding the central importance of the boundary for plot, Lotman writes: "The agent is the one who crosses the border of the plot field (the semantic field), and the border for the agent is a barrier. As a rule, therefore, all kinds of barriers in the text are concentrated at the border and structurally always represent a part of the border" (240).
- 18 This is why Lotman calls the hero a "mobile persona" (244). This circular movement is a key motif in the journey of the hero and was identified by Vladimir Propp in his analysis of fairy tales and later by Joseph Campbell in his representation of the monomyth. The story of the hero or heroine can also be read as a rite of passage. From the perspective of developmental psychology, it is easy to understand why people are interested in heroic stories in which the heroic figure overcomes the same challenges readers are facing too.
- 19 The description of this process can be used to productive results here without the necessity of adopting Girard's basic anthropological assumptions.
- 20 This combination leads to the figure's fictionalization. Even if a historic person becomes the object of collective projections, the person develops into an ideal image and is seen as overly positive.
- 21 That heroic figures are also able to destabilize existing orders is addressed here under the subsection about the quality of transgressivity. It should moreover be noted that the effect of these figures cannot be regarded as merely functional, because they also generate an additional aesthetic and semantic effect.
- 22 Giesen fundamentally regards heroes and heroines (as well as perpetrators and victims) as liminal figures, meaning they remain in a kind of liminal state of uncertainty. These figures are also used by society to address its relationship to what cannot be said or is extraordinary, sacred and so forth: "Heroes, perpetrators and victims are naturally the figments and projections of a community looking beyond the boundaries into darkness, trying to calm its uneasiness through stories and pictures of the uncanny world beyond" (Giesen 86).
- 23 While I refer here to the identification with one side in the context of the heroic narrative, there usually is an overlapping of different sentiments of affiliation, the affective connection of which can be differentiated according to their strength (Mennell 177-178).
- 24 In order for the entity to survive, it is necessary not only to have boundaries, but to have internal conditions like coherency and a centripetal power, as well as external environmental conditions that guarantee survival. External conditions (seen from an internal point of view) include, for example, opposition against a political opponent.
- 25 It was Carl Schmitt who regarded political identity formation as being closely connected to war. However, he also contributed to processes of polarization. He argued that the distinction between friend and enemy was *the* genuine criterion of the political that he claimed to be "the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation" (Schmitt 26), because this relationship is characterized by fighting and war. However, we do not have to agree with Schmitt's problematic anthropological assumption to acknowledge his identification of the narrative connection between a 'we-identity', enemy stereotypes, an increase in intensity, a militant attitude, and a beligerent mindset in heroization processes.

26 Armor and weapons serve the "visualization of the hero's fighting power" according to Horn (74). Yet he stresses that, in Homer's *Iliad*, the battlefield was not the only place where heroes and heroines could prove themselves, they could also do so in the assembly (52).

27 For more on the conditions and limits of heroization in post-heroic societies, see Bröckling, *Postheroische Helden*.

28 However, as already discussed, within the constellation of figures, the agency of the opponent plays an important role and is therefore not omitted in the same way as the agency of other actors.

29 Exceptions to this rule are those objects that became emblematic along with their hero or heroine, like Harry Potter's magic wand, King Arthur's sword Excalibur, Louis Pasteur's microscope and beaker, and so forth.

30 Exceptions are the representations of great men in the nineteenth century that also addressed new mass media and their effects (see Gamper).

31 This corresponds to the demarcation process by which a collective introversively defines and delimitates itself and to which Nail (39-40) applies the term "boundary". The formation of a geographic border, on the other hand, is covered by Nail's concept of "limit" (37-39).

32 When we compare the boundary drawing analyzed here with Nail's four types of borders – *mark*, *limit*, *boundary*, *frontier* (Nail 35-43) – it becomes apparent that there are first of all *limits* in heroization processes – in the sense of borderlines between friend and enemy. Second, there are *boundaries* in the sense of delineating a self-identifying collective. Third, by creating their own laws, or by performing a heroic deed, heroic figures set *marks*. Border areas, on the other hand, which Nail calls *frontiers*, do not appear in the context of heroizations. The dynamics of heroization seem to be characterized by simplifications rather than by complicated situations.

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The Imaginary Field of the Heroic

On the Contention between Heroes, Martyrs, Victims and Villains in Collective Memory¹

Introduction

Heroes and victims, martyrs and terrorists, champions and losers are to be differentiated from one another. They often explicitly represent opposing sides of the same story and are thereby set apart from each other by the narrative. This statement is not as superficial as it seems if one considers the effects that these oppositions have in determining the functions and interactions of these figures in the processes pertaining to the creation and adaptation of collective memory. In tales of society, it is often explicitly by dint of the interpretation of their interaction in historical or fictitious events that actors are called 'heroes', that the deceased are labelled as 'victims' or awarded with the title 'martyrs' and that their dying is narrated as the result of an unjust act by a 'villain'. Thus, heroes produce victims, one group's martyr is another's perpetrator, champions triumph over losers, the latter considered tragic heroes thereafter, or probably even martyrs if the respective narrative deems their death the unfortunate result of the winner's brutal injustice – the exact same injustice which is considered a righteous act if committed by the opposing group's hero. Accordingly, these figures usually have to be seen as the result of their own fights and contentions with each other on the narrative level and thus they can and must be distinguished from one another. However, in reference to their meaning for a society's collective memory, they are of the same kind: they are figures of boundary work.

In the modes of each society's boundary construction, heroes, martyrs and victims, as well as villains and other dependent relational figures, fulfil similar functions. Their stories and their labelling as *good* or *bad* help to establish certain moral codes and construct the symbolic boundaries that structure society, categorize objects,

people and practices, (Lamont/Molnár 168) and define its cosmology. As such, these boundaries "are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (ibid.). Against this background, if groups struggle over their views on their own state, over their collective identity, over the notions of good and evil, or over moral conduct and ideal behaviour, this may also hold true for the representatives of the respective boundary construction and thus for the role and position of heroes, martyrs, victims and villains in collective memory. Therefore, I argue that in collective memory these figures of boundary work are constructed in a relational framework within which they are perpetually under contention, so that their positions are constantly renegotiated and rearranged. This assessment also holds true in cases of institutionalized heroes and the recognized narratives and catalogues of a society's heroes, manifested and presented in monuments and textbooks. There might be obscure and ambiguous heroes as well as established and stabilized narratives. However, they are always under contention and while the remembrance of some heroes or villains might vanish over years, the monuments of others might be torn down only in the aftermath of greater upheavals.

That said, while following Émile Durkheim's basic distinction of the world into the two domains of 'the profane' and 'the sacred' (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 34), I propose the idea of an 'imaginary field of the heroic' in order to determine the construction of social boundaries by dint of the tales of idealized and demonized figures alike. Thus, the imaginary field of the heroic constitutes a model that captures the network of relationships within which heroes, martyrs, victims and villains meet at the level of the collective memory, while they transcend the specific narrative they are embedded in – so that the imaginary field captures not only the relations between the protagonists of a particular mythology, but also their contention with the actors of (all) other narratives of a society's collective memory.

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The assumption of a field is based on the idea that the respective protagonists are given similar functions in the process of constructing collective identities. At the same time, they are juxtaposed in dynamic exchange relationships and dependencies. The appreciation of figures as heroes, their branding as perpetrators or their labelling as victims is therefore bound to the historical and social context and can shift in the process of remembrance. Therefore, the position of historical figures within the field is not fixed but dependent on society's collective memory and on the underlying mechanisms that make them figures of boundary work. By the same token, the idea of an imaginary field of the heroic leaves room for ambiguous figures who are not remembered in an 'either-or' logic but who combine multidimensional discourses in themselves. Therefore, the concept reaches beyond the restraints of ideal type thinking, as will be discussed in this article.

As constructions, the figures under scrutiny compete on a narrative level. Hence, regarding the modes of boundary construction, I follow Pierre Bourdieu on a meta level and "think relationally" (Bourdieu, *Logic of Fields* 96) by proposing the term of the imaginary field of the heroic. If it is true that "the real is relational",² this has to be equally true for the construction of its past and its foundations. Accordingly, the analysis of the imaginary field of the heroic becomes a useful tool for determining the dynamic and competitive dimensions of social relations because it hints at the tension inherent in a society's field of power in Bourdieu's sense. Certainly, if heroes, martyrs, victims and the like are seen as society's boundary construction, they are first and foremost *constructions*. They are no social actors themselves, we cannot speak about their habitus or capital; instead they are mere projections of social actors. That said, while the respective actors certainly have or have had an embodied habitus if they are (as far as living heroized persons are concerned) or have been real-life figures, for the assumption of an imaginary field this is irrelevant. It is important, however, that the corresponding figures are constructed *as if* they have a habitus and *as if* they are dependent on the logics of the forms of capital, regardless of whether they are actual persons or fictitious actors. Accordingly, they *symbolize* these phenomena, and by the same token offer references on the symbolic level to which the actors in the sociological fields can refer. This in return affects these real-life actors' habitus and a group's social capital.³ Hence, the respective figures can never constitute a social field in the Bourdieuan sense – though the way they are labelled and remembered by the living

positions them within an imaginary field. Thus, these figures of boundary work are certainly not capable of acting and competing as social agents, but they are constructed as such by their society. In this way, the emerging imaginary field of the heroic reflects the state of real-life power relations and thus defines the structure of the field of power (Bourdieu, *Some Properties of Fields* 73-74).

In the following, I shall outline the theoretical reflections that lead me to propose the idea of the imaginary field of the heroic. Starting with the Durkheimian perspective, I will introduce the role of the sacred in the construction of collective identities. Linking up with Durkheim's ideas, the sociologist Bernhard Giesen developed the concept of an 'ideal typological field' (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 7) which, on the one hand, provides the intellectual foundation for the imaginary field proposed here, but on the other hand will be criticized due to its theoretical restraints which, among other things, do not leave any space for the ambiguous figure of the martyr in the respective modes of boundary construction. In comparison, in the concluding reflections of this article the theoretical power of the imaginary field of the heroic as a concept will be shown precisely by its capacity of being able to include the martyr.

The Durkheimian perspective

"It is society that speaks through the mouths of those who affirm them in our presence; it is society that we hear when we hear them; and the voice of all itself has a tone that an individual voice cannot have" (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 210): With these words, Émile Durkheim expresses the role of the tales and stories of *them*, the "countless individual representations" of those behavioural patterns that have developed in a collective, so "that the intensity with which they are thought in each individual mind finds resonance in all the others, and vice versa" (209). Thus, these representations serve as brokers between society and the individual, and they are capable of eliciting the 'respect' that society demands of the individual. In Durkheim's understanding, this 'respect' is the power of the collective subject that "calls forth or inhibits conduct automatically, *irrespective of any utilitarian calculation of helpful or harmful results*" (209, italics in original). Hence, a society's discourses on good and evil, righteousness and injustice, or virtuous behaviour can be seen as a collective agreement on those moral standards which

demand public, as well as tacit and private consent, by the members of a particular society in the same way a god demands belief, because in effect a “society is to its members what a god is to its faithful” (208).

Although Durkheim’s main argument regarding the specific nature of society as different from our nature as individuals remains a persuasive perspective today, the somewhat pessimistic (*we cannot escape society*) but unanimously egalitarian (*no one can escape society*) reading of a society’s members’ positioning as well as the abovementioned representations is being called into question here. At this point, I will not remark upon, neither will I ignore the discussions about the individual’s autonomy from society in Durkheim’s thought, which can only be understood against the backdrop of his entire oeuvre and the evaluation of its inner development (Alexander, *Inner Development* 136), but I will merely refer to the egalitarian starting point for my approach.⁴ That said, while the main line of Durkheimian thought is appreciated here and constitutes the theoretical basis for the following remarks, I shall propose a modification of his claims on the phenomenon that later came to be called collective memory.⁵ I argue that society’s imaginations of its heroes, martyrs, victims and demonized figures are to be considered sublime within the stratification of the modes of boundary construction since they dominantly constitute and powerfully communicate the collective imaginations and agreements regarding the realm of the sacred. In effect, they appear as embodied examples of culturally idealized or condemned ways of living, and they thus define the social facts in a Durkheimian sense, “which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 52). In this respect, a society’s set of heroes and other remembered figures mediates between the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group, which collectively constitute social facts (54) so that we hear society speak when we hear ‘their’ stories. This hypothesis does not challenge the statement that the “voice of all itself has a tone that an individual voice cannot have”, rather, it supports this idea strongly. However, compared to the Durkheimian interpretation, it also hints at a more hierarchical reading of modes of boundary construction which has profound effects on the respective societies, since the prominence of the figures in the imaginary field of the heroic reflects and unanimously supports the authority of specific social facts in Durkheim’s sense. In other

words: If a society asks its members to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the social group, the tale of *one* martyr who has a name and a story might powerfully reinforce all those countless individual representations which convey the message that this is a morally good society – a society worth dying for.

The sacred and the construction of collective identity

Durkheim claims that society can achieve its “ends only by working through us, it categorically demands our cooperation” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209). On the other hand, he states that society „requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests” (209). The question that is to be debated might be on which basis the dualistic but likewise reciprocal relationship between the individual and society can be founded and maintained. The Durkheimian answer to that question undoubtedly lies in the invocation of the concept of the sacred.

In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim defines religion as “always [assuming] a bipartite division of the universe, known and knowable, into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude one another” (38). Although this bipartite division into the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred⁶ has been formulated in respect to religious thinking, its logic as an *absolute* distinction⁷ is of such fundamental importance that it also helps to explain the construction of collective identities and group consciousness. This is an observation Durkheim himself, without using these terms, obviously made when he coined the phrase that a society is to its members what god is to the faithful. Thus, for Durkheim “the sacred is eternal” (Pickering 92), a perspective which led to ample criticism of the concept from different perspectives, with the main argument against the prominence of the sacred as a concept being that “it is so closely associated with religion, [that] religion may be viewed in the same manner as ‘a constant’. Ergo, Durkheim, along with those who follow him, hold that religion is a universal and everlasting phenomenon” (92). In effect, William Pickering argues polemically “[to] argue that all societies are equally religious or have the same amount of religion but under different forms is fallacious if not ridiculous. And the same can be said of the sacred” (92).⁸

However, despite these critiques, as Dmitry Kurakin puts it, contemporary Durkheimian scholarship is changing and “the concept of the

sacred has become one of the flagships of this rediscovery” (Kurakin 379). Most importantly, the works of Jeffery Alexander, Philip Smith⁹ and Alexander Riley¹⁰ have helped to recalibrate the sacred/profane dichotomy in sociological thinking. Thus, if we leave the religio-sociological starting point of Durkheimian thinking aside and try to grasp what holds societies together beyond religion, we may point at the ambiguity of the sacred¹¹ and thus reveal sacred and profane codes that underline the spheres of everyday life (Kurakin 378). Accordingly, what makes the concept of the sacred a useful tool for the analysis of the construction of collective identity is the statement that the “sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209).¹² This statement might help to transfer Durkheim’s notion of the sacred to a generalizable sociological concept, for it is the exact same logic of untouchability that applies to social groups which are bound and defined by *social facts* since they assume a tangible and ontological form: they constitute reality. Following the dictum that the “first and most basic rule is *to consider social facts as things*” (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 60), while also keeping in mind the observation that the very basis of a certain society’s identity must appear untouchable and unquestionable, we can apply his ideas of the sacred to the construction of collective identities, detached from its religio-sociological core meaning. In effect, the concept of the sacred describes “the signature formations of new and traditional groups”, as William E. Paden puts it. He states:

‘Group’ here does not mean social environments in general, but rather the self-representations of specifically differentiated collective units or subunits. A group is a kind of linguistic construct that functions as an essentialized representation of aggregates of individuals, and thus comes to have the effect of a ‘thing’ or an objectivity. (Paden 36)

The underlying process is described by sociologists Shmuel Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen who argue that collective identity can only fulfil its function of offering a relevant benchmark for the individual when the social processes of constructing it are kept latent; and by the same token, they assume that “attempts to question it and to lift the veil of latency are usually rejected by pointing to its naturalness, sacredness or self-evidence” (Eisenstadt/Giesen 73). Therefore, collective identities consistently

stress their primordality, their civic and cultural self-evidence, and thus their ontological situational determination. The underlying social processes thus mark the area in which members of a community can, to a certain extent, perceive themselves as equal. It is this experience of equality which must be understood as a key requirement for the consolidation of collective identities. At the same time, the corresponding boundaries must be continuously confirmed, while the latency of the processes is maintained by detaching them from the realm of ordinary life and instead evoking a connection to the sacral domain.¹³ In effect, it is this construction of the collective identity’s naturalness which subjects us to its rules: “We defer to society’s orders not simply because it is equipped to overcome our resistance but, first and foremost, because it is the object of genuine respect” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209). Society is that which we do not question. It is sacred. In effect, society

subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations, and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible. And so, at every instant, we must submit to rules of action and thought that we have neither made nor wanted and that sometimes are contrary to our inclinations and to our most basic instincts. (ibid.)

That said, Durkheim does not seem acutely focused on the hierarchical aspects entwined in this forced submission to society – regarding neither the mortal world and its inhabitants, that is actual power relations, nor the stories of the “countless individual representations” which form and foster the ‘social facts’ that exert external constraints over individuals (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 59). However, by focussing on “the society that speaks” through an affirmation of the past, Durkheim not only proposes a memory discourse which helps to explain the history of societies, but rather transforms the past into a source of identity for the present (Miszta 124). Additionally, since the opposition of the profane and the sacred has nothing to do with common binary oppositions, the “good and the evil are both parts of the sacred and distinct from merely profane individual (nonsocial) life” (Kurakin 383).

These two observations are where Bernhard Giesen attaches his reflections on collective memory in the construction of collective identities in general and the role of the heroic as well as the demonic in these processes in particular. Based on the assumption that an identity seems absolutely secure to the individual, but at the same time has to remain insuperably inscrut-

able and non-transparent, Giesen argues that, analogously, humans presuppose a continuity of collective identities. It is precisely this continuity which is constructed with reference to the sacred domain and which must be represented in everyday life. Giesen identifies figures who are liminal mediators between the profane and the sacred while simultaneously defining not only the boundary between the everyday and the extraordinary but also the inside and outside of communities. He writes about these cultural imaginations of identity:

They mark the boundaries between the regular and ordinary social life and the realm of the extraordinary beyond it. Heroes, victims and perpetrators are liminal figures that can be imagined only from this side of the boundary, from the point of view of regular social life, from the point of view of a community. We have to refer to their position in the outlands if we want to understand our situation inside the boundary, our social order, our community and history. (*Triumph and Trauma* 1)

Hence, the figures presented here not only define a community's boundary to the sacral domain and thus conceal the social processes of boundary construction in order to maintain collective identities. They also fulfil the second central requirement in the construction of collective identities which Eisenstadt and Giesen identified as necessary, in addition to the latency of the process. These figures link "the constitutive difference between 'us and them' to the difference between the routine and the extraordinary" (Eisenstadt/Giesen 80). As liminal¹⁴ figures that link the sacral area to the everyday world, heroes, perpetrators and victims can be understood as figures of boundary work which "create community and become the foil for collective identities" (Giesen, *Zwischenlagen* 75).

However, Giesen only refers to 'heroes', 'perpetrators' and 'victims' while not including the figure of the martyr in his group of ideal type figures of boundary construction. This omission is bound to irritate, since the martyr in many ways represents a radicalization of boundary work who not only determines the sacred centre of the martyr's society, but also defines entities in terms of polar opposites (Gölz, *Martyrdom* 37). As a paradigmatic figure of boundary work, the martyr not only marks the boundaries between two belief systems, they also become an embodied definition of the nature of their own belief system and communicate the values and virtues of their own society. It is the notion of the 'victim'

which, in the case of martyrdom, accompanies the heroized self-sacrifice and connects the martyr to the moral standards of their society (Gölz, *Struggle for Power* 5). In his remarks on the figure of the victim, Giesen concludes that the act of calling somebody a victim implies that the result of the actions that produced the victim are considered wrong and must even be perceived to be avoidable (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 46). "Thus the discourse about victimization becomes a social construction and is carried by a moral community defining an evil" (46). The exact same assumptions are also true for the figure of the martyr who always and inevitably carry the subliminal semantics of the victim with them, even if the notion of 'sacrifice' is emphasized (Gölz, *Struggle for Power* 5). Consequently, discourses on martyrdom

not only define the demarcation between two belief systems but also the terms of good and evil in a paradigmatic way. Since martyrdom presupposes that the Other is presented as evil, the martyrs themselves have to be constructed in a way that doesn't leave room for doubts about their impunity. (5-6)

In this regard, the martyr unites all levels of meaning that Giesen ascribed to heroes, perpetrators and victims in one figure. So why does he not take the martyr into account? The answer might be found in the theoretical restraints of the concept of the ideal typological field.

Bernhard Giesen's ideal typological field

It is thanks to the ideas of Bernhard Giesen that we may understand the ideal types of heroes, perpetrators and victims as boundary markers "between the regular and ordinary social life and the realm of the extraordinary beyond it" (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 1) and by the same token acknowledge the way they relate to each other. In his work *Triumph and Trauma*, Bernhard Giesen brings his ideal types of boundary work together for the first time while also observing that these protagonists, as brokers between the realms of the sacred and the profane, not only communicate the *social facts* to us. On the contrary, the same also applies in the opposite direction: changing "and crossing social boundaries affect[s] the imagination of the land beyond the horizon – the contour begins to waver, heroes appear as perpetrators, victims as heroes.

What is demonic terrorism for one community is revered as heroic martyrdom by another" (1). Accordingly, Giesen considers the distinction between the archetypes of victorious heroes and tragic heroes, perpetrators and victims (albeit not martyrs, even though he explicitly refers to "heroic martyrdom") an ideal typological field. The positions that historical personalities are assigned in this field are not fixed and immutable, but may change according to the needs of their society so that triumphant heroes "can become tragic ones, heroes can be turned into perpetrators, and victims can, later on, get the sacral aura that before was the mark of heroes" (7).

The four archetypes in Giesen's ideal typological field point to the 'hero' as the bearer of subjectivity and the 'victim' as the one being degraded to the status of an object as their ultimate reference points. They are thus representations of the human constitution manifested in memory.¹⁵ By the same token, they are to be understood as cultural incarnations by means of which fundamental human boundary experiences – such as birth and death – are addressed and processed (cf. Schlechtriemen 18). Giesen details the figures of the 'triumphant hero', the 'victim', the 'tragic hero' and the 'perpetrator' as cultural constructions that represent the reference points of two formative dualisms. He observes that between the perfect and sovereign subjectivity of the hero and the dehumanized victim who is treated as an object, "there is a range of positions denoting a subjectivity that is limited and restricted by the adversity of the world or by its own preservation" (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 6). By using subjectivity and worldly success as axes, he sets up a matrix in which he presents the triumphant hero and the tragic hero as representatives of a preserved subjectivity distinguished by the question of whether they have been able to master the world. The perpetrator and the victim are divided by the same question whilst representing figures with a damaged subjectivity.

However, Giesen designs this concept of ideal types as cultural constructs in a way that goes far beyond simply pointing out the reference points that define the matrix of his typological field. He also enriches his four archetypes with anthropological propositions. In doing so, he calls heroes the triumphant embodiment of collective identity. As singular and individualized figures, they symbolize the connection between the community and its sacred space. They stand for the possibility of one person rising above the banal concerns of everyday life to become part of the sacred order and thus immortal (17).

Heroes represent the extraordinary and charismatic: They overcome the narrow rules

of everyday life, despise routines and break with conventions (18). This statement is less to be understood in reference to historical models that have succeeded in implementing a new order, but more as a reference to the theoretical dimension of the hero: The social order cannot be constituted without recourse to its opposite – the sacred – and the community cannot form a collective identity without imagining subjectivity, embodied in the hero. Heroes, therefore, are imaginations of the highest degree of individuality and collective projections of sovereign subjectivity as well as the sacred, manifested in the memory of individual figures and their lives. Through the construction of heroes, a community not only overcomes the mundane contingencies of everyday life, but also the threat of death. The construction of heroes thus creates a social bond that transcends the limitations of personal life and its prevailing logics (18).

The hero is not only theoretically juxtaposed to the victim in Giesen's matrix, but also immediately dependent on them since the concentration of the sacred in the person of the triumphant hero must come at the price of the de-sacralization of others. Therefore, while there are no natural victims, heroes can produce them at the moment of their triumph (45).¹⁶ This hints at exactly the same phenomenon which leads to the idea of the imaginary field of the heroic: The figures of boundary construction are not only theoretically dependent on each other, they also have an exchange relationship on the narrative level.

As a result, Giesen's logic implies that the victim should be considered a cultural construct to which a specific function of boundary work must be attributed. The archetypal victim represents the faceless subject: "Victims [...] have no face, no voice and no place. Even if they are still alive, they are numbed and muted, displaced and uprooted" (53). Where the hero acts as a mediator to the sacred centre of the community, victims, because of their lost or blurred subjectivity, are liminal figures of the dark edge of human communities where doubts about seemingly clear boundaries dwell. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that subjects can suddenly be degraded to objects, but that objects can also gain a voice (ibid.). However, it also becomes clear that this idea leaves no room for a figure combining elements of the presented ideal types. In other words: What about victims with faces? What about martyrs?

The martyr and the restraints of the ideal typological field

Against the background of the ideal types ‘hero’ and ‘victim’, the idea of the ideal typological field certainly provides a convincing heuristic instrument for analyzing the function of the figures placed in this field in constructing collective identities. However, the incorporation of these ideal type considerations with the simultaneous insertion of generalized anthropological statements leads to a double bias.

First, according to Bröckling, typologies are particularly suitable for the investigation of heroisms and processes of heroization since they correspond to the logic of the object itself. However, it is necessary to consider that heroic semantics construct existing or fictional characters based on a model character (Bröckling 43). Typologies do not make reality but

make comparisons between ideal types and therefore are heuristic in nature. They do not describe reality, but suggest how reality could be described and thus provide orientation for further research. They offer an organizational system for a particular field, and to this end they construct abstractions that leave aside the particular qualities of a concrete case. (42)

Giesen’s archetypes, however, seem to have lost their ideal character through numerous historical references and anthropological settlements. For example, Schlechtriemen notes that Giesen’s reading repeatedly conveys the impression that the types of cultural constructs actually thought to be found ‘out there’ are fabricated (Schlechtriemen 18).

Second and probably more serious is the reverse effect of the ideal typical view of Giesen’s archetypes in relation to the phenomena of the heroic. By focusing on the four reference points that constitute the matrix of the ideal typological field, he naturally constricts his scope; a feature which is inherent in all typologies and can also be intentional. In this case, however, this leads to very important configurations of boundary work not being taken into consideration. In this regard, it is no coincidence that the figure of the martyr finds no place in the matrix of the ideal typological field. The martyr itself is an extreme figure because martyrs are heroes, perpetrators, tragic heroes and victims at the same time – not only in reference to different views from opposing societies (one group’s martyr, thus hero, is the other group’s terrorist, thus perpetrator), but also regarding their positioning in their community

of admirers. The ambiguity of the martyr, who draws from discourses on strength and on vulnerability at the same time (Gölz, *Struggle for Power* 2), leaves them no place in the matrix of Giesen’s ideal typological field, which is closed to tiptoeing, ambiguous protagonists, tragic constellations, and shades of the social world. Thus, the configuration of the martyr finds no place, although they can undoubtedly claim the same status as a liminal figure on the level of collective memory as ascribed to the triumphant hero. The same thing must be true for other ambiguous figures, like Robin-Hood-type bandits or noble villains, although the theory was formulated expressly to explore the phenomenon of shifting meanings. Giesen states:

As is not uncommon in the aftermath of war and defeat, those who had been praised as heroes before, were afterwards considered as victims whose self-sacrifice was devoid of any meaning, or they were regarded as perpetrators, as icons of evil, as embodiments of demonic madness. In death and defeat, heroism exhibits its ambivalences, the fragility of its foundations, the tension between trauma and triumph. (*Triumph and Trauma* 15)

Consequently, following Giesen’s theory, ambiguous figures are conceivable only as representatives and phenomena of radical upheavals. The former hero becomes the icon of evil to be re-integrated into the matrix, but this time as a culprit. However, aside from the radical upheavals that are – in line with Durkheim’s thinking on heroes¹⁷ – the starting point for Giesen’s theses, ambiguous figures *per se* are opposed to the idea of the extreme. They resist being assigned a place in the matrix, as do all victims who have faces, all martyrs and firefighters, and all unknown soldiers who are not to be seen as victims, but who have no face and no voice.

This criticism might be easy to address by pointing out that there is enough space between the reference points for all these examples and constellations, and that ultimately the visibility of these positions would only be obscured by the dominance of the four reference points, but not entirely hidden from view. However, Bröckling’s objection remains; typologies over-emphasize differences with respect to relationships, hybrid formations and blurring – and “is a place for everything in the table, but only *one* place” (Bröckling 43). In this regard, the idea of the typological field is trapped in its theoretical restraints: It is either but a mere theoretic construction which hints at the Weberian logic of the ideal

types that explicitly *do not exist* in the real world; or it is a model which oversimplifies social reality and leaves no space for ambiguities.

The imaginary field of the heroic

Therefore, in order to introduce a fruitful theoretical tool to cultural studies, I propose the implementation of an *imaginary field of the heroic* into the theoretical discourse on collective identities and modes of boundary work. While agreeing to the ideas which were presented here that divide the social world into the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred in a Durkheimian sense, and at the same time appreciating the modifications which point to the prominent role of extraordinary figures in the underlying processes of boundary construction, I propose a different notion regarding the construction of a field. Here, I would like to take the Bourdieuan term of the 'field' into consideration in order to highlight the dynamics which constitute the imaginary field of the heroic. Being fully aware of the fact that heroes, martyrs, victims, villains and other prominent relational figures of boundary work are not social actors themselves and that they do not constitute a social field in the strict sense of the theory, my reflections follow an analogous propagation of Pierre Bourdieu's thoughts.

The starting point for this theoretical transfer lies in the observation that Pierre Bourdieu's model is in line with the basic thinking on the structure of the social world and the modes of boundary construction. He agrees to the basic distinction of the social world into the profane and the sacred, as proposed by Durkheim, who is in fact one of the defining theorists for Bourdieu.¹⁸ In Bourdieu's thinking, "the religious sacred is but a particular case of the more general idea that social distinctions, whether applied to individuals, groups, or institutions, assume a taken-for-granted quality that elicits acceptance and respect" (Swartz 47).¹⁹ Accordingly, he sees reality in the light of the construction of social boundaries and combines this thinking with his ideas on the struggle over legitimate delimitation. Thus, he even interprets seemingly natural boundaries, like those of regions, not as ontologically existent, but rather as social constructions. He states:

Everyone agrees that 'regions' divided up according to the different conceivable criteria (language, habitat, cultural forms, etc.) never coincide perfectly. But that is not all: 'reality', in this case, is social

through and through and the most 'natural' classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition, in other words, of a previous state of the relations of power in the field of struggle over legitimate delimitation. (Bourdieu, *Identity* 224)

In effect, as Bourdieu puts it, 'reality' is nothing but the permanent struggle to *define* 'reality' whereas this specific logic of the social world has to be prevented from being apprehended by the individual (ibid.). Thus, for the construction of social boundaries, Bourdieu points to a logic comparable to that of the notion of latency in the construction of collective identities in Eisenstadt and Giesen's thinking. In this regard, the symbolic representations of the underlying processes come into consideration.

Bourdieu himself did not take recourse to the different types of symbolic representations and the respective memory discourses, but was rather interested in the social world and its power relations. He therefore saw the world as structured through social fields which represent the dynamic power relations between social actors and institutions (Bourdieu, *Some Properties of Fields* 73-74). "[A]gents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions in space" (Bourdieu, *Identity* 226). In effect,

[t]he social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that each actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of coordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Agents are thus distributed, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – in other words, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital in the total set of their assets. (ibid.)

Heroes, martyrs, victims and villains are memory constructions. Thus, on the one hand they represent and define the social world as the liminal figures who mediate between the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred. They thus help to position social agents in their social fields and must be considered powerful tools (or even weapons) for competition in these social fields. Bourdieu states that thinking in terms of the field means "to think relationally" (Bourdieu, *Logic Of Fields* 96). If we position the figures of boundary

work in relation to the social fields of the mundane world, we follow this first condition in order to adapt the term 'field'. At first glance, this seems to contradict the logic of the sacred, which is defined by the fact that it seems untouchable and unchangeable. However, it must be said that the statement of the dynamics of the field is *per se* merely a theoretical-analytical one. The position of the figures in the imaginary field must appear stable to the actors who refer to the reference points in the imaginary field of the heroic. Only in this way can the heroic unfold its social effects at all. Against this background, the imaginary field of the heroic can be seen as the liminal reflection of the field of power in the realm of the profane. In this regard, the position that the figures of boundary work take up in the imaginary field of the heroic follows exactly the same logic as that of the position that social agents take up in the real world except that they are products of those actors' imaginations. Accordingly, as reference points for real-life actors of the social fields, they are used as tools in the struggle over the definition of 'reality' within these fields while preventing that struggle from being apprehended. While pointing precisely at the figures in the imaginary field of the heroic, actors in the sociological field hold certain social capital, perform a specific habitus and position themselves in competition with other actors in their respective field.

Therefore, the imaginary field of the heroic consists of figures who build up a configuration of objective relations and dependencies amongst one another that positions the figures in the field itself (97). They cannot be treated as ideal types in a Weberian sense, for these ideal types are far from real life and accordingly not suitable for the social conditions of the construction of collective identities or explanation patterns for social reality to the individual. However, the field is constituted by the labelling of remembered figures in a way known to the social actors. The respective figures are *called* heroes, martyrs, victims and villains and the specific society's discourse defines the essence of these terms in the first place. Thus, these designations carry an archetypal character in the sense of Gaston Bachelard with them since "they are not static; instead, they are variational, reverberational, valuational, and dynamic" (Hans 317). Methodologically speaking, if a remembered figure is labelled by the society as a prominent figure in an archetypal way – whatever the respective discourse deems important to the concept of the respective archetype or demands of its representatives – they enter the typological field of the heroic. In that moment, they start to compete with each other on a fictitious level.

This holds true even if they transcend their narrative of origin, so that they may be defined as heroes or their victims, as martyrs or suicide attackers, as noble outlaws or vile bandits, as insurgents or freedom fighters. Thus, they help to constitute 'reality' as modes of boundary construction. It is "society that speaks to us" if we hear their stories and it is the field of power which allocates their stories a position in the imaginary field of the heroic. In this regard, the egalitarian notion of Durkheim's reflections on the impact that countless voices have on the structure of society is called into question. The figures of the imaginary field of the heroic – as imagined reflections of the power struggles in the social world – help to construct not only communities and 'the other', but also social boundaries and hierarchies, since they keep these boundaries latent and demand society's 'respect'. In effect:

Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways. Moreover, only then can they become social boundaries, i.e., translate, for instance, into identifiable patterns of social exclusion or class and racial segregation. (Lamont/Molnár 168)

Thus, if we analyze the contention between heroes, martyrs, victims and villains on the level of collective memory, we can learn much about the society that constructed these figures as well as about the prevalent power relations within this society. While Giesen's ideal typological field might help us to deconstruct specific figures of boundary work and thus to explain their function in transforming societies, only by referring to the idea of the *imaginary field of the heroic* can we learn about subtler changes and shifting processes in power relations. Ambiguous figures are always under contention since they represent (and hint at) power struggles which do not challenge the latency of boundary construction. These figures are in a constant exchange relationship with each other: they attract each other, repel each other, defeat each other, or replace each other – in creeping and incremental processes, without major upheavals. The place of heroes, martyrs, victims and villains within the imaginary field of the heroic is not only a product of these transfers; it also powerfully communicates and translates these effects into social boundaries.

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2 Bourdieu, *Logic of Fields* 96-97: “To think in terms of field is to think relationally. [...] I could twist Hegel’s famous formula and say that the real is the relational: what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist ‘independently of individual consciousness and will,’ as Marx said.”

3 Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital* 51: “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”

4 For a conclusive statement on this matter, see Alexander, *Inner Development* 153: “From his first day as a sociologist, it had been one of Durkheim’s principal ambitions to create a humanistic alternative to instrumental Marxism. Only after his breakthrough to a symbolic conception of social structure, however, did he feel ready to create a theoretical alternative that could match its generality and scope. This new theory, he insisted, was just as collective, but, because it was also resolutely anti-instrumental, it would avoid the problem of coercion that seemed to correspond to the Marxist understanding of social control. Durkheim finally had differentiated his own theory from Marx’s in a conclusive way. That in doing so he had created a theory whose subjectivity was as exaggerated as the objectivism he despised did not dissuade him.”

5 For the developments regarding the theoretical term ‘collective memory’ and Durkheim’s role in it, see Misztal 123: “Durkheim did not explicitly employ the notion of collective memory, his approach offers a very insightful understanding of the need for historical continuity. Although it was his student, Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the term ‘collective memory’ to sociology, Durkheim’s input into the debate on the subject is rather worth discussing and preserving, particularly the importance that he attached to the revitalization of a group’s social heritage for the reaffirmation of its bonds and the reinforcement of its solidarity. Such a reconstruction of Durkheim’s approach can also assist recent attempts to rethink the notion of collective memory.”

6 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 34: “Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes – two opposite genera – that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane – such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things.”

7 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 36: “[I]f the criterion of a purely hierarchical distinction is at once too general and too imprecise, nothing but their heterogeneity is left to define the relation between the sacred and the profane. But what makes this heterogeneity sufficient to characterize that classification of things and to distinguish it from any other is that it has a very particular feature: It is absolute. In the history of human thought, there is no other example of two categories of things as profoundly differentiated or as radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition between good and evil is nothing beside this one: Good and evil are two opposed species of the same genus, namely morals, just as health and illness are nothing more than two different aspects of the same order of facts, life; by contrast, the sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common.”

8 William Pickering refers to the works of Mary Douglas (1970) who, for example, observed in her *Natural Symbols* that amongst some Persian nomad groups there exist no major ritual activities.

9 For an evaluation of the development of the sacred as a useful concept in social thought, see Smith/Alexander 3-10, 25.

10 Cf. Riley 274-301.

11 On this matter, Kurakin writes: “His approach promised to solve the problem of how social order is produced and what its purpose is. However, for most of the twentieth century, the potential of Durkheim’s theory of the sacred for grounding sociological theory and research was not effectively realized. For decades, it was read as interpreted by Talcott Parsons and Lévi-Strauss. Particular aspects of the theory, such as the ‘cult of the individual’ and the sacralization of the person in modernity, became more popular than the overall argument. The important role of the ambiguity of the sacred in the overall argument was almost entirely obscured” (378).

12 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 38: “To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use. This placing in relationship in itself is always a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complex initiation. Yet such an operation is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and to some degree. The two genera cannot, at the same time, both come close to one another and remain what they were.”

13 Giesen, *Tales of Transcendence* 96: “The thesis that all politics relies upon a hidden transcendental reference can point to well-known philosophical arguments, ranging from German Idealism to more recent varieties of social philosophy: perception of reality presupposes a categorical frame (Kant); the order of objects is constituted by a transcendental subject (Hegel); the exception is constitutive for the rule (Wittgenstein); the profane exists only in distinction to its opposite, the sacred (Durkheim); social order has to be contrasted to some liminal reference (Turner); action cannot be conceived of without reference to an autonomous source of agency (Parsons); constitutions are set by a sovereign (Schmitt); and so forth. All these arguments converge in supporting the idea that social reality is constituted by referring to something that transcends the sheer positivism of the ordinary world of everyday life.”

14 On the transfer of Victor Turner’s concept of liminality in ritual practices to a comparative study on societies, see Eisenstadt 315-38.

15 Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 6: “Both the hero as well as the victim are represented as ultimate reference points for the *human constitution* and both are located beyond the profane and mundane everyday activities of the regular social

reality. In this respect, the distinction between the subjects and objects is closely associated with the distinction between the sacred and the profane.”

16 Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 45: “Living heroes, in their attempt to rise above the ordinary, disregard mundane reasoning and disdain the voices of caution. Cruel and merciless, their deeds demand sacrifices also from their followers and can even entail the death of those who are not members of the charismatic community. The concentration of the sacred in the person of the triumphant hero comes at the price of desacralizing others. Thus heroes, in the moment of triumph, can, and frequently do, produce victims.”

17 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 213: “Under the influence of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek one another out and come together more. The result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. The result of that heightened activity is a general stimulation of individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in normal times. The changes are not simply of nuance and degree; man himself becomes something other than what he was. He is stirred by passions so intense that they can be satisfied only by violent and extreme acts: by acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism. This explains the Crusades, for example, as well as so many sublime or savage moments in the French Revolution. We see the most mediocre or harmless bourgeois transformed by the general exaltation into a hero or an executioner.”

18 Wacquant 105: “Far from seeking to reduce Bourdieu’s sociology to a mere variation of the Durkheimian score, I would like to suggest that, while he leans firmly on them, Bourdieu imprints each of its pillar-principles with a particular twist which allows them, ultimately, to support a scientific edifice endowed with an original architecture, at once closely akin to and sharply different from that of the Durkheimian mother-house. This is another way of saying that Pierre Bourdieu is an inheritor who - contrary to Marcel Mauss for example - could and did, in the manner of an intellectual judoka, use the weight of the scientific capital accumulated by Durkheim the better to project himself beyond his august predecessor.”

19 Swartz 47: “Bourdieu extends Durkheim’s sacred/profane opposition to an analysis of contemporary cultural forms. In his sociology of education, Bourdieu sees French schooling as a ‘religious instance’ in the Durkheimian sense for it produces social and mental boundaries that are analogous to the sacred/profane distinction. The elite tracks and institutions in French education function analogously to religious orders, as they set apart as superior and separate a secular elite with quasi-religious properties of public legitimation or symbolic power. [...] More generally, Bourdieu believes that the religious sacred is but a particular case of the more general idea that social distinctions, whether applied to individuals, groups, or institutions, assume a taken-for-granted quality that elicits acceptance and respect.”

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Negations of the Heroic – A Typological Essay

Heroes are paradoxical figures. According to Niklas Luhmann (86), a hero produces “conformity through deviation”, and further, displays this paradox in public “in order to be able to fulfil his socio-pedagogical function”. Thus, according to Luhmann, the hero embodies “an exemplary surpassing of expectable accomplishments”, and the carrying out of “services that are more than can be demanded” is “perhaps the most impressive semantic form that has developed in European history for morally regulated deviance.” Here, ‘morally regulated’ refers to deviance that is suitable for serving as a model, endorsed as an example to be imitated. This could be understood as a general normative and action-theoretical definition of the heroic. The deeds of heroes fluctuate between norm creation, norm fulfilment, and norm violation, between exceptionality and exemplarity.

When Luhmann describes the hero as a semantic form, that is, as the demarcation of a difference that fulfils a socio-pedagogical function, or in other words, is meant to set in motion behavioural changes, this points to the action-oriented character of heroization. Hero stories are not so much descriptive as they are prescriptive; images of heroes do not so much record a likeness as sketch out examples. Whoever speaks of heroes and their deeds (or circulates heroic portraits, monuments, films, comics, and so forth) does so with a desire to motivate the audience (and possibly also oneself) to go beyond one’s limitations, to fight and make sacrifices, to strive for great and exceptional accomplishments, or, at the very least, to humbly acknowledge the superiority of the heroes. Even if this is not always successful and invocations of the heroic frequently come to nothing or even

bring forth effects opposite to what was intended, it is still possible to feel something of the appeal’s potential energy in its ironic distortion or rejection.

Heroic semantics create force fields that attempt to pull all those who come within their reach towards the heroic pole. They describe a *telos* towards which individuals strive, a *benchmark* against which they evaluate their actions, a daily *regimen* by which they improve themselves, and a *generator of truth* in which they are supposed to recognize themselves. But unlike iron filings in the vicinity of a magnet, the addressees of heroizations are not completely powerless against their forcefield. They may yield to its pull, rebel against it, or attempt to ignore it, but as long as the power of heroizations remain in effect, they are required to take a position in relation to it. Heroic narratives polarize: one can revere their protagonists or hate them; one can admire or laugh at them – but one cannot remain indifferent to them.

Starting from this paradoxical definition of the hero as a morally regulated deviant and the polarizing power of heroic semantics, we can derive the possible counter-models. The various counter-, anti-, non- and no-longer-heroes differ with respect to the normative value they are given and their position relative to the force field of the heroic. They oscillate between inertia and the active choice to ignore the motivating power of heroic appeals, between unwillingness and inability to heed such calls, between rejection of heroic claims and reversal of their polarity. *Counter-heroes* compete with heroes in an antagonistic field of opposite value orders and motivations for action; they serve as figures for identification in cases of conflicting heroizations. *Antiheroes* stand in opposition to the heroic code of behaviour; they do precisely what heroes would never do, and they avoid doing what is expected of heroes. *Non-heroes* fail in the face of heroic appeals or they remain immune to them. *No-longer-heroes* signal processes of de-heroization – once celebrated, they lapse into insignificance or are exposed to ridicule.

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Considered formally, the basic modalities of negation can be identified as follows:

(1) *Quantitative Privation*: The figures belonging to this type fall short of the measure of heroic greatness. They lack exceptionality and, consequently, lustre. Rather than distinguishing themselves through overperformance, they remain in the realm of the average and expected, or possibly fail even to meet the standard of the norm. Without any charisma, they cannot gather any circle of admirers. While they heed the heroic summons, they lack the courage, ambition, or opportunity to carry out heroic deeds.

(2) *Qualitative Opposition*: This type of counter-hero is characterized by a reversal of the moral polarity. The figures belonging to this group unquestionably possess greatness, but it is a greatness in evil. More accurately, they are considered disgraceful and villainous according to the prevailing heroic code. Rather than accomplishing admirable heroic deeds, they perpetrate loathsome misdeeds, or are accused of doing so. While they are exceptional, they are anything but role models. They are not exemplary, but scandalous figures.

(3) *Categorical Difference*: Here the important feature is not underperformance or a change in polarity, but a change of register. Figures of this type do not fall within the reach of the heroic force field; they are excluded from it or manage to elude its pull. They are neither models of virtue nor terrifying monsters, but rather morally indifferent. They are automatically unsuitable for heroic deeds because of their social standing, profession, or gender – or because their very humanity is not accepted as a given. Heroic pathos does not move them, they are not interested in glory and honour, they want nothing of self-sacrifice, and they remain unsusceptible to other heroic evocations.

While quantitative privation and qualitative opposition are defined in direct relation to the heroic code – namely in terms of negation of the heroic qualities of exceptionality and exemplariness – categorical difference is more complicated: there is a virtually unlimited number of ways of being different, and mere lack of sameness does not by any means imply negation. If a person is not qualified to be a hero due to their lowly birth, they do not automatically become an anti-hero. In order for difference to become an antithesis, something else is necessary: Sancho Panza only achieves the status of a paradigmatic counter-figure because he and his peasant wit expose the unpractical heroic pathos of Don Quixote. Only to the degree to which heroic appeals are generalized can deafness to these calls or deliberate refusal to hear them

be understood as negation. Only where heroic interpellations exert their force can immunity or refusal counteract them. Unlike figures of quantitative privation and qualitative opposition, which remain firmly rooted in the heroic canon of values in the way that the thief acts within the system of property ownership and the bankrupt business owner is defined by the imperative of economic success, the figures of categorical difference challenge the very validity of this canon. They are less an opposing force to the power of the heroic field, and more a suspension of it; they disrupt the flow of energy rather than reversing its polarity. It is these figures in particular who then provide the models that step outside (or remain beyond the reach of) the circle of power of heroic appeals. In other words, they mark out the limits of what can be heroized.

These three modalities of negation are useful for creating a typology of the counter-, anti-, non-, and no-longer-heroes because they can be related to specific dimensions of the heroic: First, heroes, as previously noted, are morally regulated deviants. Their deeds may bring them into conflict with what is right and lawful, but their exemplariness is beyond question. Second, heroes are admired or revered, and they must earn this distinction on a 'field of honour' (this may, but does not have to be, a battlefield). Third, heroes distinguish themselves through their exceptional and often agonal agency. They confront challenges, join battles, overcome obstacles, and establish order. Fourth, they must be prepared to make sacrifices and even, in extreme cases, to put their own life at stake.

Putting the three modalities of negation into a matrix with the four dimensions of the heroic produces the following [table](#).

Morally Regulated Deviance: The alternative models to the heroic type and its exceptional, exemplary performance of good are, on the one hand, the *conformist* and the *everyman*, the ordinary man, who lack the transgressive quality; on the other hand, the *villain* and *traitor*, who turn the heroic performance into something negative and are condemned for it. Thirty years ago, Hans Magnus Enzensberger noted that "[i]nto the shoes of the village idiots and the oddballs, of the eccentrics and the queer fish" had stepped a new figure, "the average deviationist, who no longer stands out at all from millions like him" (Enzensberger 179). While the residents of the zones of normality can hope for benevolent irony in the post-heroic era, the stories of villains and traitors elicit fear and loathing, but also fascination. The question of *hero or villain*, *hero or traitor* is always political: One person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist; what one person

Modalities of Negation Dimensions of the Heroic	Quantitative Privation	Qualitative Opposition	Categorical Difference
Morally Regulated Deviance	Conformist Everyman	Villain Traitor Terrorist	Opportunist
Honour and Veneration	Wannabe	Scapegoat	Infamous man
Agency	Sluggard Failure Dilettante	Berserker	Robot
Willingness to Make Sacrifices	Coward	Gambler	Victim

Table: Four dimensions of the heroic, three modalities of negation.

sees as the exposure of state crimes, another sees as a betrayal of one's country. The type of the *opportunist*, by contrast, is characterized by a categorical difference, for this person acts based not on values, but on their own interests. While the traitor is someone who switches sides, opportunists are not loyal to any side. They do not decisively act in support of the cause of the good, nor do they arbitrarily side with the bad. Instead, they manoeuvre between the two. They avoid choosing in favour of one or another principle because they lack principles entirely.

Honour and veneration: Heroes are venerated; wannabe heroes want to be admired. Often their excessive ambition and hunger for charisma make them appear ridiculous. When the intention to be heroic is too obvious, it bothers the audience and destroys the heroic aura. Heroes must have a certain artlessness. Part of their paradox is that they are venerated not least of all because they carry out deeds for their own sake, not out of a desire for honour. This is precisely where the *wannabe* fails. The qualitative opposition of the veneration of the charismatic hero is the demonization of the *scapegoat*. While the former unifies all the positive emotions of a community in their person, the persecution of the latter draws all the community's negative energies (Girard). Both contribute to social cohesion. By contrast, neither veneration nor hatred are directed towards non-heroic figures, as Michel Foucault describes in his study of *infamous men* (Foucault 76-91). They fall outside the company

of the heroizable, but they also lack the dark lustre of daemonic counter-identifications. No *fama* precedes them, nor are they commemorated posthumously. They do not shine with their own light, but are illuminated by others. Infamous people are not forgotten, but only because at some point they found their way into the spotlight and left behind traces in the archives of history.

What rescues them from the darkness of night where they would, and still should perhaps, have been able to remain, is an encounter with power: without this collision, doubtless there would no longer be a single word to recall their fleeting passage. (Foucault 79)

Agency: If action, courage, and decisiveness constitute some of the basic virtues of the hero, the counter-figures of the *sluggard*, the *failure*, and the *dilettante* lack precisely these qualities. The first is unwilling to hear the summons to action, the second lacks the power to obey it, and the third does not have sufficient skill. To be sure, virtuosos of comfort, passivity, and indecisiveness like Ilya Ilyich Oblomov, Bartleby the scrivener, or Jeff Lebowski still retain the ability to fascinate, but they do not provide material for heroic narratives. The same is true for the stories of inadequacy that accompany failures and dilettantes. Acting irresponsibly or simply being very unlucky can also make one into an antihero. *Berserkers*, by contrast, have an excess of combative fervour. Their rampaging knows no limits,

as they enter a state of near ecstasy in their rage – and with this mad fury they throw away both their chance at victory and their moral integrity (Shay 77-101). Suitable material for a hero is only the person who can cease fighting at the right time. If the berserker incorporates the violence of pure power of action, in the case of the *robot* one must ask whether they even possess agency. There is no doubt that machines are superior to humans in many ways: they can see more clearly and hear more precisely, they can process a much greater amount of information and call upon infinitely greater physical strength and endurance, they can move more quickly and are able to defy adverse conditions. Machines replace human agency and thus a basic characteristic of heroic figures, but can machines act deliberately? And can they be heroized? The imagined worlds of popular culture are full of anthropomorphized robots, but these characters only advance to the status of heroes when they demonstrate human qualities – above all the ability to make moral judgements, empathy and emotion – in other words, when they give up their robotness. Machines do not themselves operate in hero mode, for they lack a fundamental dimension of agency: the ability to make decisions. They process algorithms; they have no apparatus enabling them to heed the call of heroic appeals, or to refuse such calls.

Willingness to make sacrifices: Heroic deeds are distinguished not least by the fact that those who perform them put their lives at risk. Whoever calls for heroes, desires that their listeners do precisely that. For this reason, the invocation of heroes is a standard part of military mobilization. To be considered a *coward* is a devastating judgement wherever warrior heroism reigns – and it continues to be a punishable offence for soldiers even today: “fear of personal danger does not excuse an action if the soldier’s duty demands enduring that danger”, paragraph 6 of the German Military Penal Code (*Wehrstrafgesetz*) dictates. Also beyond the contexts of war and the military, it is a radical negation of heroic principles to value self-preservation over a noble goal, or to give in to one’s inner voice of fear rather than allowing it to be silenced by propaganda. If the coward avoids danger, *gamblers* taunt it. Recklessly they rush into battle when prudence would dictate retreat; they sacrifice themselves and others, even if there is no need to do so, in short: they do not strive for victory or the act of salvation, but rather the thrill of adventure – and often enough, their own destruction. The semantics of the heroic speak only of *sacrifice*; it has no place for considering the *victim*. To accept that one’s life is not, to rephrase Schiller,

a “good supreme” (see Schiller 136) can be extended to apply to each and every person – as it is in totalitarian regimes – and the only exception to this call are those who are themselves persecuted and made into victims. The figure of the *victim* stands for pure suffering; victims have harm done to them. They cannot be heroized because their persecutors extinguish their physical existence and deprive them of their subjectivity:

Victims are impersonal subjects; they have no face, no voice and no place. Even if they are still alive, they are numbed and muted, displaced and uprooted. They embody the dark fringe of human societies, where doubts about the seemingly clear boundaries arise, where subjects are suddenly turned into objects and objects are endowed with a voice – a realm of haunting ghosts, monsters and nightmares in between common subjectivity and plain objectivity, a realm ruled by demons and deprived of humanity. (Giesen 53)

This cast of figures is by no means an exhaustive list of all varieties of negation of the heroic. The fool, the nerd, and the resigned are missing, to name only a few additional types. If other dimensions of the heroic were to be placed on the table – for example, by adding a row for agonality rather than subsuming it under agency, or by separating the transgressive and the exemplary elements from one another – the tableau would also change.

What is gained by creating such a compilation? Typologies occupy a middle ground between definitions (or the theoretical systematizations which build upon them) on one side, and exempla or case studies on the other. They allow for more nuanced descriptions than possible with definitions, and at the same time avoid the limited capacity of case studies to serve as a basis for generalizations. Typologies make comparisons between ideal types and therefore are heuristic in nature. They do not describe reality, but suggest how reality could be described and thus provide orientation for further research. They offer an organizational system for a particular field, and to this end they construct abstractions that leave aside the particular qualities of a concrete case. Instead, they take especially characteristic elements from the material of a historical-social constellation and consolidate it into “a unified thought construct” (Weber 90). The usefulness of typologies for guiding research must grapple with a number of difficulties: Firstly, typologies are ahistorical, and not capable of capturing historical transformations and processes of cultural translation. Secondly,

typologies suggest a comprehensiveness and systematicity that does not do justice to the diversity of the historical material. There is a place for everything in the table, but only *one* place. Thirdly, typologies overemphasize differences at the cost of relationships, hybrid constellations, and blurred boundaries. Therefore, they cannot replace either an analysis of constitution and function, or historical reconstructions. They are a theory-guided and theory-generating tool of cultural research – no more, no less.

Typologies are particularly suitable for the investigation of heroisms and heroization processes, because typification is part of the subject's own logic: heroic semantics construct figures, whether based on reality or fictional, who have paradigmatic qualities. Considered in their own right, each hero is unique; they become a morphological focus of a community only when they embody something greater than themselves. In other words, one becomes a hero as a type, not as an individual. The same is true for the various counter-, anti-, non- and no-longer-heroes from which the disparate elements of the heroic come to light *ex negativo*. By considering which figures are condemned, scorned, ignored, ridiculed, or unheroizable, it is possible to gain insight into which aspects of the heroic are particularly emphasized in a specific constellation. Ultimately, it is the lines of resistance that make visible the contours of a force field.

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Michael N. Ebertz

Charisma and ‘the Heroic’¹

Of all the terms in Max Weber’s theoretical writings, none has been as publically effective or historically important for the field of sociology as the term ‘charisma’. It continues to generate interest (Gotter 173; Felten et. al.), and its usage has extended to the field of history (Rauer 155). To this day, charisma polarizes scholarly discussions to a greater degree than any of Weber’s other terms. While some “regard and use it as an important instrument of sociological research”, others reject it, arguing for example that it is full “of unproven theoretical premises” and cumbered with “meta-theoretical presuppositions and religious beliefs” (Cavalli 34-35; Karstein). Charisma seems to be a most fascinating and mysterious term (Lenze 1; Rauer 155), and, as Odo Marquardt writes, is prone to misunderstandings and blind agreements, even between fellow sociologists. The word charisma entices us to close our eyes, rather than discuss or think about its meaning. Alternatively, according to Weber, we may let our minds rest and feel charisma where we should not expect to find any. Either way, we cannot deny that

[i]n such a situation, there is a propensity to apply the attribute of the charismatic all too hastily to all those phenomena [...] that fall outside of the framework of the usual and familiar in some way or another. Thus, any blond boy with a tennis racket who can drive an entire audience wild is said to have charisma these days [...]. Business consultants teach politicians and managers the art of “cultivating charisma and using it for their goals”. (Gebhardt et. al. V)

Similar to the term ‘heroic’, the trivialization and inflationary use of ‘charisma’ – the extended attribution of charismatic qualities paired with an artificial construction of charismatic semblance – “blurs the original meaning of the term” (V). It also evokes the question of whether the classic theory of charisma, as developed by Weber, can still be regarded as a suitable heuristic and analytical tool. Moreover,

the theoretical discourse on charisma does not necessarily need to be inspired by Weber, the classic inventor of the charisma theory, or to continue his theory. There is a growing number of studies on charisma that hardly seem based on this origin or they regard it as irrelevant. (Zingerle, *Charisma-Forschung* 249)

Finally, there is the methodological question of “how social and cultural studies addressing the constitution of a structure of social order should deal with attributions of the extraordinary, of anti-structure or the ephemeral”, since charisma is a concept “through which the ‘other of order’ becomes the focus” of perception (Rauer 155).

With this situation in mind, I would like to go back to Weber and the origins of the theory of charisma in order to analyze its development and identify several traditions of reception that emerged in the last century, which I believe are important for the discourse of the heroic. In this discussion, I will be highlighting the following five aspects of the theory of charisma: a) the relational aspect, b) the situational aspect, c) the motivational aspect, d) the communication and action aspect, and e) the processual, or reception, aspect.

Unlike other facets of Weber’s sociology, we have always known the key sources for his ideal type of charisma. Weber frequently noted that he had based much of his theory on the work of the jurist and legal historian Rudolph Sohm. Sohm’s dogmatic works on the social ‘organization’ of early Christianity based on ecclesiastical law

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gained much attention and were hotly debated around 1900. Weber was also influenced by the theologian and church historian Karl Holl from Tübingen, especially Holl's studies on Greek monks. For Weber and his contemporaries, the term charisma was "thus nothing new" (Weber, *Economy* 216), and he mined Sohm's and Holl's works to form an ideal-type that would be distinguishable from actual historical cases, assuming that "in principle, these phenomena are universal" (1112). Weber's semantic exploitation of Sohm's and Holl's works is thus exemplary of the ideal-typical compositional technique that "brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is *conceived* as an internally consistent system" and exemplary of an artificial, comprehensive, understandable and heuristically useful terminological figure (Weber, *Objectivity* 90). We should not forget that charisma is an ideal type that serves the sociological research interest of recognizing the general in the particular; nor should we forget that it is unlikely that a historical phenomenon corresponds exactly to the characteristics of this type.

On the relational aspect of charisma

We will begin with the relational aspect of charisma. Sohm regarded the ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) of the early Christian community as a group whose structure was based not on "the abstract equality of all members", but on

dominance and subordination, depending on how God distributed his talents to everyone [...]. Charisma demands recognition, and insofar as it transforms someone into a director, leader, or administrator, also the *obedience* (!) of the others. (Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* 16, 26-27, exclamation mark in original)

Although Sohm fundamentally agreed with Paul the Apostle (as did Holl, incidentally) that "every true Christian has charismatic talent" (28), he still believed in horizontal and vertical differentiations in terms of charismatic talent. He reserved the term charisma for those among the first Christians who were "characterized by the power of their charisma" and who therefore stood out and left an impact, both as individuals and as "leaders" (Holl 190). Weber took this idea and narrowed it down to the ideal-typical charismatic relationship, stating that "the person of command is typically the 'leader'" (Weber, *Legitimate Domination* 12).

Sohm thus laid the foundations for a theory that goes beyond charismatic domination and for which further proof could be found, and also laid the foundations for the social inequality of charisma, the conflicts associated with (the distribution of) charisma and the charismatic division of labour.

This set the stage for what Weber understood as one of the constitutive qualities of charismatic domination. In reference to Sohm, Weber distinguished this type of domination: unlike traditional and legal domination, the structure and authority of charismatic domination are exclusively connected to a specific person. Although charisma can be associated with an "object" (Weber, *Economy* 400), the person with the charisma of a leader formulates the "mission believed to be embodied in *him*" (1117, emphasis MNE; see also Weber, *Three Types* 482). The person with charisma postulates the acceptance of this charisma and recruits their own 'personal assistants'. These personal assistants are deemed blessed and are subsequently organized and divided into a more or less elitist following ("charismatic aristocracy"), the social relations that they are able to regulate and integrate into, depending on the situation and whose tasks they delegate on a case-by-case and time-sensitive basis. As Sohm and others wrote, charisma is thus about a "*personally* qualifying power" (Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* 54).

In addition to the personal and subjective character of charisma, Weber also adopted Sohm and Holl's noteworthy clarification that charismatic ability, which not everyone possesses to the same degree, cannot be measured objectively, but is rather ascribed and acquired through interaction. According to Sohm, charismatic ability can only be "borne of conviction" (27); it is, in Weber's own words, "[conceived as] gifts of body and mind" ("*gedachte* Gaben des Körpers und Geistes") (Weber, *Economy* 1112, cf. 241-242, German quotation in Weber, *Wirtschaft* 654). Charisma is a product of cognition, interaction and attribution. As Weber writes in a somewhat constructivist manner:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is *considered* extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. [...] In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of quality is thought of as resting on magical powers, whether of prophets, persons with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in the

hunt, or heroes of war. How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What alone is important is how the individual is actually *regarded* by those subjects to charismatic authority, by its 'followers' or 'disciples'. (241-42; see 1112; italics MNE)

In the same book, Weber also writes about his understanding of 'supernatural' gifts ("in the sense that not everybody could have access to them") (1112):

The term 'charisma' [...] must be used in a completely value-free sense. The heroic ecstasy of the Nordic berserk, the legendary Irish folk hero Cuchulain or the Homeric Achilles was a manic seizure [...] for a long time his seizure was said to have been artificially induced through drugs. [...] The ecstasy of the Shamans is linked to constitutional epilepsy, the possession and testing of which proves the charismatic qualification. For us, both forms of ecstasy are not edifying; neither is the kind of revelation found in the Holy Book of the Mormons: if we were to evaluate this revelation, we would perhaps be forced to call it a rank swindle. However, sociology is not concerned with such value judgements: Important is that the head of the Mormons and the "heroes" and "magicians" proved their charisma in the eyes of their adherents. (1112)

This demonstrates Weber's attempt to work against an objectivist, substantialist and essentialist understanding of charisma in an effort to conceive a relational understanding of the term. He demonstrates the "decisive turn from a sociological perspective" – in other words, "the logical emphasis on charisma's dependence on recognition by those who are dominated" (Schneider, *Sinnproduktion* 139). In the "terminology of relations and not qualities" (Goffman, *Stigma* 11) that Weber uses to construct charisma as a relational aspect, it is unclear whether "the charismatic leader [is] the first who unconditionally believes in his mission" (Cavalli 36), or whether this is not purely a matter of attribution. Weber writes that, because bearers of charisma do not derive their authority from their followers' belief in them,

[t]he charismatic authority rests on the 'faith' in the prophet, on the 'recognition' which the charismatic warrior hero,

the hero of the street or the demagogue finds personally, and this authority falls with him. Yet, charismatic authority does not derive from this recognition by the subjects. Rather the reverse obtains: the charismatically legitimized leader considers faith in the acknowledgement of his charisma obligatory and punishes their violation. (Weber, *Three Types* 105)

This "new grammar", as the historian Ulrich Gotter (175) calls it (with one eye on Hans-Joachim Gehrke's works on Alexander the Great and his successors) and by which he means the nature of charisma as based on a leader's followers, is particularly emphasized in the history of the reception of Weber's concept. When researching charisma (as well as the heroic), the challenge is thus to analyze the criteria that have been used to evaluate the "charismatic hero" (Weber, *Economy* 1113). The criteria have varied throughout history and have formed the framework for how this hero 'proves' themselves (Karstein). Over the years, there have been several attempts to flesh out personal qualities of leader figures based on the distinction between 'internal charisma' and 'external charisma' (Rauer 157).

The discourse and research on the heroic is also not immune to such substantialist temptations. There is a suspicion that the research on the heroic cultivates an essentialist perception and a history of 'exceptional people'. However, I believe that a systematic orientation toward Weber's notion of charisma, with the heroic as a subcategory, could liberate the research on the heroic from such a suspicion. Charisma could therefore serve as a heuristic aid for focusing on the overall network of relationships of those involved in maintaining a charismatic impression and expression – in other words, those involved in "charismatization", which is a term that Rainer Lepsius (see Karstein) proposed to describe the processual character of such negotiations. Charismatization would also include those who ascribe charismatic qualities to an individual, but instead of reacting to them with devotion, they react with fear, dislike or other 'negative' emotions (Cavalli 35). The goal should thus be "to not look at the central figure of the hero in isolation, but to embed this figure within a relational network of all actors involved" (Schneider, *Habitus*). The concept of charisma has such immense theoretical potential that microsociological approaches such as dramaturgical action theories could also be applied in this context (Goffman, *Presentation of Self*; Lipp, *Stigma*; Rapp). This would help to raise questions about the constellation of actors, about 'figurations' and interdependencies and

'charismatic or heroic scenery'. We could analyze the 'stage set' of the scenic components from the repertoire of expressions, the front stage and backstage of the heroic and charismatic ensemble, their façades, the temporary and permanent supporting actors, the sponsors, sympathizers, opportunists, tag-alongs and claqueurs, along with those with 'counter charisma' and other adversaries, people who are a hindrance, and enemies. Performance theory could also be useful in this case (Rauer 164-171), as could the terminology of 'symbolic interactionism'.

The construction of charisma as an interpersonal, relational and "emotional form of communal relationship" (Weber, *Economy* 243) with dynamic potential (Cavalli 33) results in what Weber describes as a "fundamental lability of legitimation based on charisma. Actors are always forced to prove themselves and, in case of a failure, are in danger [...] of undergoing de-charimatization" (Rauer 159). According to Weber,

[t]he charismatic hero derives his authority not from an established order and enactments, as if it were an official competence, and not from custom or feudal fealty, as under patrimonialism. He gains and retains it solely by proving his powers and practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord. Most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by bringing well-being to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master. (Weber, *Economy* 1114)

Since the 1960s, the research on charisma has asserted that charismatic leadership is based on its recognition by a following and must always be characterized by its instable internal structure and a revolutionary intentionality. Since then, numerous social scientists investigating charismatic leadership have focused on the precariousness of its internal and external dynamics. They view charismatic leadership as the central trait from which other components (more or less clearly defined by Weber) can be deduced, and thereby elucidate the typical setting of charismatic movements. Using this as a basis, the literature on charisma relies on communication and action theory, as well as empirical case studies, in order to delineate a structural, intrinsic dynamic of charismatic relations of domination. If we look closer, we quickly realize that this dynamic is part of the struggle between charisma and the everyday world. It is the omnipresent process of routinization that is inherent in the charismatic

relationship but is not intended by the charismatic leader – in other words, as Weber stresses, it is "the internal logic of this relationship pattern defined by dominance compared to the attitudes of those involved" (Seyfarth 158). However, this must be distinguished from the necessary processes of routinization that occur after the charismatic leader's death.

In general, we can say that charismatic relationships represent a pro-active imperative to construct a new social reality and destroy the old. Both of these references to interaction are inseparably connected with each other (Wilson 9) and represent the key problem of interaction in charismatic movements as such: They must be resistant to tradition and be "foreign to all rules" (Weber, *Economy* 244) (also from a tactical point of view). They must assert themselves against old orders, attitudes and opinions in a permanent process of interaction, while remaining primarily dependent on the convincing power of the charismatic leader's personality (Waddel 5-6). The charismatic leader must therefore continuously acquire new legitimacy and constantly take it away from others – ideally from the representatives of the old order – without exposing themselves to the risks of delegitimation. On the other hand, all charismatic leaders depend on confrontation with representatives and followers of the existing social situation – just as they need the people's faith in their legitimacy for their *raison d'être* (Perinbanayagam 395).

For the most part, the recognition of the charismatic leader is maintained through primary communication: a) through relatively frequent, continuous, face-to-face, spatially and temporally condensed, familiar relationships within the small group of followers; and b) through the interaction between the leader and a single companion or a small group of companions with growing potential. Using this social basis of recognition as a springboard, charismatic leaders then turn toward a broader audience, where their followers can help boost their public image through acts of reverence, for example, or by serving as living examples of the new reality.

The fundamental, legitimizing dependence of charismatic leaders on the faith of their circle of helpers – regardless of the fact that this faith can be easily shaken – becomes greater and all the more indispensable the more limited their arsenal of sanctions. This can occur when the leader's independence from or resistance against traditional and legal sources of legitimation continues for a long time; when an increasing number of charismatic competitors appear on the "charismatic scene" (Mühlmann 251-256); when their support in their social environment

becomes more limited (Schweitzer 159), and when external pressure, and hence the danger of a cognitive and physical elimination, their "counter charisma" (Tucker 746; Perinbanayagam 396), increases. The more radical the charismatic leaders behave, the more likely the faith of their followers will shake. For this reason, leaders must satisfy their followers, while also counteracting tendencies within the group to deny their extraordinariness and disallow the 'exception to the rule' that guarantees them normative autonomy and variability (Legér 54) and ensures their "anti-economic character" (Weber, *Economy* 251). Leaders must also face a gradual loss of originality (Waddel 3-4), a waning enthusiasm and crisis awareness, along with a falsification of their definition of the situation, assurances and promises. Because followers share the charismatic leader's prestige, they also share an interest in the leader's appreciation, which they strive to guarantee while also maintaining and/or enhancing their own image within the group (Wallis 36-39). The followers adopt the appropriate measures accordingly: for example, they may feel that they need to isolate the charismatic leader from discrediting social contacts, thereby selectively controlling information, while maintaining and increasing the charismatic leader's already enhanced identity. However, selectively controlling information may cause the leader to overestimate their own abilities and to misjudge their potential support in society, as well as the overall conditions for the success of a charismatic mission, which could have devastating consequences for the charismatic relationship (Perinbanayagam 398-400).

In the literature on charisma, charismatic leaders are dependent on legitimation and are therefore confronted with an ongoing basic problem: they must maintain control over the cognition of both their close followers and those people who are further removed from them. As a result, they must maintain control over their own self-image, which becomes more difficult as the number of their followers grows (Fabian 804). Charismatic leaders are confronted with a dilemma: they must combat the hyper-apathy of followers whose faith in the leaders' legitimacy is dwindling due to a rapidly shrinking "benefit" (Weber, *Economy* 242), and simultaneously work against the danger of 'over-legitimation' within the group, in order to avoid falling prey to the charisma "trap" (Perinbanayagam 397-398). This trap is the permanent need for legitimation – in other words, they must not succumb to the consequences of a socially constructed megalomania.

The problem of charismatic leaders striving to find a balance between the apathy and activity of

their followers also defines the external relations of the charismatic group, but in reverse. Again, the key reference point here is the required cultivation and maintenance of the fragile legitimacy of the charismatic leader. Paradoxically, in the case of the leader's interaction with addressees outside of the group, the interaction with adversaries plays a decisive role, because they represent the social conditions that the leader delegitimizes. In this context, the charismatic leader is not confronted with the problem of over-legitimization, but rather with the risk of delegitimization. As Sennett was able to demonstrate with the example of Savonarola, the "paradox of charismatic authority" consists of the fact that the charismatic leader must mobilize the population in order to win them over for their mission and 'convert' them – in other words, to convince them that they cannot let the charismatic mission diminish through their indifference. The leader must also take care not to cause or strengthen processes over which they could lose control, or to invoke expectations of their charisma that they cannot fulfil, thereby creating hostile reactions that cannot be deflected (Sennett 110). The charismatic leader could thus become entangled in the external 'trap' of a mobilized social environment if they hand over the control of their identity to others – for example, by bowing to the rules of testing their charismatic abilities and their attempts to destroy their charisma. In addition to the interactive control of internal legitimation processes, the most risky structural condition for a charismatic relationship is thus the relationship between the charismatic leader and their adversaries. This must be interactively rationed so that any form of opposition does not suddenly become a campaign for the physical or cognitive annihilation of the charismatic leader. Such a campaign can be a direct or indirect result of their internal compensatory over-legitimation, but is used as an indirect secondary source of recognition for the charismatic leader (Perinbanayagam 24-25) or is regarded as a 'success' (Friedland 24-25) or even as a driving force for the continuation of the charismatic interaction.

With this and the "scarcity of corresponding statements in the terminological and typological parts of Weber's work" in mind (Zingerle, *Soziologie* 141), the strong interest found in literature about charisma in the macrostructural conditions and typical interactional modes of the development and maintenance of charismatic movements becomes understandable.

On the situational aspect of charisma

Sohm, in contrast to Holl (153), believed that the element of enthusiasm in early Christianity was restrained through the “stipulation of a religious idea” in a value-rational way, stressing that “only the rationally justified” word demands obedience (Sohm, *Katholizismus* 378-379; *Kirchenrecht* 23). In contrast, Weber emphasizes the emotional component of a charismatic interaction, referring to this as an “emotional form of communal relationship”, which is based on the “emotional rapture” and emotional “conviction” of the leader. The followers, on the other hand, are defined by their “affectual devotion” and “affectual, especially, emotional *faith*” in the leader’s charismatic quality (Weber, *Three Types* 12; *Economy* 243, 1115, 36, italics in original); in fact, “all emotional mass appeals have certain charismatic features” (Weber, *Economy* 1129). Inspired by Holl, Weber states that the conditions for sustaining and supporting the acceptance of the charismatic leader are based solely on testing the leader “time and again” and measuring their “success”. That is to say, those who are involved in the charismatic relationship judge the leader’s acceptance, according to their cultural context, as a miracle, sign or benefit (1113; *Three Types* 14), or, if the leader has failed, as a form of deprivation. For Sohm, the recognition of charisma is “born only out of love” (Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* 27); Weber, on the other hand, repeatedly omits love. He replaces it with fascination or despair and the hope that this inspires:

Psychologically this recognition is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope. (Weber, *Economy* 242)

Weber also ventures far beyond Sohm to argue that the development and maintenance of charismatic relationships are connected to a social situation defined by deprivation and benefit. He regards this compensatory effect of charisma – its inherent tendency to cancel itself out – as further proof of the fragile nature of the charismatic relationship, which Sohm also recognized. Unlike Sohm and Holl however, Weber extends the capacity to experience deficiency to include all areas of life.

A number of sociologists have accused Weber of insufficiently researching – or failing to research – the necessary social conditions for the development of charismatic relationships (including Friedland; Worseley 423-424; Oommen; Tucker 742; Wolpe 309; Malamet 119-120).

Indeed, Weber was more interested in the application of charismatic relationships, rather than their genesis. Using existing charismatic relationships as a basis, he traced the reception history of the variations that could be regularly expected and which always become more prominent when charismatic domination endures beyond its primary phase. It would be wrong, however, to accuse Weber of not considering the social development and action contexts of charismatic social movements. Although they represent “a permanently recurring phenomenon”, according to Bendix (248), Weber still regarded these social situations as states of emergency. He argued that contrary experiences could not provide a favourable context for charisma: A charismatic movement “arises from distress or enthusiasm” and

always results from unusual, especially political or economic situations, or from extraordinary psychic, particularly religious states, or from both together. It arises from collective excitement produced by extraordinary events and from surrender to heroism of any kind. (Weber, *Economy* 1114, 1121)

In addition to harbouring scepticism toward rigid social determinism and a potentially complete classification of human experience with deficiency, this broad and general typology reveals that Weber was not just an empiricist who opted to maintain an open mind toward all concrete historical, deficient situations. In fact, he was also a sociologist of understanding who left the definition of each of these situations up to the actors themselves, their personal perspectives and their sense of what is relevant to them in their concrete historical worldview. He also emphasized that our constant existential concern is the “problem of the world’s imperfections” (521), meaning that the chances of believing in charisma are never low. Weber wrote that “it is the worldview that has directed ‘from what’ and ‘for what’ one would be ‘saved’ and, let us not forget, could be saved” (Weber, *Religionssoziologie* 252). Such crises – events or situations in which “routine is to some extent broken or disturbed” (Eisenstadt XXVII), which are favourable for charismatic movements in numerous cultures and which occur in multifaceted historical combinations – are dealt with in the literature on charisma; this seems like a belated affirmation of Weber’s decision not to discuss more concrete conditions for his theory’s development. Although this may not be satisfying from a theoretical point of view (Zingerle, *Charisma-Forschung* 252), the

literature on Weber's theory of charisma shows a tendency to deem such macro-structural crises as necessary, albeit insufficient conditions for charismatic social movements to evolve. The literature also differentiates between several types of crises:

a) Crises based on unresolved intercultural conflicts, especially a clash of systems of orientation (for example, Fabian 776-777) and in cases in which people are conquered politically (Willner; Perinbanayagam 392-393; Malamat 122).

b) Crises stemming from unresolved tension within a culture and from conflicts within society. Namely, crises in connection with economic scarcity and distribution problems (Rammstedt; Oommen 89-91, 93-94), political crises of legitimation and crises of administration (especially conflicts concerning power and sovereignty) (Friedland; Dekmejian/Wyszomirski 195, 200-201; Ingram). Crises can also stem from 'suffering from society' (Hans Peter Dreitzel), processes of social control, stigmatization and marginalization (especially Lipp, *Selbststigmatisierung* 25-29; *Charisma* 64-66, 68; *Stigma*), socio-structural identity and change (Friedland; Rammstedt; Perinbanayagam 395; Dekmejian/Wyszomirski 195-196, 201), as well as the weakened religious or cultural production of meaning (Rammstedt, especially 9).

From a socio-psychological point of view, collective and personal crises limit the scope and variety of possible actions and the ability of the actor to judge. These crises address, question and focus on what has been regarded as incidental and self-evident. They direct our attention towards something new by lending things relevance and creating new hierarchies of relevancy. They also produce a willingness to search for and to accept the cognitive and normative information that refers to the crisis and how to control and overcome it (Bord, especially 488-490; Mühlmann 255-256). This also creates the conditions for considering alternative interpretations of reality and types of orientation and norms that are either regarded as new (having so far 'not been seen correctly') or are now being re-discovered for the first time. At the same time, the latent desire to "transcend" the interior and exterior world (Marcus; Schelsky 44), especially the latent belief in charisma in everyday life (an important social fact for Wilson, see Wilson VIII, also 94), is also evoked, thereby creating the conditions for accepting often several charismatic leaders (Tucker 745; Sennett 173).

The literature on charisma tends to explain a crisis as a necessary but insufficient condition for the genesis of a charismatic relationship (Cavalli 36). Cultural conditions must also be

available as motifs for interpreting this crisis as solvable, rather than accepting it fatalistically. Furthermore, the resultant problems of the crisis must be discussed and regarded as solvable. In this context, Lepsius distinguishes between a "potentially charismatic situation" and a "manifestly charismatic situation", thereby emphasizing the many conditions required for the successful interplay between the person claiming to have charisma (with his or her mission and belief in his or her calling) and a social group (with their willingness to accept and follow the potential leader) (95-119). The potentially charismatic situation is the necessary condition for a charismatic leader to be accepted by the people – for example, when they perceive a crisis but the actors responsible are unable to manage it. The delegitimization of those responsible creates a power vacuum in which the people hope for the leadership of a 'strong man'. In contrast, the manifestly charismatic situation occurs when an actual charismatic relationship of domination has already evolved. This brings us to the motivational aspect of this relationship.

On the motivational aspect of charisma

Sohm discussed (albeit only in passing) the charismatic effect of the leader's acting as a model, which he associated with the effect charismatically talented people achieve "through their words" (*Katholizismus* 376). This aside later became the focus of Weber's most advanced ideal-typical definition of charismatic domination, which he conceived and published in 1919/20. Weber's definition bases the "validity of the claims to legitimacy" on

charismatic grounds – resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, *and* of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. (Weber, *Economy* 215, italics MNE)

Therefore, the activity and intentionality of those seeking charismatic confirmation also play a role, as does Luciano Cavalli's notion that no one could become accepted as a leader "who was not able to interpret a crisis according to the culture of their 'group of people' and offer a solution adequate to this culture" (Cavalli 36). Cavalli also emphasizes that the term charisma necessarily includes "the idea that a mission is a constitutive element" and without it "the term would lose much of its analytical power" (36).

The 'because-motives' may therefore be based on charismatic processes of genealogy and education (Gehrke 20-21). As Weber writes:

At the root of the oldest and most universally diffused magical system of education is the animistic assumption that just as the magician himself requires rebirth and the possession of a new soul for his art, so heroism rests on a charisma which must be aroused, tested, and instilled into the hero by magical manipulations. In this way, therefore, the warrior is reborn into heroism. Charismatic education in this sense, with its novitiates, trials of courage, tortures, gradations of holiness and honor, initiation of youths, and preparation for battle, is an almost universal institution of all societies which have experienced warfare. (Weber, *Economy* 458)

These 'because motives' can relate to experiences of 'self-transcendence' (Hans Joas) or to dreams or visions. As has been demonstrated by William James and others, the latter are not psychopathological, but merely have a different emphasis on reality (Thomas Luckmann) and are interpreted as a 'call' to enter on a mission (328-329). Finally, there is also the collective experience of 'effervescence' as described by Emile Durkheim.

Wolfgang Lipp ventured beyond Weber when he integrated experiences of marginality and stigmatization, charged with resentment, as a theme in his research of motivational structures of charisma (Lipp, *Stigma*; Ebertz, *Stigma*; *Gekreuzigter*; Hartmann; Ridder). According to Lipp, these 'because motives' are transformed into 'in-order-to motives' and used by marginalized people to stigmatize themselves. In other words, they intentionally assume negative attributions in order to redefine these as a state of chosenness. Lipp continually insisted on the interchangeability of stigma and charisma – *Stigma und Charisma* is also the title of one of his books – and he repeatedly used the hero who sacrifices himself as an example of this. Although literature on charisma tends to acknowledge these connections between charisma and stigma, it does not generalize them. Instead, it solves the problem of generalization "through the construction of a typology of multiple genetic contexts of charisma" (Zingerle, *Charisma-Forschung* 255), with a "meaningful internal typology" postulated by Ulrich Gotter (185). Thus, as reception history shows, the pro-active and intentional aspect of charisma can also be understood as the interactive process of 'charismatization'.

As those who absorb the excitement and hopes of the people affected by a crisis, potential charismatic leaders become actively engaged in social interaction and communication, or they are passively made part of it (Tucker 744). They 'test' their chances of influencing and finding a potential audience that approves of them, perhaps even finding several followers who are willing and pledge to follow their 'new' teachings, while actively helping to spread them by 'following' the teachers. These reactions of potential followers could be the first step in the process of forming the identity of a potentially charismatic leader: they will now see themselves as a (socially) 'real' charismatic leader (Wallis 30-31; Schweitzer 154). As Wilson explains, the conditions for the acceptance of prophets and other bearers of personal charisma (by others and of themselves) are favourable in societies in which there is an ongoing cultural tradition of expressing natural and social relationships through personification. Furthermore, they are the most favourable in societies in which worldviews are charismatically conditioned, meaning that the arrival of a charismatic leader is expected when certain crises occur (Wilson 21-23, 95).

On the communication and action aspect of charisma

Sohm anticipates other aspects of Weber's ideal-type of charisma concerning the orientation to action within the charismatic relationship. According to Sohm, this orientation is neither based on the past nor on legal aspects, not even in terms of form. Instead, as already mentioned, it is personal, although this is meant in a 'religious', rather than 'worldly', sense. Weber, who regarded even religiously motivated action as "oriented to *this world*" (*Economy* 399, emphasis in original), counters this by saying: "There is no separation of religious and worldly states other than by the extraordinariness of the first" (Weber, *Wirtschaftsethik*). Instead of describing charismatic relationships as having transcended the profane, Weber talks about the distance to and divestiture from 'everyday life' and the 'world' (*Economy* 1117). As to charismatic action, this can thus be seen in two ways (Rauer 162-163): a) as magical and ritual action, and b) as contingent action.

According to Weber (*Economy* 400), while magical and ritual action manipulates "extraordinary powers", for which "we shall henceforth employ the term 'charisma'", the contingent mode of action (see in comparison Rauer 161) presents

itself (not only from the perspective of an observer) as “outside of the usual structures of expectation” (Weber, *Economy* 400). Thus, all charismatic action “lacks all orientation to rules and regulations whether enacted or traditional. Spontaneous revelation or creation, deed and example, decision from case to case” define social action (Weber, *Three Types* 12). Hans-Joachim Gehrke describes this trait using the example of Alexander the Great:

First and foremost, there are two characteristic traits that define Alexander's behaviour in his early years as a ruler. He was well aware of the effect of demonstratively wielding military power, and he had a sense for the cold logic of power politics. Furthermore, he used this knowledge to act without compromise, without regard for the circumstances and without being mindful of long-term strategic planning. Things that were difficult, impossible or especially unexpected were just right. This is the secret of his success. (Gehrke 31)

In fact, charismatic action and communication have always been characterized by a secret, by something held back. While secrets may be an essential part of all social relationships, this particular ‘game of secrets’ is part of the communicative core of charismatic relationships. It serves as the “charismatic protection against profanation and copying” and thus

prevents the democratization of charismatic talents for everyone, while at the same time producing a desire that is directed at a secret, without ever entirely being able to unravel it. (Schneider, *Sinnproduktion* 131)

This creates a contingency problem for the co-actors in that the secret must remain intact, because its revelation would mean that what is ambivalent and cannot be interpreted would be transformed into something with a clear meaning. Thus, the difference between a charismatic person and his or her followers is maintained through a secret that must be clearly voiced as such in order to make silence possible in the first place (135). It seems to me that, from the point of view of communication and action theory, the idea of the secret has been key for the literature on charisma (from Georg Simmel to Heinrich Popitz, for example) to understand charismatic relationships. This idea could be developed further and can also help to explain the fascination

and fright (*fascinosum et tremendum*) involved in ‘charisma’ and ‘charismatic relationships’ – and thus also in the ‘heroic’.

On the processual aspect of charisma

In conclusion, I want to address the processual aspect of charisma, which Weber focused on predominately as the “routinization of charisma” (Weber, *Economy* 246), albeit without ultimately developing an adequate theoretical systematization and typological differentiation (Zingerle, *Charisma-Forschung* 259). According to Weber:

When the tide that lifted a charismatically led group out of everyday life flows back into the channels of workaday routines, at least the ‘pure’ form of charismatic domination will wane and turn into an ‘institution’; it is then either mechanized, as it were, or imperceptibly displaced by other structures, or fused with them in the most diverse forms, so that it becomes a mere component of a concrete historical structure. In this case it is often transformed beyond recognition, and identifiable only on an analytical level. (Weber, *Economy* 1121)

In an extension of Weber's two main methods of institutionalization, which are “lineage charisma” or “hereditary charisma” and/or “office charisma” (1135, 246, 1139), yet another form was added in the literature on his work – namely, “world-view” or “idea charisma”. This form of charisma is fiercely defended and held up as canonized, holy knowledge by intellectuals who closely guard it in order to maintain a monopoly over the ‘truths of salvation’ and the interpretation thereof, mercilessly defending it against criticism with inquisitions and show trials intended to punish those who disregard it. This type is also capable of creating and producing genuine charisma: We only need to remember the history of Marxism (Gebhardt, *Lebensform* 69-73) and Christianity, both of which have constantly produced new ‘religious heroes’. Did not the charisma of Alexander (whose teacher gave him the nickname Achilles) also profit from Homer's charisma of ideas and the values it conveyed?

In contrast, Winfried Gebhardt distinguishes this from

forms that take another path towards institutionalization. This is not an attempt to inject charisma into everyday situations, but

to create temporally and spatially limited special institutions [...] that are meant to maintain 'pure' charisma in order to keep its legitimizing power alive and permanent. (74)

Weber also noted (but did not discuss in detail) 'a form that takes another path', which he referred to as the "charisma as a form of life [*Lebensform*]", using the example of Christian monks. To Weber, monks were "the old charismatic disciples and followers, but instead of a visible religious hero, the prophet removed to the hereafter is their invisible leader" (Weber, *Economy* 1168). We could ask whether Achilles was also viewed by Alexander and his friends as "the idolized hero" (Weber, *Religionssoziologie* 308) who transcended into the 'Hereafter' and whom they followed to "a sacred secluded place of nymphs" (Gehrke 20)? Did he not embody the heroic as a form of life? For Gebhardt, charismatic forms of life are therefore not only spatially localized, isolated and subdued and can evolve into groups protesting against the structures of 'office charisma' and 'lineage or hereditary charisma'; they can also include temporary forms. Among these are formal celebrations, which he distinguishes from informal parties by claiming that a party can

have a 'critical' power, which it usually gains when a given social order is confronted and compared with the ideal of a charismatic original event or the utopias derived from this. (Gebhardt, *Ordnung* 62)

As such, a party is therefore another important bearer of the idea of charisma, or charisma of the heroic, that continues to fascinate us to this day.

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Veronika Zink

The Game of Devotion

On the Production of Idolatry¹

'Charisma' is a kind of blanket term we use when trying to understand the alluring, glamorous and mysterious qualities of a social figure whose captivating aura makes them seem like a heroic exception to common social life. The heroically charismatic fills us with awe; it makes us marvel, and it excites us. In turn, we praise the extraordinariness of these heroic figures and give tribute to them. Whether we are referring to saviours in ways that resemble religious motives, political representatives or revolutionary leaders, people who are regarded as charismatic seem to be endowed with a unique appeal. This appealing presence not only ensures that they are approved and trusted by their followers, but is also constitutive for their exceptional social position of power. The world of mass media entertainment, for example, offers a culture industry of charisma, utilizing a strategy of symbolic idealization to place stars, icons and cult figures at the top of the social strata. The veneration of 'iprophets' in the digital age, the frenetic enthusiasm for a supposed 'god of football' and the enthronement of an entertainment icon as the 'king of pop' are all expressions of the mediatised omnipresence of countless charismatic heroes and of the mass cultural production of idolatry in which charisma is even made out to be a fundamental condition for success. The perceived extraordinary attractiveness of these figures secures the adoration and emotional affection of fans, not to mention their willingness to purchase goods that are the basis for the symbolic greatness and economic power of these adored stars.

Such exceptional figures embody something that can be regarded as 'more than normal'. They seem to operate along the margins of, or

beyond, the social standards of normalcy, transcending them and rising above what is common and mundane (see, for example, Bataille, *Sovereignty*; Giesen; Lipp). They represent *venerabilis* – in other words, those values and virtues that are respected and regarded as sublime within a social group. This is one of the reasons why the figure of the charismatic hero is awarded a superlative social status. Representing a concentration of the attention, esteem and veneration of his or her followers in turn guarantees this status. Saviour figures thus not only embody what a social group regards as venerable, but the charisma ascribed to them, simultaneously, constitutes a vital element of this very collective. Their nimbus-like aura is regarded as a captivating effect that enables them to attract the attention of vast audiences and to mobilize a collective in their name.

It is this social power of charisma that has repeatedly been in the focus of public and academic attention.² On the one hand, public and academic valuations of charisma affirm the motivational, transforming, and recreating power of charisma. For example, in the field of 'transformational leadership', management theories suggest that cultivating the apparently constructive dynamics of charisma can awaken hidden potentialities in employees by means of increasing their motivation (see, for example, Bono/Ilies; Conger et al.). In the field of politics, there is also a recurring call for charismatic dignitaries. Charisma is said to inspire a new enthusiasm of citizens to participate in politics, thereby counteracting a contemporary frustration with politics.³ On the other hand, by pointing to the destructive dimensions of the revolutionary and seductive power of charisma, to the social and psychological dangers of blind devotion, and to an irrational over-identification with a venerated idol we are confronted with quite an opposite scenario of the effects of valuing exceptionality.⁴ From this perspective, charismatic enchantment is ultimately a kind of manipulation, staged and produced by political leaders or the culture industry to cover

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up the illegitimate character of an asymmetrical power structure. From the enthusiastic fan and loyal acolyte, the humble believer, the screaming masses threatening to pass out in the face of their pop hero, to the martyr who sacrifices him- or herself, to an outsider devotion appears as a dubious passion. The people who are affected by this frantic and jubilatory affirmation of another's power seem to be only weak-willed individuals overcome by their strong feelings willing to give everything to the person they adore. The seductive power of the charismatic person seems to impair the ability of followers to judge.⁵ The veneration of the charismatic person thus appears irrational, because the devotees willingly engage in an unequal power relation in which they are the powerless part. Thus, adoration serves as the affective foundation for the greatest possible antagonism of power and the asymmetrical relationship of dependence to which the follower falls prey in his or her emotionally motivated superstition – the “disease of submission” as Richard Sennett (87) calls it.

Along with adoration, an uncomfortable suspicion seems to enter onto the cultural stage. In light of such devotion to an overpowering Other, those who are not enchanted by the charisma of this Other, the enlightened outsiders (and hence also the academic critics), inevitably challenge the legitimacy of this veneration and question the power relations based on adorers' humility. Whether we see charisma as an opportunity for a social group or as a threat to the social realm, in both cases the charismatic is regarded as having a vital significance for society in that it refers to the emotionally mobilizing potential of this exceptional phenomenon. As contradictory as these two perspectives on charisma may be, they both share a belief in the power of charisma, in its ability to incite the masses. For the most part, however, it remains unclear what is actually being referred to when we talk about a person's charisma. What is the basis for believing in a charismatic phenomenon and its seductive power? The purpose of my argument is to address this principle of seduction, while also demonstrating that, in order to answer the question of whether or not this asymmetrical power structure is legitimate, it is necessary to refer to people's faith in and devotion to the extraordinariness of charisma. Using this as a basis, I will demonstrate that this faith is the result of a production process designed to create and make visible signs of charismatic extraordinariness.

On the question of the legitimacy of enthusiastic power relations

Classic works of mass psychology and the sociology of religion in the tradition of authors such as Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber address the function and logic of this mobilizing potential with the attempt to explain the social effect and the cultural significance of such exceptional figures of social life. The aspect of people 'becoming emotionally affected' by the charismatic person, thereby developing jubilatory devotion to him or her, serves as a recurring motif in theoretical attempts to account for the phenomena of charisma: Whether referring to how an irrational mass of people has become infected through the suggestive power and nimbus of a seducer (see Le Bon), how they have developed a libidinal connection to an idealized leader (see Freud), or how their enthusiasm toward a charismatic person has transformed into obedience (see Weber), affections and feelings appear as prerequisites in the explanation of charisma's vital social potential. Yet what is the source of the charismatic person's power to affect people emotionally? The reference to the ability to infect others with strong emotions makes this quality appear even more mysterious. It only defines the captivating and binding aspect of this phenomenon without explaining the social construction of this quality as well as the cultural logic that drives the belief in someone's affective aura.

The most radical sociological explanation is Durkheim's. He describes this enthusiasm and devotion as sacred emotions. According to his sociology of the sacred, these passions should be regarded as social facts (and thus not as psychological phenomena) and should therefore be understood as being based on social foundations:

Moreover, now as in the past, we observe society constantly creating new sacred things. Let a man capture its imagination and seem to embody its principle aspirations as well as means to fulfil them, and this man will be set apart and considered nearly divine. Opinion will invest him with a majesty quite similar to the majesty that protects the gods. [...] Furthermore, the simple deference that men invested with social positions inspire is not inherently different from religious respect. (Durkheim 160)

Seen from this perspective, charisma is not the inexplicable and mysterious gift belonging to a

chosen figure. Rather, faith in the divinity of such figures is grounded in their existence as symbolic representations of condensed collective ideas. As a result, these representations are said to have a socially regenerating and creative potential and fulfil the function of symbolic integration. Their idolatrous character can thus be regarded as something imposed and projected on them by society, something that needs to be staged and continuously reactivated in the social realm through practices of worship and cultic veneration.

What Durkheim understands as “religious respect” Weber regards as an “interest [...] in obedience” (212). In the case of charisma, this interest is legitimized “by virtue of personal trust” (216) in that

this recognition is freely given and [...] consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader. (242)

Although the motifs are similar, Weber’s perspective is very different from Durkheim’s because Weber focuses primarily on the question of what conditions are necessary for an asymmetrical power structure to be recognized as legitimate, and how the belief in the charismatic person’s power is established and stabilized. If we apply this to the followers venerating the charismatic person, it becomes clear that this adoration is actually based on a belief in otherness, in not being bound by ordinary rules, and, therewith, in the extraordinariness of the charismatic person. If we take Weber’s point of view and regard charisma as a type of domination that follows an extraordinary logic, then the basic relation of power between the honourable hero and his or her followers can be defined as a relationship that is not regulated by force or violence, but by the belief in the legitimate power of the person bestowed with charisma. The charismatic relationship of domination is radically different from other “everyday forms of domination” (Weber 242), at least in its ideal-typical form, because this relationship is not based on producing symbols indicating how rational or traditional the system of domination is. Its legitimacy does not rest upon a rationally defined or historically established body of rules that can be discursively analysed. Since it is not bound by rules, it appears fundamentally irrational compared to rational domination and essentially revolutionary when compared to traditional domination.

Charismatic domination draws its legitimacy from symbols indicating how extraordinary this form of rule is. Its authority is justified by the belief in the charisma of the ethical, heroic and/or

religious virtuosity of a powerful Other and their claim to power through the enthusiastic approval of followers. It is exactly this affirmative experience of power I am referring to in my discussion on adoration and devotion. This said, adoration can be defined as an enthusiastic emotional attitude toward a sacred figure, whose extraordinary appearance is based on the belief that he or she is acting in the name of a higher order and a sublime power that has bestowed him or her with charismatic talent. This means that belief in the legitimacy of charisma primarily depends on the production of symbols indicating that the Other is extraordinary, mysterious, irrational and revolutionary.⁶ The belief in the charismatic person’s extraordinariness is fundamental to the logic of adoration because this logic rejects any rational power of order. But, likewise, the seeming irrationality of an “internalized devotion [...] appears undignified to the outside observer” (Weber 1108). How can we then understand this construct of extraordinariness – in other words, that which seemingly overrides any rational and traditional order and which, according to Weber, is fundamental for the belief in the charismatic giftedness and the emotionally motivated enthusiasm for it? According to Weber’s concept of validation, charisma must be produced and staged to be effective. Its validity depends on the devotion of followers and their belief in the extraordinariness of this heroic position of power.

It is this dimension of devotion and adoration that I want to address in the following – with the goal of focusing on the production of extraordinariness. My hypothesis is that the staging of power and extraordinariness by those who are perceived to be endowed with charisma depends on their enthusiastic counterpart, on the adoring audience that engages in the production of the extraordinary logic behind the validity of the charisma by emotionally affirming and stabilizing it in the social realm. Therefore, affection, devotion and veneration are not seen as factors that explain the belief in the extraordinariness of these figures; rather, they are regarded as elements in the production of this belief. I will therefore concentrate my investigation on the type of hero that represents the charismatic core of a social group of followers⁷ that adore and venerate the hero’s giftedness.⁸ Using this as a basis, I will focus on the charismatic dyad of adoration understood as the mutually constructed logic of the relationship between hero and follower. In this way, I will approach the production and realization of extraordinariness and its symbols step by step, all the while concentrating on two essential aspects for the dyad of adoration and its seductive logic: the construction of mysteriousness,

and the symbolic exchange. While the production of mysteriousness will prove fundamental for the extraordinariness of the venerated person, I will also demonstrate that this veneration is based on the belief in an agonistic game of the mutual expenditure. My argument is that these two mechanisms are constitutive for the belief in the extra-economic value of adoration, meaning they represent dynamic elements in the production of charisma's illusory value. I will conclude the investigation of the dyad of adoration by discussing the perspective of the unaffected outside audience. Understanding the onlookers this way – not identifying them with the circle of venerating followers – means to include the audience in its role as the 'fourth wall' into the analysis. Because this is the position of an observer who does not actively interfere in the production of idolatry, but who judges it from the outside, the focus on the outside audience enables a different perspective on the belief in extraordinariness, while also providing the observing audience with an essential function regarding the logic of adoration. Acquiring the function of interpreting the dyad of adoration from the social periphery, the outside audience plays the role of a third party (for more on the complementing function of the outside figure, see especially Simmel, *Sociology*). Therefore, the point of view of the not-enchanted, enlightened audience – whether they be the public, or a scholar who is searching for substance in the blanket term 'charisma' – becomes significant for the formation of this dyad and the production of the principle of seduction on which it is based.

Signs of extraordinariness: The adoration of opacity

Charisma must be staged – after all, adorers need signs to believe, and in this case, they need signs that vouch for the extraordinary giftedness of the charismatic person. According to Weber, the production of signs of exceptionality is a constitutive instrument for the stabilization of this fragile form of authority and the power structure that goes with it. Charisma only exists as long as the mysterious and magically attractive virtuosity of the venerated person is constantly kept alive without it becoming routine. The visible construction of arcana is one of the most common tools of power: What is hidden and opaque provides a foundation not only for the mysterious extraordinariness of the adored person by presenting what is impenetrable, unobtainable and incommensurable; it also provides

a foundation for his or her exclusiveness and publicity. As Georg Simmel wrote, the many are "those denied something valuable" and mysterious (*Sociology* 326).

Charisma is by definition an "opaque symbol of reference" (Schneider 130). Because of this lack of transparency, the nimbus of the venerated person is constructed as impenetrable. As long as the nimbus cannot be explained and comprehended, it remains an extraordinary effect, letting the adored person appear important yet untouchable, which is essential for the stability of this extraordinariness. In this way, charisma, which is constantly threatening to disappear, becomes immunized. The production of charisma is always in danger of becoming the opposite, and overproduction can cause the routinization of charisma. When a charismatic person is a public figure, their mysteriousness risks becoming profane, causing their magic, inexplicable and attractive effectiveness to wane. Only when the mystery of charisma is maintained and preserved can it unfold its captivating and seductive effect.⁹

Ultimately, the danger of becoming routine can only be counteracted by safeguarding and stabilizing this mysteriousness. This is also true for the adorers, who are interested in maintaining charisma's emotional attractiveness. In order to protect this mysteriousness, followers use a sacred language (see also Paulhan), which in turn preserves the belief in the untouchability of the adored person. The marvel and enthusiasm of fans who tremble and are struck dumb when in the presence of the object of their desire, the fundamental incomprehensibility of the numinous as defined by Otto, or the inability to describe this experience in an adequate manner, as Agamben states in his engagement with Hegel's *Eleusis*, are examples for the usage of sacred language. The rhetorical reliance on the stylistic means of impenetrableness, incomprehensibility, and indescribability is an essential element of adoration. The guise of language and the communicative framing of charisma as something ineffable transforms it into a blanket term without definite content. However, what cannot be communicated must be indicated in the realm of the social (and it must be communicated as non-communicable) for its mysteriousness to take effect. Communicating extraordinariness thus necessarily relies on "figures of alienation" (Waldenfels 90) that indicate a distinction from the everyday world of experience by referring to what is incomprehensible and is hence a "surplus" (ibid. 91). The rhetorical method of relying on the fundamental impossibility of communication therefore strengthens the belief in the incommensurability

of this phenomenon by demonstrating that all attempts to approach it with signifiers will necessarily fail, because charisma rejects a clear definition: “It is insignificant” (Schneider 145).

This method of using rhetorical guise and language taboos can be interpreted as one of the sacralizing practices that are essential to the interaction with the venerated person. In the relationship of adoration, the motif of the taboo is constitutive for stabilizing its logic. The logic of veneration is based on an ambivalent interplay between prohibition and desire – between closeness and distance, attraction and repulsion (see, for example, Bataille, *Attraction and Repulsion I and II*; Freud, *Totem and Taboo*). When the Other is elusive, when something is constructed as hidden, followers strive toward it, meaning the arcanum is recognized for what it is. When the Other comes too close by becoming too accessible, his or her nimbus seems too much to bear and demands that followers resume a distance and show a “pious shyness” (Assmann 63). In this way, the constitutive difference in status and significance between adorer and venerated person is affirmed through an honouring attitude.¹⁰ This playful tension between closeness and distance is essential for ensuring that extraordinariness remains attractive, while avoiding routinization through constant closeness. Absolute closeness has a homologizing effect and erodes the constitutive difference between the adorer and the adored. Maintaining maximum distance, on the other hand, presents the danger that followers will see the Other in an objective and emotionless manner, because he or she is not perceived as important within their social sphere of influence. This tense hyperbolic nature of “proximity-distance” as described by Plessner (116), for example, safeguards the mysterious extraordinariness of the dyad and is thus not only staged by the charismatic person, but reproduced by the venerating subjects as well.

This relationship can thus be understood as a form of adoration.¹¹ While the boundaries (and thus the imbalance of power that must be reproduced) between the two parties are acknowledged and maintained as constitutive, there is also an attempt to create a sympathetic bond of veneration. It is this interaction between honour and devotion that is characteristic for adoration. If we think about prayers, for example, or collective rituals like cultic celebrations or sacrifices – in other words, practices through which an attempt is made to make the sacred Other present and to call upon, worship and invoke him or her – we realize that these are always ambiguous gestures that both preserve the untouchability of the venerated person and create a relationship that

is impelled to follow an extraordinary logic. Adoration is, as Kümmel-Schnur¹² points out, a dissociative phenomenon: when invoking or calling on the Other (*ad-orare*), he or she is perceived as a tangible entity that does not lose his or her overwhelming and overpowering potential. Although the social and cultural boundaries between the two parties are cultivated, they are also invoked as selectively permeable. The actual performance of adoration, or *proskynesis*,¹³ that we know from courtly etiquette and religious liturgy – for example, in physical practices of honouring like kneeling or kissing feet – can therefore serve as a metaphor for the aspects of veneration visualized in them. On the one hand, the venerated person is excluded from the profane through a negative ritual in the sense of Durkheim in which the untouchability and greatness of the Other is not only preserved, but staged in the realm of the social; on the other hand, devout, honouring veneration also manifests a communicative and sympathetic connection between the person venerated and the adorer.

This honouring and sympathetic connection is therefore staged as holy, untouchable and venerable.¹⁴ The act of adoration itself is regarded as sacrosanct: narratives of predestination and fate¹⁵ lead us to understand the dyad as extraordinary, as destiny, as the result of giftedness (*charis*) and charisma. This aspect is important because the venerated person is called to take up the adored position, meaning the dyad is prefigured as an untouchable sacred object (*res sacra*). As a result, the relationship with the adored power acquires the status of exclusivity.

The game of devotion: Playing with power

Both parties, the venerated person and the honouring followers, are responsible for maintaining the logic of the dyad of adoration and are thus equally dependent on it. The subject does not question this logic but devotes him or herself to it. That is why the belief that veneration is based on a one-dimensional social relationship in which the adored seducer is regarded as a manipulator of a submissive mass in the sense of Le Bon must be questioned. The adorer can also be understood as playing an active role – as someone who, like the charismatic person, participates in an interplay of closeness and distance and affirmatively reproduces the logic of this power relation. As already elaborated upon, impenetrability is the principle of seduction that guarantees the followers’ devotion. Therefore, adoration is

not dependent on signs indicating that the power of the venerated person is justifiably legitimate, rather the exact opposite is the case. The motif of veiling constitutes the playful aspect here, along with the “tendency towards illusion” as described by Plessner (115), which rejects rational comprehension. Since the relation between the venerated person and his or her adherents is characterized by a ludic strategy of deception (*illudere*) adoration is to be understood as a social game.¹⁶ That is why it is important to ask whether the adorer is devoting him or herself to another, more powerful player or whether or not these two parties are both devoting themselves to the seductive principle of idolatry – to the unquestionable rules of the idolatrous game. This could explain why the differing values – that only one is the master – and why the legitimacy of a difference in status are not brought up at all. They are both, at least from the perspective of the adorer, engaged in this intimate and mysterious relationship that has a logic accessible only to the interacting parties. The assumption is therefore that veneration is based on an interactive relationship within which the gesture of devotion and honour can be regarded as a constitutive aspect for the reproduction of this asymmetrical power structure. This gesture not only affirms the mode of veiling; the untouchability of the adored Other is also maintained, and the power positions of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ are confirmed and reproduced.

Through the veneration of the followers, the charismatic person is not only called upon to assume this position of power, he or she is also challenged in this position, and must constantly prove him or herself through indications of extraordinariness. That the adorer places the venerated idol in a position of power is not only a way of challenging the idolized person to prove him or herself worthy of this authority; this challenge also serves as an attempt to gain power over the venerated person. This can best be seen in the form of symbolic practices of honouring by giving gifts, which we perceive as a game of honour.¹⁷ Both players, the charismatic person as well as the adorer, enter the idolatrous playing field making different promises: the charismatic person promises care, guidance, virtuosity and protection, while the adorer promises loyalty, praise and devotion. Veneration is thus not about a one-sided behavioural rule of humility; rather, it follows the agonistic game logic of a symbolic exchange, as described by Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu and others. Along with the motif of veiling, agonism is thus added to the logic of the game (see Caillois’ typology of the game). *Euergetism* shapes the code of honour of the

person adored, but the followers are impelled to devote themselves to him or her. If we therefore understand veneration as a form of symbolic exchange, not only does the supposed irrationality of such expending acts become clear; the one-sided hierarchical relationship of power is revealed as a game of power or as a game with power. Whether it be in the form of little presents for the venerated person, cultic practices of adoration, the demonstration of a willingness to sacrifice, or even devotion itself, all are elements of the veneration game. That said, devotion itself is the greatest possible sacrifice. As Bernd Bösel remarks, in devotion “the dialectic of the gift [is] active in an existential way” (Bösel 58). While the symbolic gifts dignifying the Other are a way of affirming and recognizing his or her honourable status, they are also an appeal from the follower to be given recognition, affection and gifts in return. Whether the adored figure is indeed moved by the gifts offered is of course unclear, but this appears to be secondary. Adorers give the venerated person gifts as a way of attempting to get through and appeal to, and thus gain, as Mauss (18) says, “hold over” the charismatic person by honouring him or her. We can thus interpret this as the mutual attempt of each to bind the other to the game of exchanging veneration, of mutual expenditure, which in turn strengthens the game logic.

If veneration is a devotional game with power, then it is about more than merely establishing two antagonistic status positions. It also organizes the social strata of the community of followers according to “charismatic qualities” as Weber calls them – from the “administration staff” of “disciples”, faithful “followers” (Weber 243), and a circle of passive followers, all the way to the unenthusiastic audience lacking all charismatic qualities. The quality of charisma refers here to two things. First, it demarcates the followers’ social, symbolic and emotional proximity to the adored person, because it measures the degree to which each member of the community is endowed with charisma. Second, it is based on the ritualistic means that are available to each figure within this social strata. It is therefore the participation in the process of producing idolatry through veiling and through honouring practices of giving gifts that determines whether someone belongs to the community and hierarchy of adorers. This is especially clear in the example of symbolic exchange. The gift given to honour someone must have a unique symbolism and singularity in order for the giver to stand out from the faceless circle of adorers. Because a gift has a value that is measured by the amount of expenditure and demands mutual recognition, the

gift of honour always has the potential to create a closeness to the charismatic person, thereby lending the connection between adorer and venerated person a social dimension. A gift as exorbitant as possible thus functions as a social distinction, because it begs the appreciation of the bearer of charisma. This appreciation is usually linked to a rise in the status of the venerated person, receiving emotional gratification and a symbolic bonus of loyalty – meaning it qualifies the follower's charisma.¹⁸ The adorer must therefore prove him or herself a worthy partner of veneration through the gift and must demonstrate through expensive symbols (for more on this, see Alcorta/Sosis) that he or she has sufficient emotional and material resources that can be spent freely for the benefit of the venerated icon. Gifts of honour therefore always represent the social and symbolic potency and the esteem of the devoted person. Hence, these acts of expenditure serve to establish a social stratification by not only suggesting a closeness between the venerated person and the adorer based on the significance of the gift, but also by establishing social hierarchies in the social structure of the group of adherents.

The audience and the danger of becoming profane

Charisma is by definition a fragile construct, because it is constantly in danger of becoming routine through overproduction. Maintaining adoration's illusionary and agonistic game logic safeguards the produced reality of charisma by working against this danger, while also having a prophylactic effect with regard to all attempts to find a rational explanation for the magical appeal. The disenchanted gaze of the unaffected audience looking for an explanation represents this danger of profaning the ludic reality, because it "breaks the magical circle and confronts the world of the game with the unreality of its construction" (Gerster 106).

The construction of mysteriousness serves as the basis for demarcating between the spell-bound devotees and the critical and enlightened outsiders. The belief in mysteriousness that is at the core of adoration is based on a peculiar form of knowledge. According to Jan Assmann, adorers protect the mystery with indisputable devotion, while outsiders follow a pathos of transparency and strive to unveil, visualize, unravel and especially find a reason for this mysteriousness (see Assmann 53). What for some can become disenchanted through rather simple explanations,

or become an indication of a game of deception – a smokescreen for power that strives to conceal the true interests of the powerful – is for the adorer an expression and a sign of extraordinariness that must be preserved. Questioning the legitimacy of this asymmetrical relationship of power can be regarded as an attempt to profane it and is therefore an attack on the integrity of the relationship as such. The adorer thus has the choice of relinquishing his or her veneration to this disenchantment, or – provided he or she is interested in maintaining this extraordinary relationship – he or she can work against this by enhancing the exclusivity and impenetrability of the charismatic aspect. In this way, a corresponding zone of intimacy around the venerated superfigure and the adoring subject is marked out, which is necessarily inaccessible to questions from outsiders. As Bollnow writes, "Veneration is always based on a very personal relationship that is expressed through the necessary addition of 'my'" (22). In this possessive 'my' lie the roots of the unfathomableness of this phenomenon – an unfathomableness that is kept from the audience's view and has a seemingly inexplicable foundation accessible only to the enthusiastic follower. The attempt to profane is thus always in danger of having a positive effect on the process of producing idolatry. The adorer contributes to the integrity of the charismatic person's position of power through his or her own veneration. If the nimbus of the honoured person and the reality of idolatry is vulnerable to attacks from a spoilsport audience, the adorer will venerate them with even more enthusiasm.

The audience's disenchanting gaze is thus transformed into the opposite because it has the potential to symbolically idealize the relationship of devotion and the charismatic figure. Concerning how the symbolic exchange value of veneration can be interpreted, the attempt to profane also plays a vital role in the production of the illusory value of charisma. From the point of view of the adorers, the form of the symbolic exchange of veneration described above clearly seems to be exempt from the laws of rational economics, because for the devotees it operates in the sense of Bataille's *dépense improductive* (unproductive expenditure; see Bataille, *Accused Share*). Adorers exhaust themselves for the Other. From their point of view at least, the ritual practice of honouring is based on a pure, non-material relationship of gift-giving and is indifferent to material interests. Although this interpretation gives the impression that, with regard to acts of veneration, a clear boundary could be drawn between symbolism and economy, between useless expenditure and maximum

utility, this cannot hide the fact that the symbolic exchange relationship is based on a close connection between the symbolic and the economic. According to Baudrillard,

[w]e would like to see a functional squandering everywhere so as to bring about symbolic destruction. Because of the extent to which the economic, shackled to the functional, has imposed its principle of utility, anything which exceeds it quickly takes on the air of play and futility. (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* 94-95)

From the perspective of all those who do not participate in the symbolically charged game, the illusory value produced here acts as a pure smokescreen that is based primarily on the economic utilization of the ludic and thus ultimately leads to an accumulation of economic capital on the part of the praised person (see Bourdieu). This is perhaps most obvious in the area of pop culture, where the possibilities of venerating a hero are financially limited because these must be purchased with money – for example, in the form of a concert ticket or merchandise. This close connection between symbolism and economy is naturally not only a contemporary cultural phenomenon, or even the product of presentation techniques of the culture industry; it is rather an essential characteristic of sacralizing practices in general and can therefore be found in archaic gift relationships.¹⁹ The game of power, which here takes the form of a gift exchange consisting of the symbolic recognition of status positions, is always also based on an economic principle – an aspect that was clearly identified by Bourdieu. Although the separation between symbolic and economic capital may seem obsolete, this is not the case for the adorer and neither for the disenchanting. For them, this is precisely the supposed key to understanding veneration: only economic interests matter to the audience, while the devotee is only interested in the extra-economic aspect.

For the adoring followers, the logic of veneration must appear indifferent to the law of economics while conjuring the power of the gift of honour that lies in the symbolic formation of a social bond between the two parties. According to Mauss, this seemingly selfless gift of honour and devotion almost always takes

the form of the gift, the present generously given even when, in the gesture accompanying the transaction, there is only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit, and when really there is obligation and economic self-interest. (Mauss 4)

Veneration is thus about disguising the interdependence of quantitative assessment and the symbolically charged, qualitative practice of gift-giving – although, from an outside perspective, the economic law of value seems to be clearly in the foreground. We return to the motif of veiling or disguising here because the mystification of the economic law of value is constitutive for veneration and therefore forms a rule within the game of honouring that cannot be questioned. According to Bourdieu,

The whole society pays itself in the false coin of its dream. The collective misrecognition [...] is only possible because, when the group lies to itself in this way, *there is neither deceiver nor deceived*. (Bourdieu 195-196, emphasis VZ)

The production of idolatry: The belief in extra-economic value

According to this argument, the venerating adorers do not so much blindly submit to the power of a hero as the venerated person and the devotees both submit themselves to the seductive principle of concealment. Although adoration indicates an imbalance of power between two parties, this does not automatically mean that we are dealing with a one-dimensional effect that comes from a manipulative and deceiving seducer who causes his or her followers to be blinded by their emotions and to fall victim to their power. The belief in the extraordinary logic and libidinous energy of charisma is based on the work done by both the venerated person and the adorers to conceal things from the audience. This means that the venerator is thus not simply deceived; rather, he or she actively collaborates in the reproduction of idolatry. As I have demonstrated, the question of power in this game can never be regarded independently from the economic principle on which the production and reproduction of idolatry are necessarily based. However, the belief in the extraordinary is based on the belief in the extra-economic value of veneration, which must constantly be (re)produced. Weber writes about the belief in the value of religion in a similar manner:

As such [...] the significance of distinctively religious behavior is sought less and less in the purely external advantages of everyday economic success. Thus, the goal of religious behavior is successively 'irrationalized' until finally otherworldly

non-economic goals come to represent what is distinctive in religious behavior. (Weber 424)

From the point of view of the audience unaffected by this game, economic value acquires a prominent position, because the seemingly seductive principle can be exposed as a mystification of the economic principle. However, the ability to unmask and hence profane charisma depends on the quality of the veiling efforts of the adorers and the worshipped person. The unmasking gaze of the audience can thus always be interpreted by devotees as an invitation to increase their enthusiastic work on idolatry.²⁰ The process of producing idolatry is thus based on generating illusory values through the dyad of veneration. Within this process, the point of view of the profaning outsider plays a potentially dynamizing role, because the attempt to confront the established game-world with its relativity and with a rational seriousness can also turn into the opposite and lead to an excessive increase of the symbolic values. The attempt to disenchant followers can thus indirectly become an important element in the production of this game.

Devoutly accepting the mysteriousness, making comprehension a taboo, maintaining un-touchability and playing the potentially excessive game of devotion and veneration are all constitutive elements of the logic of adoration and the belief in extra-economic value it is based on. At the same time, these aspects of a symbolic transformation and the game of disguise with charisma also arouse the suspicions and draw the criticism of outsiders. What to the enchanted follower appears to be the expression of a meaningful, fulfilling phenomenon appears to the outsider like the crazy idolizing of an illegitimate superpower.

This difference in the assessment of adoration has a special status in contemporary culture and in a society in which the song *No More Heroes* by the Stranglers is just as applicable as the recurring social diagnosis that, because of our post-religious attitude, we live in an idolatrous age where everything and everyone can, in principle, become an extraordinary object of heroic fetishism.²¹ On all cultural stages and in all football stadiums we are confronted with religious, pop cultural and political idolatry and charismatic signs produced by the culture industry. The veneration of a religious icon can just as easily take on pop cultural attributes as the cultic engagement with a 'star' can adopt genuinely religious elements. From pilgrimages to Graceland, to private shrines for stars, all the way to imitations – there are countless

anecdotes about the symbolic transgression of the boundaries between religion and pop culture. In religion, certain aspects have obviously been adapted from pop culture, as Bergmann, Soeffner and Luckman have demonstrated in their study *Erscheinungsformen von Charisma* (Forms of Charisma) about two popes. Pointing out that "the categories pope and celebrity are becoming blurred" (Bergmann et al. 152), they investigated the effects this has on followers. In view of the postulated blurring of the boundaries of the sacred and considering the variety of venerable figures, a comparison of the different contemporary realms of veneration would be fruitful. Although religion, politics and pop culture all adopt the "logic of the 'event society'", as Joas (26) and others state, this does not mean that political and pop cultural events are simply 'quasi-religious' phenomena. The idea that they replace religion seems to fall short here because the scopes of meaning clearly differ in religion and the culture of entertainment. For example, in religion, it is not the *idea* of transcendence, but actual transcendence that is essential to the believers: it is "a reality that does not have an effect, but claims that it 'exists' independently of religious communication" (Knoblauch 181). While something higher and recognizably 'true' is referred to in religious veneration – something hidden beyond the limits of the social world – pop cultural adoration is committed to the enjoyment of what is offered and to the accompanying aura of the phenomenon. The belief in the existence of a transcendental that is only conveyed to this world in a distorted sense was always the framework for religious forms of veneration. In pop culture, on the other hand, at least from the point of view of the adorers, the quality of veneration does not lie within a reference to something otherworldly and true; rather it is embedded in the acceptance of this illusory world of stars and idols produced by the entertainment industry. The aspect of illusion thus gains an entirely different meaning; especially if we follow Michael Jackson's suggestion to "be part of the illusion". The diversity of veneration in contemporary culture demands that we reflect on the symbolic dissolution of boundaries and interpenetrations in light of the differences in cultural meaning of these social fields and to put the different processes of the production of idolatry and the social power thereof into perspective. In order to better understand the contemporary cultural significance of idolatry, we need a critical analysis of the symbolic and economic logic of adoration that not only approaches the phenomenon from the outside, but most importantly explores the production of veneration as a basis.

In other words, such an analysis should focus on where the work on idolatry takes place.

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1 I would like to thank Ronald G. Asch for his helpful comments on this text.

2 Issue 4 (2012) of the magazine *Der Spiegel* with the theme "Charisma. Das Geheimnis der besonderen Ausstrahlung" (Charisma. The Secret of the Special Aura), which was sold with seven different covers, is an example of the continual public interest in the apparent mystery of charisma. The main feature takes mysteriousness as the starting point for understanding and explaining this phenomenon and explores its psychological and sociological mechanisms.

3 For more about an emphasis on the creative potential released by charismatic figures, see, for example, Patzelt; Fiol et al. For further exploration of the constructive and destructive dynamics of charisma within institutional and organizational structures, see Shils.

4 Especially Le Bon's remarks on the "Psychologie des foules" subscribe to the interpretation in which a characteristic weakness of will is ascribed to the masses. Precisely as a result of this weakness of will, the masses are seen as open to the suggestive power of manipulating authorities who have a strong will. For a study of contemporary evaluations of veneration, see especially the psychological study on the so-called celebrity worship syndrome by Maltby et al. in which the authors describe an intense and passionate devotion to an idol, cautioning that "the expression of celebrity worship is firmly rooted in pathology and thus may become a serious clinical issue. The case of the female adolescent who was willing to self-mutilate over her parasocial relationship with a popular musician subsequently might serve as an illustrative example" (Maltby et al. 29). This bathetic euphoria is regarded as a pathological disorder because it generates a dependency that absorbs the subject's attention in a way that qualifies as "poorer mental health" (ibid. 28).

5 The feeling of enthusiasm is especially suspected of being the opposite of sober rationality. For more on this, see Bösel's genealogical investigation of the philosophical discourse in which he discusses how the defamation of enthusiasm should be regarded in relation to, and as a result of, an enlightening attitude. For an analysis of the interpretative connection between being filled with God (enthusiasm) and madness in the area of religion, see also Foucault's discourse-analytical discussion of madness, *Madness and Civilization*. For more on what is suspicious about feelings toward a charismatic person and fear of illegitimate authorities, see Sennett, *Authority*. For a discussion on the precariousness of veneration from the point of view of contemporary culture, see also Zink.

6 By production, I mean "making" as well as Baudrillard's mode of visualization and realization in the sense of *production*. For more on the concept of production, see Baudrillard, *Seduction*.

7 In focusing on the hero as a charismatic figure, I refer here to Bernhard Giesen's definition of the hero: "Heroes embody charisma, they fuse the sacred into the profane world, they establish a mediating level between the humans and the Gods" (Giesen 16).

8 For a nuanced analysis of adoration as an emotion and its distinction from other feelings of praise, such as awe or admiration, see (among others) Bollnow; Schindler et al.

9 However, whether a secret really exists behind the veil is secondary. What counts is the construction of an impenetrable mystery.

10 In addition to Assmann, Bollnow also extensively explores the role of shame for reverence. See also Goffman's description of how distance is kept as a form of honour.

11 For more on adoration in the sense of worshipping and appealing to another person, see Marti. Jean-Luc Nancy also points out the terminological similarity between adoration and addiction when he writes: "The word developed its sense in the direction of 'to dedicate oneself,' 'to devote oneself,' 'to give oneself over to,' and later in the direction of obligation, indebtedness, and submission. It is impossible not to allow some vague relations to emerge between adoration and *abdicare*, since the two verbs are close to one another here) and *ad-orare*, even though *dire* is related to the declaration and to its content, while *orer* (as Old French had it) suggests speech as address" (Nancy 8).

12 For more on this, see Kümmel-Schnur's remarks on *adorcism*, which he regards as the opposite of exorcism.

13 For more on gestures of adoration or *proskynesis*, see Marti.

14 Whether this 'actually' exists is only secondary here, of course. What is important in this context is whether adorers recognize this as real.

15 The motif of predestination and providence, on which the extraordinariness of this relationship is stylized, can also be found in narratives of love. See Simmel, *Fragment*.

16 For more on this, see (among others) Baudrillard. For more on the logic of the game, see also Caillouis; Huizinga.

17 For more on the game of honour, see Bourdieu. For an analysis of the symbolic exchange of gifts, see Mauss 4.

18 See Mauss 18. For an analysis of the socially structuring effect of rituals from the perspective of interaction theory, see Collins. According to Collins's approach, the accumulation of emotional energy by the participants in the ritual decides on the position of the actors in the social structure. The question is, however, how these can be visualized in order to be effective in the social realm. Practices of expenditure are necessary in my opinion, because they are valuable signals that make visual the disposal of a sufficient amount of emotional energy.

19 One example is the transformation of a real sacrifice into a symbol in the form of objectified charter money that has been substituted by a coin on which only the picture of the sacrificial animal remains. See Baudet.

20 However, the attention we give to a phenomenon like veneration either in scholarly or media-related form increases exponentially with the asymmetry of these relationships and thus in connection with the rising dubiousness of the venerating acts of the passionate followers.

21 Or like Michel Maffesoli titles in a recently published monograph: "nos idolatries postmodernes". See also Horner et al.

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Heroism – Violence – Mediality

Working Paper of the Collaborative Working Group on Mediality

Affinities between representations of heroization and representations of violence

In our work on the cultural aspects of heroisms and heroizations, we have highlighted a number of qualities and phenomena that have defined heroism in the *longue durée* and across cultural spheres. The following features of the heroic also have a special relationship to the phenomenon of violence, as will be elaborated below:

- *transgressiveness*: heroic figures and heroic actions operate at boundaries, which they transgress;
- *justification*: because of their transgressiveness, the actions of heroic figures need to be justified;
- *agonistic character*: heroic figures prove themselves in conflicts with their opponents or opposing forces;
- *the potential to attract and affect audiences*: due to their extraordinariness, heroic figures and deeds have a special power to evoke emotions and a power to fascinate.

Heroizations can only be described and analysed when they become manifest in a mediated form. This means in turn that the very form of mediality makes the heroic phenomenon in question possible in the first place and plays a role in its structuring. We believe that there is

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an essential connection between the mediated forms of heroic phenomena and the development of cultural and social discourses surrounding them. Since there are structural similarities between violence and heroism, this connection becomes especially palpable in those media expressions where the use of physical violence interacts with heroization.

In what follows, we present a model for analysing the phenomenon of heroic violence. Violence was the focus of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 948 in 2017 and the proposed model was developed over the course of discussions in the SFB's working group on mediality.¹ We will conclude with two brief case studies that illustrate how this analytical model may be effectively applied. In this way, the working group hopes to contribute to the interdisciplinary analytical vocabulary of the SFB.

The starting point for this discussion is the connection between violence and heroism in certain situations, a connection that will be demonstrated through the analysis of specific media representations and media products in parts 3 and 4 of this paper. This link through mediatization makes it possible to establish a discourse about physical violence and its relationship to the heroic (and vice versa). **Figure 1** illustrates this link and hence our analytical model for this discussion. The fundamental assumptions about media communication are based on Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall's circuit of culture model (see also Goggin).

Representation in a specific media form and the particular type of representation direct our focus from the recipient to the relationship between heroism and violence. This initiates processes of interpretation, reflection, and evaluation in an ethical as well as an aesthetic sense (see Hall). It also positions the recipient in a specific affective relationality with the media representation, its genres and technology.

According to the hypothesis of the working group on mediality, the fact that violence can be semantically effective in regard to heroism is a

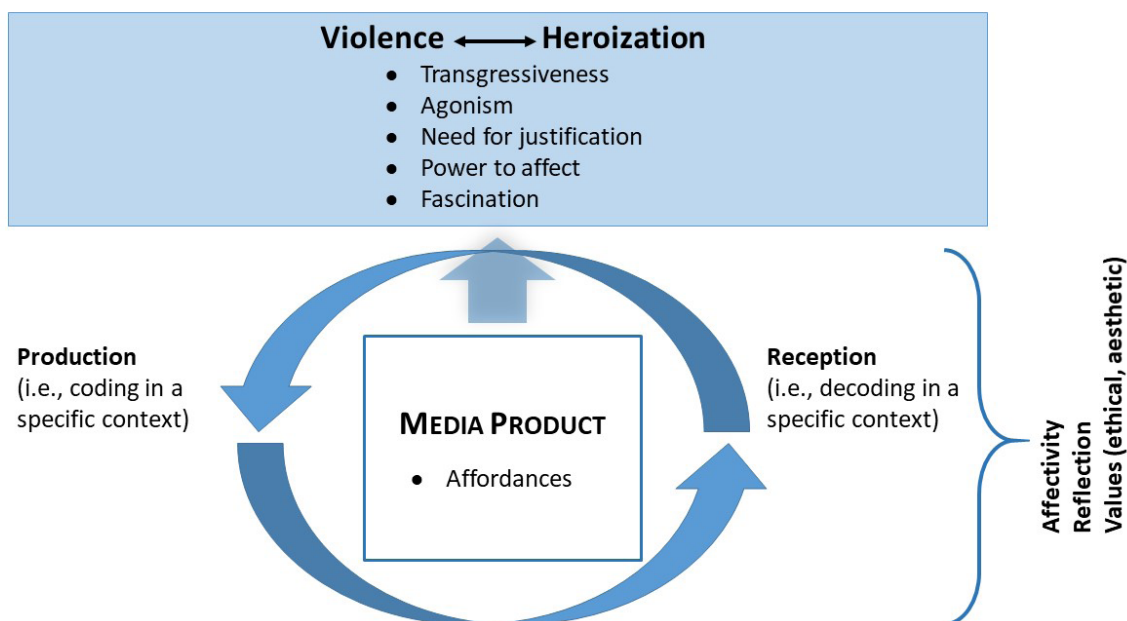


Fig. 1: Analytical model (diagram: Claudia Müller).

result of fundamental structural similarities between the phenomena of violence and heroism. Like heroism, violence is transgressive; most notably, it transgresses another person's physical integrity. Violence also has an agonistic element and its use must be justified. Moreover, the representation of violence can, like heroism, have a certain potential to affect people emotionally and even overwhelm them – a power to fascinate and attract.

Media representations that explicitly link heroic actions with violence specifically emphasize these aspects, while also allowing the problematic sides of heroism to manifest themselves – for example, the transgression of generally accepted boundaries. The link between violence and heroization thus demands that audiences form an attitude towards the representation in question (see Prince). This leads us to the following questions:

- Are there boundary transgressions that cannot (or can no longer) be reconciled with or justified by ethical or aesthetic norms?
- How much violence can recipients accept before it begins to interfere with their idea of heroic greatness?
- Does the connection to violence contribute to the heroization of a figure or deed, or does it have a de-heroizing effect?

- Can violence be heroized?

- How does a certain type of representation determine the creation of the meaning and value of the represented?

- Which facets are particularly emphasized in the relationship between violence and heroism in each case?

Representations differ in the degree to which violence is shown. For example, in the theatre, violent acts are often not shown on stage, but are only described (in the form of viewing from the walls – *teichoscopy* – or a message). Pictures may also omit the moment of violence, depicting the moment before or after a violent act instead. Based on this, the following questions arise:

- What intentions and implicit norms can we assume when explicit representations of violence are avoided?

- What motives are involved in representations of extreme acts of violence?

The way a connection between violence and heroization is created in a particular representation depends partly on the intention behind that particular form of representation. It is also determined by the possibilities inherent in a specific media form, which 'filters' if and how violence and heroism are to be connected.

Affordances of media forms

In our model, we regard the actual media product (a narrative, image, play, video game, etc.) as a surface that *affords* us a view of a certain constellation of heroism and violence. The qualities of the surface determine our view and are essentially defined by the *medium* and the *genre* of the representation. We define *media form* as the point at which the medium's qualities and modalities overlap with the conventions of representation and traditions of certain genres.

According to conventional definitions from communication studies, a *medium* is any kind of channel used to communicate information of a symbolic kind through a material or technological device that is external to the human body. Based on this definition, a handwritten text is a medium, while the human voice is not. However, some leading experts in communication and media studies disagree with the view that the human body cannot function as a medium, and some approaches explicitly include "human media" (the body, the voice) (see, for example, Faulstich 29-30; see also Peters). With regard to heroization, a definition which excludes the body is particularly problematic when we consider theatre (on the physical aspect of stage - audience communication, see the SFB publication *Fremde Helden*).² Furthermore, in the case of video games, players also become directly involved *physically* when playing the role of a hero – for example, via emotional reactions or through certain functions of controllers that are transmitted to the body (such as vibrations).

The term *category* defines a group of forms of expression that are similar (across media) and share a multitude of key features. The term *genre*, on the other hand, is primarily a literary concept that describes subgroups of categories that are similar in how they are formed or in key sub-elements such as plot structures – for example, romance novels or detective fiction. Heroically charged violence (or violent heroizations) can take on different figurations, depending on the category and genre. Excessive acts of violence that are both possible and expected in some genres – for example, in the classic heroic epic, or in horror or war movies – would probably be perceived as a conspicuous and alien element in a romance novel.

Whether the representation of heroically aestheticized violence is enhanced or constrained depends on the concrete interplay between medium and category. Certain categories can make the representation of violence difficult due to the qualities of the medium in which they are usually expressed. For instance, while a heroic epic or

action film can describe or depict violent acts in a temporal sequence, in the case of an individual picture, the heroic narrative referred to in the image must be communicated through the characteristics of the situation or through the characters. In other words, being able to decode the representation of violence as heroic in a single picture is more strongly dependent on cultural knowledge external to the image than in the case of a narrative artwork, which makes the connection between heroism and violence explicit.

Media, like categories and genres, have a certain amount of basic creative leeway. This range of possibilities, which can also be expressed using the concept of 'affordances',³ determines what form the relationship between heroism and violence can take in a specific representation or performance. The term 'affordance' was coined by the developmental psychologist James J. Gibson and refers to the possible actions of interacting individuals that are suggested, facilitated, or hindered by certain environmental conditions or the formal attributes and qualities of objects. A cup handle is a typical example: it affords the possibility of lifting and holding the cup. Different media forms also have different affordance structures that help to define what can be represented, how it can be represented, and the ways in which viewers can perceive what is represented.

As to heroizing representations of violence – or, as in the case of a video game, the virtual use of violence – different media and genres act as affordances that enable certain ways of depicting violence while also providing possible interpretations through their form of aestheticization. Certain media and genres prioritize particular representable aspects of the field of 'physical violence' through their conventions, codes and technical qualities, while other aspects remain in the background or simply do not correspond to the representational possibilities of a particular media form; in other words, they are not representable in certain ways. While this does not mean that we argue in favour of an absolute distinction between media, we also do not promote the idea that all media are equally effective in their capacity to represent violence. Rather, what different media have to offer is structured in different ways. This is the result of both their technological possibilities and the traditional cultural use of the genres that are realized through them. A prime example is the genre of the epic, the very form of which evokes the expectation of a heroic tale even when there is actually no heroic content (as in the case of the so-called *mock epic*). In regard to violence, one question is why certain media forms tend to depict heroizations in an especially violent way. Those media forms in

which violence is conventionally heroized in an aesthetic manner raise a similar question. The actual aesthetic rendering and the intensity of representational forms of heroically connoted violence are specific to a particular culture, medium and time. They are part of a complex network of visual and/or narrative habits as well as an attempt to fulfil, or subvert, the expectations of the audience.

The form that the link between heroism and violence takes in each case is thus part of a dynamic context of communication in which the producers, the recipients, the structural possibilities (affordances) of media systems, and the traditional sets of representational codes react to and interact with each other, in both complementary and contradictory ways. In addition to the codes and conventions of categories and genres, the modality of media is another important element of the affordance structure (see Elleström). Whether we can actually hear battle cries and yelling or if these are only described – in other words, whether we are dealing with a multi-modal or a mono-modal medium – makes a difference for the representation of violence and its effects. The dimension of sound that affects us emotionally (cries, swords clashing, bones breaking, shots, the sound of an explosion) is often underestimated, especially when it comes to the representation of physical violence. This is true for text-based as well as audio-visual media. In some forms of video games, the sense of touch can also be part of the medium's design. This is the case, for example, for game console controllers that vibrate whenever the player's avatar (in most cases, the hero) takes a hit.

The link between heroization and physical violence can fulfil different functions within the typical codes and modalities of different media and their genres. Like virtually all heroic narratives, the representation of violent acts helps to identify individual characters that have a high level of agency in agonistic situations. The fact that in many cultures heroes are fighters helps explain why the use of violence plays such a large role in the construction of heroization.

In the following, we will apply the analytical model we have outlined to two historically and culturally different examples of the mediality of heroized violence in different media.

The death of Turnus: Epic poem and mosaic

In this case study, we will demonstrate how the media form fundamentally defines the relationship



Fig. 2: Fourth-century floor mosaic, 'House of the Medusa', Abelterium (Alter do Chão, Portugal) (António 55 fig. 3).

between heroism and violence by comparing two representations of the same mythological narrative in two different media. We will look at the story of Turnus's death at the hands of Aeneas, as described by Vergil in the twelfth book (1178-1271) of the *Aeneid*.⁴ The narrative is from the final scene of the epic. We will compare this to a floor mosaic from late antiquity, from the ancient city of Abelterium (Alter do Chão, Portugal), which refers to the same event (fig. 2).

In the epic tale, Aeneas throws his spear at Turnus, the king of the Rutuli. The spear penetrates Turnus's shield and wounds him. The defeated Turnus then gives a speech in which he first encourages Aeneas to seize the opportunity and kill him, but then he changes his mind and begs Aeneas to spare his life for his father's sake. He pleads to Aeneas to return him to his father alive, or at least to bring him his corpse. Aeneas is almost swayed by the enemy's words, but then he sees the sword belt of the fallen prince Pallas (a young man in his army whom he was charged with protecting) on Turnus, who had stolen it from Pallas after killing him. Enraged, Aeneas declares his revenge in Pallas's name and plunges his sword into Turnus, killing him.

The mosaic, which was not excavated until 2007, dates back to the fourth century (about 400 years after the epic was written) and occupies a central place in the floor of a dining room (*triclinium*) in a once luxurious townhouse ('House of the Medusa') in the ancient town of Abelterium.⁵ Slightly off-centre on the left, we can see a fully armed Aeneas holding his spear and shield in

front of him. Turnus has thrown himself at his feet, with his hands raised in a pleading gesture. His weapons lie strewn around him. The two central figures are flanked by three soldiers each: Aeneas's men, identifiable by their distinctive headgear, to the left of the scene, and Turnus's to the right. In the lower part of the mosaic we see two reclining figures, personifications that indicate the location of the event.

Subsequently, we will discuss the textual and visual mediatization of the narrative, using key terms from our model for analysing the relationship between heroism and violence.

Agonistic character: That Aeneas and Turnus are the main agonistic forces in the narrative becomes increasingly clear in the course of events in the second part of the epic. Just before the final duel between the two men, this is expressed yet again in Aeneas's poignant challenge: "It is not for us / to race against each other, but to meet / with cruel weapons, hand to hand" (12, 1182-1184).⁶ The first verse of the final scene emphasizes this agonistic character again: "In Turnus' wavering Aeneas sees / his fortune; he holds high the fatal shaft" (12, 1225-1226). The action that follows completely revolves around the two protagonists; other figures are mentioned only in passing, if at all: "all the Rutulians leap up with a groan" (12, 1237).

In the mosaic, the two figures form the centre of the composition. Aeneas stands upright and sublime, while Turnus kneels submissively before him. Turnus's pleading gesture creates a visual connection between the figures. The motif of the Gorgoneion (the head of the Gorgo Medusa) on Aeneas's shield symbolizes the agonistic character of this scene. For Aeneas, the head fends off evil (it is apotropaic), but for those who see it, such as Turnus, it brings harm. The confrontation between the leaders of the two armies is also symbolized by the troops looking on from the left and right, as well as by the contrast between the light and dark backgrounds behind the figures.

Agency: In Vergil's epic, agency is asymmetrically distributed from the beginning of the scene. Turnus's knees are weak after failing to throw a massive rock (12, 1205). Aeneas, on the other hand, demonstrates that agency is entirely on his side by casting his spear and piercing the shield of his opponent, an act which is metaphorically characterized as immensely powerful: "No boulder ever catapulted from a siege engine sounded so, no thunderbolt had ever burst with such a roar" (12, 1228-1230). That the disarmed Rutulian ruler

addresses Aeneas directly demonstrates that all Turnus has left in terms of possible actions is speech. His pleading apparently has an effect, because it almost manages to change Aeneas's mind. Sparked by the sight of the baldric on Pallas's belt, however, Aeneas's agency first shifts to channel the godly powers of the Furies ("enraged by the furies – his wrath was terrible", 12, 1264) and then the dead Pallas (Aeneas tells Turnus, "It is Pallas / who strikes, who sacrifices you, who takes / this payment from your shameless blood" 12, 1266-1268). It is only at this point that agency is transformed into a violent act.

These complex shifts in agency cannot be made explicit in the mosaic in the same way as in the epic. Turnus' pose represents a formula of pathos in which his submission symbolizes what is left of his agency. The mosaic also omits the injury that has brought Turnus to his knees in the epic and thus transforms his submissive pose into an expression of his own free will. The clearly superior agency of his opponent, Aeneas, is demonstrated via the contrasting postures of the two protagonists. The kneeling Turnus, who is shown in profile, is juxtaposed to the upright Trojan hero, who is facing us. It is also visible in the contrast between Aeneas's weapons, held firmly in his hands, and Turnus's weapons, which lie strewn on the ground in front of him.

Transgressiveness: The deadly violence inflicted on a pleading and defenceless enemy was a problem in the reception of this epic. Aeneas' deed forces us to judge it as either heroic or non-heroic. While two thousand years of Vergil exegesis have demonstrated that the author himself possibly intended this act to be judged as heroic, it has not been so unambiguously received in other cultural-historical contexts. The early Christian author Lactantius, for example, famously condemned Aeneas's merciless act.⁷

In the mosaic's pictorial representation, however, the violent act is omitted entirely, meaning its transgressiveness need not be addressed or justified. Because the mosaic directly refers to the *Aeneid*, the violent end of the scene is only implied, making this an explicit form of intermediality. One cannot help but bear in mind the canonical configuration of the narrative – and the *Aeneid* is doubtlessly the most important part of the canon. Thus while the violent act is not depicted, the beholder still imagines it as part of the scene.

Comparative analysis demonstrates that the different structural possibilities of the different media in this case also allow for different representations of violence. The narrative of the

epic poem, which is based on an event unfolding in a sequence, cannot omit the excessive violence from the myth. However, it can clearly emphasize the motivation behind the violence and possibly justify it. This is not possible in a mosaic, which is a medium that can only focus on a single scene. In both cases, the handling of violence is not only dependent on the representational possibilities of the medium, but also on the concrete intertextual/inter pictorial references. The point of reference for the *Aeneid* is the Homeric epic poem. For the mosaic, on the other hand, the composition seems also to have been loosely influenced by 'submission pictures' of so-called Roman state art, in which violence is also usually not shown.

Game of Thrones: Heroism and violence in a televisual narrative

In this case study, we turn our focus to a scene from the first episode ("Dragonstone", 2017) of the seventh season of the HBO series *Game of Thrones*. This fantasy series, which is widely popular all over the world, is set in a medieval fantasy world and follows a protracted and brutal power struggle between several competing dynasties. In the scene in question, Arya Stark, who has learned to change appearances as part of her training to become an assassin, poisons all the men in the Frey family at a banquet to which they have been invited under false pretences. When the scene opens, she has assumed the appearance of the head of the family, Walder Frey. She then reveals her true identity to the men as they are dying from poison. It was in this ancestral home of the Freys where Arya's mother, her brother and his pregnant wife, and their entire entourage were murdered in the so-called Red Wedding ("The Rains of Castamere", season 3, episode 9). Arya's deed is thus staged as an act of revenge in the overall narrative of the series.

As a medium, television generally has the potential to depict violence explicitly and effectively. This multi-modal narrative form can have a great emotional impact on the audience. In contrast to viewing a live performance in a theatre, the selection of camera shots in a television show acts as a filter that can effectively direct the audience's attention and reactions. While *Game of Thrones* cannot be clearly subsumed under one genre, the series' epic elements offer a certain amount of freedom to include bloody and brutal scenes. The excessive portrayal of violence in the series has often been criticized, and at first

glance, the sequence analysed in the following does not appear particularly violent compared to some of the brutal torture scenes and massacres for which the series is known. One critic wrote in *The Guardian* that the

surprisingly unbloody start to the season saw only one real act of violence [...]. That said, it was a particularly good one. (Hughes)

Judging from this reaction and the fact that a 'violence count' is a fixed part of Sarah Hughes's weekly reviews, it would be fair to say that the audience of this series is not only used to a fair amount of violence, but has also come to expect it. While the poisoning of an entire family in another, altogether less violent series would completely diminish the heroic potential of a character, it does not necessarily lead to de-heroization here, especially in light of the many far more gratuitous acts of violence in *Game of Thrones*. It will be demonstrated that the degree of violence the audience is willing to tolerate before it gets in the way of the reception of heroic greatness depends on how extensive the depiction of violence is within a given cultural product generally.

This scene also lends itself well to our purposes because it addresses the structural similarities between the phenomena of violence and heroism. Furthermore, the scene utilizes the possibilities offered by this medium in a very effective way: first by allowing Arya to seize a fundamental turning point; and second, by proposing an interpretation of her acts of violence as heroic.

Heroism is a theme from the beginning of the scene. Walder Frey makes it explicit when he tells the maids to serve wine and then toasts "proper wine for proper heroes". The men of the House of Frey who are assembled for the banquet are thus introduced as heroes, after which they are immediately de-heroized, creating a kind of heroic vacuum in the room. While heroism is present from the beginning, the heroes are eradicated.

Violence is equally present from the start, when previous acts of violence are mentioned. If we concentrate on the wording of Walder Frey's (Arya's) speech, these acts are at first characterized as heroic deeds:

I'm proud of you lot. You're my family. The men who helped me slaughter the Starks at the Red Wedding. [The men cheer.] Yes, yes. Cheer! Brave men! All of you. Butchered a woman pregnant with a babe. Cut the throat of a mother of five. [Walder's wife raises an eyebrow.] Slaughtered your

guests after inviting them into your home.
(III/9)

The explicit pride and the men's cheering for themselves and calling themselves brave point to the fact that the Freys see themselves as heroes because they violently murdered the Starks.

The exaggeration of the violence through the use of the word "slaughter" and the following emphasis on the fact that the victims of the slaughter were innocent people (a pregnant woman, a mother) transform the acts from heroic deeds into wicked violence. The violence is thereby unjustified, and this turning point is made clear by the fading cheers of the men of the House of Frey as well as the image of Walder's young wife raising an eyebrow. This also reflects the audience's expected reaction. The scene ends with a very explicit depiction of the effects of the poisoning, which is thus revealed as an act of violence: all of the Frey men start coughing up blood and fall to the floor.

This act of violence is justified and aestheticized through means that are specific to this medium. By referring to the murder of the Starks, the massacre is identified as an act of revenge. By sparing the 'innocents' personified by the girls and women present (Walder's wife and daughters, as well as the maids), in contrast to the murder of Arya's mother and pregnant sister-in-law, the narrative structure suggests that violence is wielded against those who deserve it. This clear embedding of violence within an overall revenge narrative points to the fact that Arya's transgressive behaviour needs justification if the audience is to continue to sympathize with this character.

The violence is aestheticized both visually and audibly. The scene is visually set to make the banquet seem like a funeral party: it is dark, and candles are the only source of light. This also helps subdue the brutality of the scene because, while we can clearly see that the men are coughing up blood, the effects of the poisoning are not highlighted in a brightly lit setting or with vivid colours. Instead, they are shown under dim lighting, which reduces some of the shock. Some of the shots after the massacre are also reminiscent of *vanitas* paintings, establishing an intermediality that lets the massacre appear unavoidable and evokes the concept of *memento mori*. This aestheticization also fits with Arya's own assessment of her deed: "When people ask you what happened here, tell them [...] winter came for House Frey." The formulation "winter came" is an extreme euphemism for the bloodbath and serves as a metaphor that presents it as a natural occurrence within the inevitable cycle of seasons. That the saying "winter is

coming" is also the motto of Arya's family, House Stark, additionally marks her violent deed as an act of (potentially justified) revenge of the murder of her mother and brother.

The sounds of the scene also support an interpretation of the deed as heroic. In the first half of the scene, only diegetic sounds are heard – in other words, sounds that are part of the action: wine glasses clinking, laughter, talking in the background, cheering and so forth. After all of the men are murdered, there is a moment of complete silence. Then the music starts. Because this is the first use of non-diegetic sound after the massacre, the end of the scene acquires another level of filtering that imposes a certain interpretation of this act of violence: the drums and strings become increasingly louder, framing Arya's walk among the dead as a triumphal procession, thus giving it a 'positive' connotation and enhancing her appeal as a potentially heroic figure.

In addition to the need for justification and the element of attractiveness, the interaction between violence and heroism in this scene also addresses the aspects of agonality and transgression. It is the combination of these two qualities that leads Arya to this turning point, which is marked by this act of violence and forces the audience to form an opinion about whether or not she is a heroic figure.

Not only are the houses of Stark and Frey on opposite sides of an agonistic relationship, but it is also the men versus the women and the individual (Arya, in the guise of Walder Frey) against the many. This juxtaposition is also suggested by the many cutaway and reverse angle shots. As already explained, one group – the Freys, the men, the many – is first heroized and then quickly de-heroized through the exaggeration of their acts of violence and their revelling in it. By murdering them with poison instead of killing them in combat, Arya denies them a hero's death. Thus the heroic status is stripped away from one group, and Arya gains heroic potential as the extent of her transgressive actions becomes clear. She transgresses the boundaries between the sexes and the houses. She faces the many as an individual and she has the power to decide who shall live and who shall die.

The determination of whether Arya's act of violence is heroic or not is ultimately left up to the audience. The explicit evocation of heroism at the beginning of the scene, its narrative structure and the aestheticization of the act of violence force the audience to judge Arya. Ultimately, in the audience's eyes, Arya can go either way: she might still be a hero, or she might have turned evil. It seems impossible not to judge this

character and place her somewhere on the spectrum of hero, antihero and villain when watching this series. This is also reflected in the reactions to this episode on Twitter and in newspaper articles. Viewers either explicitly hailed Arya as a hero (see, for example, Hibberd) or wondered whether she should be regarded more as an anti-hero after this act of violence (see, for example, Kelly).

Ultimately, we can argue that the scene creates a kind of heroic vacuum that Arya is able to fill thanks to her potential to be a heroic figure. Her act of violence in this scene is justified by the narrative (not only embedded in the larger context of the overall series, but also explicitly and concretely in this scene). While the audience is presented with a choice and forced to judge Arya, the affordances specific to the medium of television in general and TV series in particular allow her act of violence to be aestheticized in a way that not only does not oppose the assessment of her act of violence as heroic, but even imposes – via the filter specific to this medium – an interpretation of this deed as heroic.

Conclusion

These two examples of analysis demonstrate how the representation of the link between heroism and violence is fundamentally determined by the media form. Each of the forms – epic text, mosaic, audio-visual narrative – has its own codes and modalities that determine how explicitly an act of violence will be represented and hence which aspects of it will be shown. This in turn is significant for how this depiction of violence will be interpreted by the audience (and is therefore specific to a certain time and culture). The representation of a violent act in media plays an important role in whether, and to what extent, the act is deemed heroic or not. It also influences the audience's emotional reaction to violence and inspires us to reflect on what heroism means in the first place. In particular, the examples demonstrate that the actual method of portrayal has a decisive effect on our ethical judgement of the transgressive action being represented. There may be worlds between the *Aeneid* and *Game of Thrones* in terms of time, culture and media, but both examples – with their respective media and formal possibilities – turn our attention towards the ethical ambivalences of heroism and the resulting need for justification much more than the mosaic's depiction of a moment in time is able to do. This is especially the case when heroism interacts with violence.

These examples confirm the idea that representations of physical violence and heroism share many structurally similar features. Both heroism and violence transgress norms. This compels recipients to make ethical judgements that are specific to certain times and cultures. Because the two narratives in the examples mentioned here have ambivalent aspects, both Arya Stark and Aeneas – the first a character in a current popular TV series, the latter a figure that has retained its cultural capital in the *longue durée* – compel the audience to take sides. In the scene analysed above, Arya uses deceit to accomplish her goal, and we ultimately watch a young woman commit a mass murder of men through poisoning. Yet many audience members still regard her deed as heroic because of their knowledge of “what happened previously”. This is also the case with the ancient floor mosaic. In both cases, the backstory explains them as acts of revenge, thus justifying them: with Arya, it is the murder of her family, while in Aeneas's case, it is the dishonouring of his protégé, Pallas. However, there is a turning point in both narratives when heroism becomes questionable.

Although the TV series *Game of Thrones* owes some of its popularity to its heroizing conventions of representation, the heroism of all main protagonists is cast into doubt on many occasions. The portrayal of extreme outbursts of violence, for which the series is particularly notorious, serves as an instrument of heroization as long as the acts are regarded as justified and perceived as relieving a burden. In such cases, the depictions of violent acts have a positive, cathartic emotional effect on the audience. However, the transgressiveness of extreme depictions of violence can also undermine heroization. The affordances of the audio-visual medium of television in general and the media form of the TV series in particular bring out the emotional appeal of aesthetic, often exaggerated violence and allow the ethical questions it poses to rise to the surface.

The similarities and affinities shared by depictions of violence and depictions of heroism are important factors in determining how an audience will ultimately define heroism. But it is the *form* of the media product that filters the portrayal of violence, thereby creating the possibility for violence to be considered heroic in the first place.

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2 In German theatre studies, intermediality is sometimes defined as a condition (see Röttger). According to Fischer-Lichte's well-known theory of performativity, on the other hand, the performative aspect, or performing on stage, is what runs counter to mediality.

3 For more on this concept, see Caroline Levine's works in literary studies, as well as works in material culture, human computer interface studies (see Leonardi, Nardi, Kallanikos) and communication studies (see Wilson).

4 For more on the epic poem, see, among others, Farrell and Putnam. For more on the final scene, see especially Burnell and Galinsky.

5 For more on the mosaic, see Caetano and Mourão as well as António (the latter has a very different interpretation of the scene, however).

6 All translations are from Mandelbaum, unless otherwise specified.

7 See also Wlosok 18: "The killing of the defeated Turnus [...] is carefully prepared by the author in previous scenes spread out over several books and is motivated as a necessary criminal procedure."

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Imitatio heroica

On the Impact of a Cultural Phenomenon

The concept of *imitatio heroica* as we employ it here warrants some explanation as it is rarely used in literary studies or history, and hardly ever applied in the study of visual images in art history and popular culture (*Bildwissenschaften*). *Imitatio heroica* refers to the imitation of *heroic* figures – their deeds, images and ideas – by *historical* figures who simulate their appearance and/or practices. We are focusing on the portrait as the primary visual medium. A portrait is a representation of a historical figure who can be identified by name, inscription, unique physical feature, gesture, iconography, or the external resemblance to the person being portrayed (Buschor 7; Fittschen 4; Brilliant 8; see also Preimesberger et al. 17-21). What, then, do we gain by employing *imitatio heroica* as a concept? In addition to answering this question, we will discuss the impact of the phenomenon of heroic representation in general and discuss related research questions.

Definition of terms

The expression *imitatio heroica* is a neologism, there are no classical examples for this collocation. Synonymous with ‘heroic imitation’, it has been used in contemporary literary studies and modern history to describe the practice of imitating ‘heroic’ behaviour. It refers to those men and women wishing (or expected) to bring back the heroic by explicitly emulating heroic figures. For example, references to the myth of the heroic Battle of Langemarck were employed in order to inspire heroic action in Germany after 1914

(Naumann 41-42, 70, 76; Behrenbeck; Borchmeyer 59; Satjukow 42; Schilling 101, 121; Telesko, *Erlösermythen* 148; van Marwyck 265; Esposito 206; and Weinrich 197). Cultural studies lacks a comprehensive term for describing such references – also in earlier periods and in non-performative occurrences – to models that are regarded as heroic, and whose appropriation and imitation in visual culture can be regarded as heroizing.

Visual studies, on the other hand, currently has several terms to describe partial aspects of this phenomenon. The terms ‘theomorphic portrait’ and its counterpart ‘heromorphic portrait’ (which is already used in British comic studies) describe the phenomenon in which a portrayed person resembles a godly or heroic image, either through attributes or other significant features (de Chapeaurouge 262-302; Bergmann 18). These terms are relatively neutral and descriptive. Other terms, which are more commonly used, refer explicitly to the (postulated) semantics of such a phenomenon. An ‘allegorical portrait’ is one that goes beyond references to a person and their social position or other historical aspects, and additionally expresses abstract ideas about the person portrayed (without necessarily relying on heroic or divine figures or attributes) (Wind, *Allegorical Portraiture* 138-162; id., *Hume and the Heroic Portrait*; Walbe). This subgenre of portraiture came to be known as *portrait historié* in the eighteenth century – a French term that highlights the narrative situation in which the portrait is implicitly contextualized through figurative and attributive additions.¹ Both terms extend beyond the descriptive in that they (try to) make a distinction between the portrayal of a person and a portrait’s ‘allegorical’ or narrative content. A portrait that utilizes heroic or divine attributes in the depiction of a historical figure is sometimes referred to as an ‘ideal portrait’.² This term implies a categorical difference between portrait and ideal, and suggests intentional idealization in the sense of aggrandization.³ The term ‘apothēosis portrait’ (*Bildnisapothēose*) goes even

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further and marks the *apotheosis* of figures through divine and/or heroic attributes that are intended to raise them above the sphere of humans and into the realm of the gods (Wrede, esp. 1-9; see also note 16). The figure's deification does not necessarily need to refer to a religious process, and so it may be visually implied, rather than explicitly depicted. The so-called 'identification portrait', on the other hand, does not suggest an *apotheosis* of the person portrayed, nor is this portrait a simple illustration of this phenomenon. Rather, it identifies the person portrayed with a heroic or divine model through attributes, supporting figures and analogies with virtues, qualities, names and events (Polleroß, *Anfänge* 17; Walbe 95; see also Telesko, *Geschichtsraum Österreich* 80-83). However, it is impossible to determine whether these pictures are intended as analogies or as a form of identification. These are two very different things, after all: To become Hercules (identification) is not the same as sharing some traits with Hercules (analogy). The term 'costume portrait' does not emphasize identification with the model, but rather a distance between the model and the represented figure: the representation is described in terms of a costume or guise. The opposite of this is the 'crypto portrait' or 'concealed portrait' – a form that has its origins in antiquity⁴ and displays a 'concealed' and negative reference to the person portrayed, but has been given some characteristics of a heroic or divine figure. The historical figure is no longer recognizable in the portrait and their identification is therefore dependent on the beholder's associations with the historical figure; as a result, the distinction between portraits and allegorical pictures that lack portraying qualities is suspended.

Although these categories of portrait may adequately describe certain elements of the imitation of heroes and gods, they do not capture the phenomenon in its entirety. It is therefore necessary to remedy the lack of systematic structure and consistency in terminology. Attempts to do so have revealed that all types of portrait describe a visual referential relationship between a historical figure who is portrayed and a heroic, divine or otherwise exceptional figure who serves as a model. The historical figure can be referred to as the target figure of the *imitatio* and the model as the source figure, or prefiguration.⁵ The content, message and effect of this construction of a referential relationship are not identical in every case, however. It is therefore important to establish an overall term for defining all forms of reference and time periods in question – one that does not depend on the reference's interpretation and one that allows us to

work in a transdisciplinary manner, without falling prey to anachronistic assumptions.

For this reason, we have developed the term *imitatio heroica* in analogy with other forms of *imitatio*. *Imitatio* describes a common form of creating references in cultural practice since antiquity – whether in poetry or rhetoric – as *imitatio auctorum* or *imitatio veterum* (imitating ancient authors) (Kaminski; also see Rombach) or as *imitatio naturae* (related to the theory of mimesis in art) (see Jørgensen; Petersen). The doctrine of virtues also teaches us *imitatio morum*, which is the principle of achieving exceptional morality by imitating the virtuous behaviour of certain models (de Rentiis, *Imitatio morum*). This notion was primarily influenced by the concept of *imitatio Christi*, which is grounded in the New Testament and spread in Christian late antiquity. Building on the pagan (Greek) and Jewish concept of *imitatio Dei*, *imitatio Christi* is significantly different in that, instead of a portrait-like imitation of a transcendental, primary image, there is the perspective of an existential imitation as a successor of a divine *and* human model figure.⁶

In all the usages above, the source figure is referred to in the genitive case (*Dei, Christi*) and, as a result, the focus of the phrase rests on the reference to the source figure. In the case of the allegorical and the ideal portraits, the question as to which model is referred to remains open. Theomorphic or heromorphic portraits, on the other hand, highlight the form of reference, 'identification portrait' highlights the reference's result. All cases are concerned with the nature of the reference or its result – for example, a distinguishing or extraordinary quality, or a divinization. That is why the description of the *imitatio* as *heroica*, in other words as heroizing, is fitting. It encompasses all forms of representation – including non-visual and/or performative representations of historical figures or their prototypes – which establish a referential relationship to figures regarded as heroic by adopting or imitating these source figures, or aspects thereof, and applying these to the target figure of the historical person. An analogous term would be *imitatio divina*, already used in late antiquity.⁷ The term thus emphasizes the result of the accentuation, its heroizing effect, while the imitated source figure and the form of reference is less important. We are concerned with the very processes and effects of heroization that constitute the semantics and functions of the heroic for the target figure.

While this perspective broadens our discussion, it is less valuable as an analytical tool. The term does not specify or explain the forms, practices and semantics of the *imitationes* in question. On the other hand, the term *imitatio*

heroica is not limited to pictures, but can also be used in the research of performative and textual practice, meaning that the term has an open and integrative function. Regarding its wide range of descriptive potential, its functions, and the resulting research agenda, are clear. Only the precise differentiation between the various forms and practices of *imitatio heroica* will enable us to better understand its functions and semantics. This differentiation, paired with an expanded perspective, leads to a critical re-evaluation of the terms that have previously been used unsystematically to describe different forms of *imitatio heroica*.

Imitatio and prefiguration

As the name implies, *imitatio heroica* focuses on the distinguishing function the imitation exerts for the target figure, whether this imitation was applied by others or the figure themselves. This phenomenon, however, has another side, illustrated by Hans Blumenberg in *Arbeit am Mythos* (*Work on Myth*) in 1979. Blumenberg regards a historical person's 'self-reference' to a figure who is considered a 'hero' to be an important element of the mythical ways of thinking that continued into modernity. As an example, he points out Goethe's reference to Napoleon: "Goethe himself is always the point of reference – either openly or covertly – when he speaks of Napoleon" (*Work on Myth* 483).⁸ Goethe also projects the ancient figure of Prometheus, which he also recreates as a poetic character, onto Napoleon. While Blumenberg did not pursue this phenomenon further in *Arbeit am Mythos*, he did consider Hitler and the National Socialists' use of myths as political instruments later in his posthumously published *Präfiguration. Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (*Prefiguration. Work on Political Myth*) (2014). In the title, he introduced the term *prefiguration* to describe the reference to (heroic) models. In this monograph, Blumenberg writes that the "act of emulating a prefigurate", which is his expression for the imitation of the model figure, "is connected to the expected creation of an identical effect [as for this prefigurate]" (Blumenberg, *Präfiguration* 11). He especially stresses that the "model [...] for the prefiguration is not born, but is made [...] when the pervading one makes it possible to recognize the one imbued [...]. What is repeated becomes [...] a mythical agenda [...] through repetition in the first place" (ibid.). The "work on myth" for the *imitatio heroica* – if we understand it as a prefiguration – refers to how the prefigurate, or

source figure, acquires (new) meaning only in the process of prefiguration. It therefore does not exist as a fixed, more or less unchangeable phenomenon, but only takes shape and acquires an ascribed meaning through the (alleged) imitation. Each act of imitation thus also transforms the source figure which is, after all, as a prefiguration is rather asserted than proven. For example, according to Blumenberg, Napoleon becomes a new figure through Goethe's reference to him as a model, and Hitler and Goebbels' perspective on Frederick the Great also changes the idea of him. The imitating target figure thus portrays himself (in this case) as the "enforcer of a historical right" (ibid., 15). In this way, prefiguration becomes an instrument of legitimizing rhetoric. It acquires a kind of magical nature as the fulfillment of providence or a revenant (ibid., 1, 17), while also acting as a promise for an otherwise uncertain future. Most importantly, prefiguration lends "legitimacy to a decision that is extremely contingent and unexplainable" (ibid., 10). It is a "singular instrument of justification in weakly motivated actions" and positions people and actions "in the zone beyond doubt" because "what has been done once before does not require [...] reconsideration" (ibid., 14, 15, 9). Prefiguration is a rhetorical technique that generates security in times of crisis by appearing to provide ultimate justifications and by refusing to grant legitimacy to arguments and criticism. It also resembles heroization and other forms of social symbolization, because the same is true for the heroic.⁹ At the same time, this marks the socio-political dimension of prefiguration.

We can rely on Blumenberg's ideas as arguments for a broader understanding of heroic imitations, or *imitationes heroicae*, and for borrowing rhetorical terminology and techniques. At the same time, however, we should keep in mind Blumenberg's point that imitations are always processes in which not only the target figure of the imitation is ascribed heroic meaning, but the heroic model figure is also always reconfigured. We should therefore not forget that these imitations fulfil specific political functions that require further explanation.

Jehan-Georges Vibert's *In the Emperor's Image*: Defining the problem

We will now take a late nineteenth-century painting, *In the Emperor's Image* by Jehan-Georges Vibert, as a starting point for our investigation. This example serves to specify the research questions and analytical problems involved in

the phenomenon of visual and performative imitation.

Jehan-Georges Vibert (1840–1902) was a French salon painter who created a large number of oil paintings between 1866 and 1899 (especially after 1871) while living in Paris. These satirical and critical works feature French clergymen, often in a historicizing perspective on the First French Empire.¹⁰ *In the Emperor's Image* (fig. 1) is an example of his satirical work and it was auctioned to an unknown buyer at Sotheby's in New York in 1975.¹¹ The painting shows the interior of a dressing room. In the rear on the left is a dressing table with bottles of perfume. In the front on the left, a tricorne and a pair of gloves lie on a round table, in easy reach of the door. In the back on the right is a gold-framed portrait of Napoleon I in uniform, hanging above a chest of drawers on which an *Empire* vase is standing. The portrait of Napoleon I shows him in his typical pose, his right hand in his waistcoat. The painting's main figure, a clergyman, is standing in the centre, wearing a crimson robe and polished shoes. He is nearly ready to leave and is turned slightly to the left. In front of him, next to the wall on the left, is a bronze bust of Napoleon I in general's uniform. This particular bust represents just one of the many busts of the emperor in circulation at the time. The clergyman is holding a small mirror in his left hand and a hairbrush in his right. His eyes are focused on the bust of Napoleon as he attempts to style his hair toward the front in the fashion of the emperor. He is inspecting his progress in the mirror. Compositionally, the clergyman's head is between and at the same height as the bust and the painting of Napoleon. This invites a comparison between the clergyman and Napoleon and enhances their similarities; because the cleric is depicted in three-quarter view, just like Napoleon in the painting, the beholder can directly compare their hairstyles. This reveals the practical process of portrait imitation: a member of the clergy is attempting to copy a pictorial representation of a heroically elevated figure before stepping out into public.¹²

What is happening here is clear, or as clear as the objective of this process can be. What is the aim of this Napoleon impersonator? What semantics are associated with his *imitatio heroica*, and what meaning does the painter lend to this scene?

What we know for certain is that the priest is preparing to walk out the door and show himself in public, which may explain his careful emulation of the deceased emperor. His purpose, however, could be one, or several, of the following:

(1) The clergyman wants to style himself as a new Napoleon of sorts. He thus exemplifies



Fig. 1: Jehan-Georges Vibert, *In the Emperor's Image*. Late nineteenth century (oil on canvas, 45 × 35 cm), whereabouts unknown.

common methods of retrospective legitimation, as practiced in other forms – for example, by Napoleon III in France (Ménager; Kopp¹³). The clergyman associates the emperor's hairstyle with power, influence and 'imperial' status. However, his dress is proof that he is neither a politician nor a military man, although Napoleon is unmistakably both, as seen in the two portraits. The clergyman is thus unable to play a similar role to Napoleon in these fields, as he is unmistakably a clergyman. This means that the imitation is either an absurd exaggeration – a clergyman is hardly capable of achieving the same status as Napoleon I, much less excel him – or it is a selective reference to Napoleon's great status, and not to his role as soldier and emperor. The clergyman (and with him, the clergy as a whole) strives to acquire imperial-like power, although this power is not fitting for his profession. The point of reference is Napoleon's status: in the imitator's eyes, the hairstyle radiates something heroic. A quality is transferred here from role model to imitator, and so the relationship between the church (the clergyman) and authority (Napoleon) is the central theme of this picture.

(2) A second approach to this painting assumes a different view of the relationship between the imitator and imitatee. By imitating Napoleon, the clergyman intends to demonstrate his veneration for and feelings of closeness to the emperor. During the Second French Empire

of Napoleon III, when Vibert first began painting, positioning oneself in relation to Napoleon Bonaparte was significant, and the painting may serve as a reminder of this significance. In his admiration of Napoleon, the clergyman also takes sides in political conflicts; his *imitatio* shows a commitment to the hero of the empire. In this case, the theme of the painting is the relationship between the church and politics.

(3) The third reading of this *imitatio* is much less direct and argues that the clergyman simply wants to appear stylish. The fashion of the Second French Empire borrowed many historical elements from the era of Napoleon I's reign; this style could be imitated without inherently implying a particular political leaning. Thus, in his vanity, the clergyman merely wants to look fashionable. Whether he is aware of the potential political relevance of this style is unclear, as the painting focuses more on form than on content. The theme of the painting would thus be the clergyman's vanity.

In the context of Vibert's ironic and critical point of view, one could argue that all three themes can be found in this painting: the clergyman's vanity and hunger for power, Napoleon I's role in French politics, and the relationship between politics and the clergy in France in the late nineteenth century. Clearly, Vibert was not interested in the ways in which imitating a hairstyle may be problematic. Rather, all three analyses play a role in this painting.

If we are to take the practice of performative *imitatio heroica* depicted here seriously for our investigation and leave aside the shift that is indicated by the representation of this practice in a painting as compared to the reality of this practice, then we must first clarify what form of reference to the heroic model can be found in such *imitationes heroicae*. This includes the visual or linguistic means that are employed, for example, through hairstyle, clothing, posture, physiognomy, name, location, etc. This leads us to the question of whether the relationship between the imitatee and imitator is represented directly or indirectly. In other words, does this imitation primarily refer to the model being imitated, or does it refer to something related, such as a fashion trend – something that is not a direct quality of the model? In this context, we must also question whether a concrete object of the imitation actually exists, or whether the imitating subject is appropriating a certain object, habitus, style of clothing and so forth, one that is not associated with a particular heroic figure, but rather with the heroic in general. An important aspect in both cases is the question of whether, based on a representational image, it is possible

to determine if a certain amount of vagueness is a fundamental part of such imitative representations. This brings us to the semantics of this phenomenon. Which features of the imitated person does the *imitatio* refer to as their ascribed qualities: political status, occupation, social role, external influence, or personal or structural qualities? How many of these qualities are transferred to the imitator through the act of imitating the source figure? And what relationship does the imitatee hereby establish to the imitator: Is the imitator a follower, someone who identifies with the imitatee and feels close to them? Finally, we must ask how the heroic model – in the case of Vibert's painting, Napoleon – is refigured through imitation.

Imitationes heroicae in portraiture: Hercules as a model

In order to better illustrate the questions and problems at hand, we will now discuss three instances of Hercules imitations from three different eras and cultures as examples of concrete forms of heroic imitations in portraiture. Based on these examples, we will demonstrate the scope, functions and semantics of *imitatio heroica*.

Qualities and heroic aura: Commodus and Hercules

We begin with the famous bust of Emperor Commodus, which shows attributes of Hercules and dates back to 192 A.D., during the Roman Empire. It belongs to the Musei Capitolini in Rome (fig. 2).¹⁴ Including its plinth, the marble bust is 133 centimetres tall. It was found on Esquiline Hill in Rome in what was part of the emperors' garden in antiquity. Its outstanding quality and complex pictorial language indicate that it was a courtly gift to the emperor (see Grüner; Giuliani).

The bust was originally presented in the semi-public context of the imperial court. When Commodus suffered *damnatio memoriae* after his murder in 192 and all of the portraits of him were removed, the bust, which had been made shortly before his death, was apparently hidden or put into storage. It survived, preserved under the earth, until its discovery in 1874. The bust shows Commodus with his hair in the style common for an official portrait of an emperor and his head does not resemble Hercules in the least. Rather, it is the lion's skin Commodus is wearing that refers to Hercules, along with the club



Fig. 2: *Bust of Commodus as Hercules.* Believed to be from 192 A.D. (marble) Musei Capitolini, inv. no. 1120, Rome.

he is holding in his right hand and the apples in his left, referencing those Hercules stole from the paradise garden of the Hesperides as his last labour. The pedestal is particularly rich in detail and contains a celestial globe with stars and the zodiac. The visible zodiac sign indicates the month of October, which Commodus renamed “Hercules” in 192 A.D. The celestial globe is not part of the canon of Hercules’ attributes; rather, it represents world supremacy and *aeternitas*. Two cornucopias frame the celestial globe. These horns of plenty symbolize prosperity, abundance (*abundantia*) and happiness (*felicitas*) – none of which is an attribute to Hercules either. Between the upper parts of the two cornucopias is a curved shield with an eagle’s head on each upper tip and a gorgon’s head on a scaly skin at its centre. The shield’s form is typical for the Amazons, a mythical tribe of warrior women conquered by Hercules. The eagle stands for Jupiter, while the scaly skin beneath the gorgon’s head is the so-called *aegis*, which Jupiter gave to his daughter Minerva for protection. The cornucopias are held by a kneeling woman (a second woman situated symmetrical-ly on the right is missing), whose dress indicates that she is an Amazon. The upper torsos of two

tritons – male nautical creatures – in the same size were also found alongside the bust. Their inward-facing arms reach upward, framing the bust symmetrically (**fig. 3**). In many reliefs from this period, figures such as these would hold a flowing robe, symbolic of happiness (*felicitas*), behind a bust of this kind, and we can assume that this bust would have once also had such a robe. The nautical creatures and the flowing robes in marble may be compositional elements that embellished the bust, but they do not refer in any way to Hercules.

Semantically, although Commodus is portrayed in an easily recognizable, official portrait, there are also several references to Hercules as a hero and a conqueror, as well as to Jupiter, Hercules’ father. However, these references are interwoven with references to certain qualities such as prosperity, abundance and happiness.

It is not by chance that Commodus was associated with Hercules. Commodus was referred to as Hercules Romanus, and he renamed one of the calendar months Hercules after the hero (and thus, indirectly, after himself). He regarded himself as *victor*, like Hercules, who had conquered the Amazons. As a result, the bust is generally interpreted as an illustration of this connection, of Commodus as Hercules Romanus.¹⁵ But what does this mean, and how exactly was Commodus heroized in this way? During his lifetime, the emperor was neither a god nor a *divus*, although he was worshipped by a cult. The portrait is also not an absolute identification of the emperor with the hero Hercules: Commodus is still explicitly, recognizably himself, as the portrait’s head shows. Furthermore, in this portrait Commodus encompasses more than Hercules’s essence, as we can see in the attributes that do not relate to Hercules. Does Commodus therefore embody certain qualities of Hercules in combination with other classically extraordinary

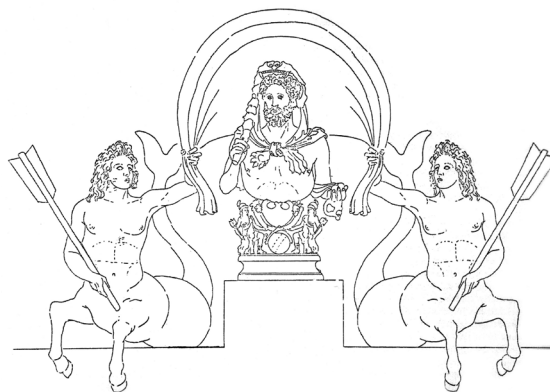


Fig. 3: Illustrated reconstruction of arrangement of the bust of Commodus.

qualities? This interpretation would assume that analogies with virtues and names metaphorically illustrate Commodus' apparent qualities through 'pictorial images', using heroic and divine iconography without Commodus being depicted as a god or hero.¹⁶ Or does Commodus' emulation (*aemulatio*) of Hercules refashion the hero into a 'new Hercules' – perhaps even a better Hercules – in the face of the reality of the Roman Empire?¹⁷ Through Commodus, Hercules would thus acquire an aspect of rulership. We could also inquire how the odd and inconsistent accumulation of attributes in this bust could be understood, for these attributes create an allegorical character that goes beyond the mythical figure of Hercules. The accumulation of these odd, inconsistent attributes constructs a heroic aura, rather than definite heroic semantics; this bust of Commodus is a heroizing *imitatio*, not an *imitatio* of a demigod and hero.

Could the attributes perhaps be read like verses of a poem of praise, of a panegyric for the ruler,

and therefore less as a heroization in the strongest sense and more as a praise of a ruler by means of heroic clichés – in other words, as a poetically charged praise of virtues (see Hallett 223-264)? That the bust was a courtly gift speaks in favour of this interpretation. As it is, while the bust leaves many formal and semantic questions unanswered, it also contributes to the understanding of different types of *imitatio heroica* in the portraiture of ancient Rome.

A paragone: Albrecht Dürer's *Hercules Fighting the Stymphalian Birds*

Albrecht Dürer's painting *Hercules Fighting the Stymphalian Birds* of 1500 (fig. 4)¹⁸ represents a second type of heroic imitation in portraiture. The painting (which is now unfortunately in poor condition and has a cut on the upper edge) (Anzelewsky 171-172) shows the hero in profile,

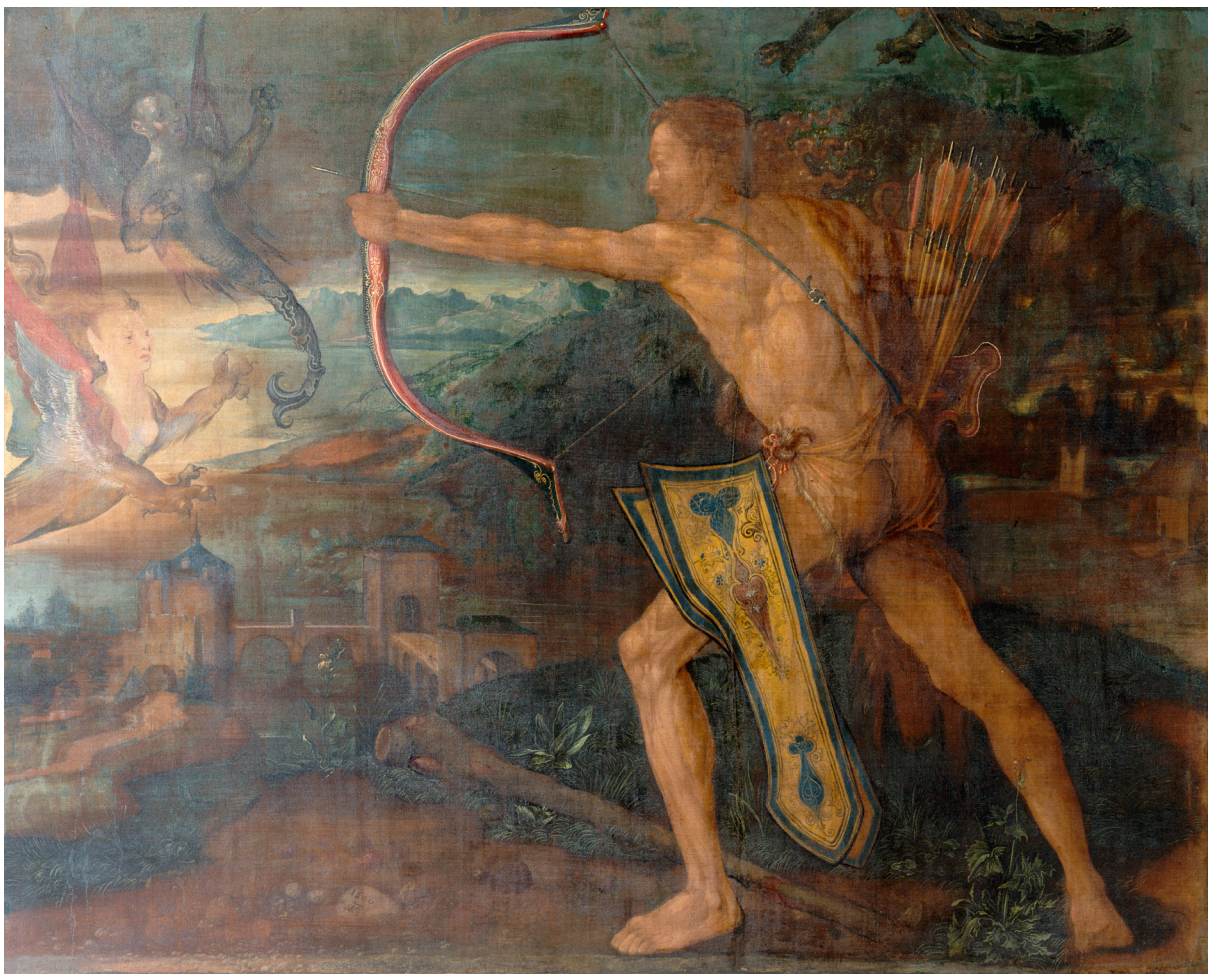


Fig 4. Albrecht Dürer. *Hercules Fighting the Stymphalian Birds*. 1500 (oil on canvas, 84.5 × 107.5 cm), Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, inv. no. GM 166.

wearing nothing but a loincloth made of lion's skin. With his body tense and his back turned toward the beholder, Hercules is slaying the metal-feathered birds rising from the swamp of Stymphalos on his left as part of his twelve labours. The lion's skin, which hangs loosely on his body and is visible between his legs, as well as the mighty club lying on the ground, the powerful archer's pose, and finally the iconographic context – the killing of mythological hybrid beings – would all be familiar symbols of the ancient hero to the contemporary beholders of the painting.

However, Dürer's depiction of Hercules' long, curly and windswept hair would have seemed discordant to even those who were only mildly familiar with ancient images of Hercules. Even from his profile, it is clear that Hercules' striking facial features bear little resemblance to the ancient ideas of Hercules.

Just like Commodus' bust, for which the emperor's features were mingled with Hercules' (Hess 143), Dürer added his own facial features to the ancient hero: in his self-portraits of 1498 (Dürer, Madrid) and 1500 (Dürer, Munich), Dürer is sporting his distinctive long, brown curly hair and Roman nose.

It is important, however, to establish a still more precise description of this Hercules imitation. By assuming the pose of Hercules, Dürer identifies his own image with that of the ancient hero. The richly ornamented bow case and the architecture of the buildings in the background also testify to the painter's lifetime, the early sixteenth century. What then was Dürer's aim in presenting himself in the pose of an ancient hero?

Firstly, the naked figure allows Dürer to showcase his knowledge of human anatomy and his ability to render an anatomically correct representation of the human body. He thus demonstrates that he is abreast with the latest trends of Italian painters, who used ancient statues as models and for whom the naturalistic representation of the human body was of the highest value.¹⁹ By portraying himself in this martial pose, the painter also subversively implies that he is ready to battle these models from antiquity.

This particular form of portrait imitation must also surely be understood in the context of the intellectual, humanist circles of which Dürer was a member. Scholars believe that Dürer painted this picture for one of his humanist friends, Willibald Pirckheimer (see Strieder 30-32), because Pirckheimer's inventory lists a Hercules painting that could be identical with this one (see Hess 143). Believing that this painting was created in a humanist context, scholars have therefore relied

on the ancient author Pliny the Elder in their explanation. Pliny once described a painting by Apelles as such: "It is by his hand [Apelles'] too, it is generally supposed, that the Hercules, with the face averted, now in the Temple of Anna, was painted; a picture in which one of the greatest difficulties in the art, the face, though hidden, may be said to be seen rather than left to the imagination" (Plinius, *Naturalis historia* 35: 95).

In his remarks, Pliny praises Apelles' ability to leave the face recognizable, even when the painting's perspective shows Hercules from behind. This is surely what Dürer is attempting to emulate in his painting, and so Pliny's next remark about Apelles also applies to Dürer: "He also painted a figure of a naked Hero, a picture in which he has challenged Nature herself."²⁰

A combative Hercules with the face of Dürer can thus be understood as a kind of *imitatio heroica* in which the painter expresses his own heroic rivalry with ancient models and even nature itself. While the ancient bust of Commodus attributes heroic and godly qualities to Commodus, while also making the mythological figure of Hercules accessible to people in Commodus' time, Dürer draws on the different roles and characteristics of Hercules for this self-portrait and, by doing so, transfers these heroic qualities to himself. At the same time, Dürer engages in what is known in Italian art history as a *paragone* – an artistic comparison – with an ancient painter who allegedly painted a similar picture, meaning he strives toward an emulation (*aemulatio*) that will surpass the ancient artist. This *imitatio* is much more multifaceted and complex than a simple, selective identification with the represented hero. According to the humanist credo, it was important to prove oneself virtuous and to avoid envy in one's artistic endeavours of competing with nature and antiquity. However, both may be represented in this (in many respects) 'hero-like' portrait of a painter who was already celebrated as the new Apelles around 1500.²¹

Virtuous rule: Maximilian I of Bavaria and Hercules at the Crossroads

Hercules continued to remain a popular model of reference for early modern rulers. The scene of Hercules at the crossroads is one of the traditional pictorial subjects that could be used to invoke specific virtues. For example, Johann Sadeler the Elder used this iconography in a copper engraving in 1595 (fig. 5),²² which shows the young hero standing between *Virtus* (virtue) and *Voluptas* (pleasure) at the crossroads, symbolized by the



Fig. 5: Johann Sadeler. *Hercules at the Crossroads*. 1595 (copper engraving), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. 15-43.



Fig. 6: Johann Sadeler. Broadsheet commemorating the ascension of Maximilian I of Bavaria as Hercules at the Crossroads. 1595 (copper engraving).

Pythagorean 'Y'. The rough path of virtue behind Virtus leads to Mount Parnassus, which is signified by Pegasus in the background. On the other road, Voluptas also beckons the hero. Hercules' posture does not reveal a decision favouring either side, although he is looking at Virtus, who has taken hold of his arm. The sensuous, but immoral path leads to death and decay, as indicated in the background in the motif of a shipwreck. The ship is a familiar metaphor for life and the shipwreck thus represents the end that all things immoral must face. Hercules lets his club rest casually against his shoulder and wears nothing but a lion's skin draped over his loins. Above his head, we see Mount Olympus, where Minerva is begging Jupiter to help his son Hercules determine the right path, as heralded by Fama (fame).

Although this work dates to 1595, the dedication above, along with the Bavarian crest embroidered on Fama's flag, all clearly refer to Maximilian I of Bavaria, who was appointed joint ruler with his father Wilhelm V. However, this reference to Maximilian I is merely implicit: the scene itself does not refer to the lifeworld of Maximilian I; instead, the mythical and allegorical

figures remain enclosed in a world of their own. This was bound to change.

The very same year, Sadeler made a second version of this engraving in which Maximilian I is shown in an imitation of the portrait of Hercules (**fig. 6**) (Panofsky 116-118, fig. 57 a; Pigler 125-127; Strauss no. 7001.432 S2). In this version, Hercules' head has been replaced by Maximilian's, which is easily recognizable by his hairstyle and Van Dyke beard. The implicit reference to the ideal figure of Hercules is thus transformed into an explicit imitation in terms of attributes and scenery. The purely allegorical composition of the first version focuses on Maximilian, who, like Hercules, was expected to behave virtuously as a ruler and for whom Hercules was held up as a virtuous model for his future rule. In the second version, the reference to Maximilian is more explicit, as Hercules is depicted with the portrait of Maximilian's head, which makes the message more concrete and directly understandable as a result. As with the instructions given in so-called mirrors for princes, this may refer to a prospective choice, but the chances of this expectation being fulfilled are significantly enhanced.

Maximilian identifies with the virtuous choice of Hercules. The inscription (identical in both copper engravings) is no longer the only connection of the allegorical scene to Maximilian;²³ the picture itself now has a concrete temporal point of reference: Maximilian's ascension when he was 22 years old. This implies that the imitation of Hercules as a virtuous hero is reduced to his choice at the crossroads – in other words, the model of Hercules is used selectively for one of his labours, while his other glorious achievements are not associated with Maximilian.

The choice of Herculean iconography for Maximilian must therefore be regarded as an allegorically plausible *imitatio heroica*, according to pictorial tradition and the direct model of the allegorical representation. First, the Bavarian House of Wittelsbach had commissioned the writer Johannes Turmaier (also known as Johannes Aventinus) in 1521 to write a history of the Bavarian duchy in which Hercules was identified as the first Duke of Bavaria (by creating a genealogical connection between the patriarch Alemanus and the ancient hero). Second, Maximilian's Jesuit education also included moralistic theatre plays, which he attended when he was roughly ten years old, and he played Euphronius, who had to choose between studying and a sensuous, carefree life in the educational comedy *Von der Erziehung und dem Unterricht des Euphronius* (Educating Euphronius) (Dotterweich 74-75).

In addition to satisfying the period phenomenon of a princely house referring to Hercules and the trend of archaizing representations, the *imitatio heroica* in Sadeler's copper engravings expresses and legitimates concrete political claims. As with the bust of the Roman Emperor Commodus, it is easy to see how a portrait can have a stronger effect and be more understandable to a larger group of recipients than a textually explicit or pictorially implicit reference.

Definitions, problems, key questions

Summing up the definition of terms, the description of the phenomenon based on Vibert's painting and the three examples of Hercules imitations, we can argue that future research of the *imitatio heroica* must not only describe the forms of each *imitatio*, but also address the following basic definitions, problems and key questions.

In terms of definition, an *imitatio heroica* indicates a referential relationship that is established between a heroic or divine source figure (object, model, prefigure) who is imitated and a target

figure who imitates this figure or to whom the imitation is attributed, either performative through specific actions, or in the form of media representations. Possible source figures are gods or human figures, such as heroes and other mythological characters, especially biblical and other religious or fictional personages to whom extraordinary qualities have been ascribed and who have thus been elevated to models. These imitations can be identified through certain forms of reference, either by attributes such as clothing, jewellery, and other accessories; physiognomy and certain physical characteristics; names; scenes; certain typical gestures like actions or types of images that are characteristic for a certain model. Imitations can also be identified contextually through an environment or a constellation of figures that is characteristically associated with a model. Although these different forms of *imitatio* can be combined, their semantics and functions remain undetermined. In all cases, the association with the source figure is selective and does not refer to all of the model figure's qualities. Moreover, the *imitatio heroica* always accentuates the target figure, usually in an admiring manner, although this can be satirically inverted. In either case, the source figure also undergoes re-formation in the process of imitation, meaning imitations can be regarded as processes of prefiguration in the sense of Blumenberg.

Terms like 'theomorphic', 'heromorphic' and (in some cases) 'allegorical portrait' can define the formal aspect of this phenomenon neutrally and descriptively. However, the multitude of additional terms used in research shows that a further differentiation between the various functions and semantics of such processes of imitation is still needed. In the past, formal and semantic aspects have often become mixed without much reflection. This is why we need an in-depth analysis to identify the above-mentioned formal qualities of the *imitatio* before attempting to determine its semantics and social and political functions.

The following issues and key questions, which are important with regard to the *longue durée* and the transformations of the practice of *imitatio heroica*, are addressed in the contributions to this collection.*

Setting the concrete formal referential relationship between target figure and source figure aside for a moment, it is imperative to ask whether the forms of references in pictorial representations

* This and the following references refer to the edited volume *Imitatio heroica*. Heldenangleichung im Bildnis (von den Hoff et al., *Imitatio*).

in particular (but not exclusively) are direct or indirect. Does the imitation make an explicit reference to the source figure, or is the reference established through other figures, patterns of behaviour, or prevailing styles or fashions? These questions are discussed here primarily in the contributions by Christina Posselt-Kuhli and Martin Kovacs, who focus on the heroizing portraits of rulers, as well as by Felix Heinzer in his analysis of the ancient and heroic-seeming terminology used for describing Christian 'athletes' through the new semantics in early Christianity. Katharina Helm's study also addresses the heroizing function of antiquity in general, while Hallie M. Franks discusses the heroic connotations of certain patterns of behaviour (not merely figures) in the hunting scenes portrayed on the graves of Macedonian noblemen in the late fourth century BC. In many instances, the distinction between direct and indirect references in images and texts is blurred, and this elucidates the potential of the *imitatio heroica* to act as an ambivalent, multi-perspective form of expression. Nevertheless, it is still important to determine how explicitly and distinctively the heroic is understood in each case, and how implicitly it is rooted in the cultural economy as a 'cliché', as part of the educational canon or as a fashionable trend. Stefanie Lethbridge, in her study of de-heroizing imitations in eighteenth-century caricatures, illustrates the extent to which the heroic can even be in danger of losing its emphasizing character. *Imitatio heroica* also enables us to approach the phenomenon of the normalization of heroic formulas and patterns of behaviour.

The edited volume also examines the characteristics of the emphasizing connection between the target figure and the heroic model. According to Blumenberg's idea of prefiguration the key point to this connection is that the *imitatio* claims the hero as a predecessor (prefigure), the imitator as the hero returned. However, is an imitation actually meant to indicate identity between the two, or does it only indicate following, or a kind of succession that defines the imitator's actions, or even one that serves to inspire him or her to potentially surpass the source figure (*aemulatio*, *superatio*) (see Green 1-26; Bauer; Döpp; Pochat; and Müller et al.)? Is it meant to provide a specific comparison (*comparatio*), indicate analogies between different virtues and qualities, express a strong association with the heroic in general, or serve as a mere piece of heroic décor for the target figure, or is the very lack of clarity significant in this regard? This is an important theme in virtually all of the contributions in the volume, as can be seen in Stefanie Lethbridge's demonstration of

how eighteenth-century caricatures play with the potential of variable associations between target and source figures. Yet, how can we distinguish between different associations and their intentions? Another issue is the fundamentally different types of associations with source figures like heroes and gods, or even God, in ancient polytheistic cultures as compared to monotheistic, Christian cultures since antiquity.

In the case of each *imitatio heroica*, we must ask at which level it can be 'believable' and plausible. Can we regard an emperor as Hercules? Do we see him as similar to Hercules? Or is this only a rhetorical statement, perhaps just a pompous cliché? And did this not mean something different in polytheistic antiquity than it did in later periods? Why can certain imitations be only either unbelievable or especially popular at certain times or with regard to certain people or media? We can begin to understand these questions only within the context of the intended character of the association between the model and target figure.

On the one hand, each *imitatio heroica* is strongly determined by the historical target figure, because the imitation requires the historical figure's actual presence in an image, text or performance. The heroic model, or source figure, on the other hand, is only present in and through the historical figure. Through the *imitatio heroica*, the heroization of the target figure and the presence of the heroic model both acquire poignancy as the heroic comes to life in the present day of each imitation, as demonstrated by Blumenberg's concept of prefiguration. We could therefore say that – contemporary message and meaning aside – the *imitatio heroica*, the comparison between a historical personage and a heroic figure, elevates the historical figure, while increasing the presence of the heroic figure within the historical figure's own time. Whether different media and/or historical constellations favour the heroization of the target figure or the evocation of the source figure – in other words, whether the prefiguration or the *imitatio* is in the foreground – remains an open question. Or does its potential lie precisely in the fact that both are achieved and superimposed at the same time? Caterina Maderna takes this question as a starting point to demonstrate the projective nature – and pictorial 'Romanization' – of heroic models in pictures of Greek myths on Roman sarcophagi.

When we think of an imitation, we tend to seek what *connects* the imitating with the imitated figure; all too often, we overlook what *distinguishes* them. Because it always works selectively, the *imitatio heroica* excludes the source figure's unflattering qualities or practices

from the transfer to the target figure without this being made explicit. No imitation of Hercules includes the killing of his own children – an aspect that is ascribed to him in an ancient myth. A complete identification with the source figures is never intended, as has been highlighted by the pictures of deceased Romans superimposed on Greek heroes found on Roman sarcophagi, or in the imitations of Alexander, which Martin Kovacs explores in his contribution to the volume. We should therefore consider not only the degree of similarity or difference in the association between the imitator and imitatee, or the relationship between partial quotes and the entirety of the represented figure, but also which criteria are necessary for the interpretation of the imitation to be ‘correct’, including, for example, social status, level of education and knowledge of traditions. This is especially the case regarding imitations in the context of the reception of antiquity, as discussed by Katharina Helm. It is also true for more elitist educational traditions – for example, as expressed in Dürer’s painting of Hercules or in Roman sarcophagus reliefs, both of which rely on Greek myths of heroes and gods from the time of the Roman Empire as part of the educational canon. For how long and to what degree was this an elitist phenomenon and thus a means of distinction?

The *imitatio heroica* encompasses a relatively high concentration of heterogeneous, possibly even vague allegories, due to the combination of references to different source figures and the selection of their qualities. There are many meanings within a picture of a Roman emperor, a Renaissance painter, or a German duke with a club and lion’s skin, but the semantics remain anything but clear – even when we attempt to recontextualize the meanings to determine their ‘primary’ message. The semantics of the *imitatio heroica* are thus indeterminate *per se* and remain relatively vague. As a result, there may be another potential of this accentuating form of representation that may be similar to the possibilities of the heroic itself: the hero is an ambivalent figure and can change in meaning. The representations of Roman emperors in the style of gods and heroes further demonstrates this potential, as Dietrich Boschung discusses in his chapter in the volume.

In order to understand these semantics, it is necessary first and foremost to examine the different media, social and political contexts, in which imitations of heroes are used. Most importantly, this applies to the actors of, and those addressed by, the *imitatio*, because it is important to distinguish between self-heroizations and heroizations by others. Which social groups

utilized these imitations when, and who were their recipients? Dürer’s self-portrait ‘as’ Hercules is not the same as the portrait of the Roman *princeps* ‘as’ Hercules in a bust given as a present to the emperor himself. Heroic imitation in a portrait intended for a royal court differs, in turn, from one in a graphic print. Such differentiations enable us to explain what functions the *imitatio heroica* performed, and whether it served as a form of social or political distinction or equalization. They also help us to understand why the upper classes favoured heroic patterns up until the early nineteenth century. We can also discern media-related phenomena, as Olivier Bonfait demonstrates in his article on the gradual progression of images of kings to the highest position on painted ceilings, a place originally reserved for heroes and gods, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. That the imitation of heroes can also be politically inopportune is the subject of Dietrich Boschung’s analysis of the first Roman *princeps* Augustus, in which he focuses on the techniques used to elevate a ruler, without rendering him heroic.

Other important aspects are the conjunctures and transformations over the *longue durée*, not only of the target figure, but also of the source figure of the *imitatio heroica*. The canon of (often ancient) figures that have frequently reoccurred throughout the centuries seems to have been rather small. It is thus important to investigate why (and how) the selection of certain relevant qualities disambiguated the multifaceted meanings of these ancient figures, and how these images shifted in various contexts. What was the impact of Christianization on these figures, and what other roles could Christian heroes play? And why has Hercules – as the figure who oscillates most between god, demigod and human in antiquity – remained so important for so long, surviving religious and political revolutions, especially in the European context (see Vollkommer; Kray/Ottermann; and Polleroß, *Hercules*)?

These observations and questions reflect the foundations and goals of the SFB 948 “Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms”, as explored in the conference papers included in the volume, and they reflect the objectives of the future research of *imitatio heroica* in other periods and media. These observations and questions can therefore be understood as the first steps on the path toward a systematic understanding of this long-term, cultural, visual and performative phenomenon.

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1 Kiss 103-104; Polleroß, *Sakrales Identifikationsporträt* 1-2. For more on the use of the term around 1700, see Ahrens 15.

2 This is the case primarily for referring to antiquity as the ‘statuesque ideal portrait’. The reference to the medium of the statue is irrelevant for the phenomenon, because it also appears in painted form or in busts. See Niemeyer 11, 54-55; and Maderna 15-16.

3 For more on a differentiated notion of the ideal, see Hölscher.

4 Ladner 78-97; Polleroß, *Sakrales Identifikationsporträt* 6. For more on antiquity, see Preisshofen 50-69.

5 For more on prefiguration in the sense of Hans Blumenberg, see section 2 of this introduction.

6 See Crouzel; de Rentiis, *Zeit der Nachfolge*; Crouzel/Mühlenkamp, for more on the Christian tradition especially col. 541-563. See also Taveirne with further references.

7 As in Ambrosius’ “Hexameron 6, 7, 43”, 234; see also Siebigs 395, footnote 119 (for this source, we thank Peter Eich).

8 For this source, we thank Achim Aurnhammer.

9 See Langbein 158, 161-163; Soeffner 163; as well as (in the context of the research concept of the SFB 948) von den Hoff et al., *Heroes* 13; Asch 200-202.

10 For more on J.-G. Vibert, see Morton; Bénézit. See also the personal testimony “J.-G. Vibert, Autobiography” and the articles on his paintings published in 1896 in *The Century Magazine* 1895, 78-81.

11 On the auction, see *19th Century European Painting*, Sotheby – Parke-Bernett Auction Catalogue, New York, 4 June 1975, no. 202; Brilliant, *Portraiture* 83-95, fig. 33. See also Pollini’s review of D. Boschung, “Die Bildnisse des Augustus.” Berlin: Mann, 1993: 723-733, fig. 14. The current location of the painting could not be determined.

12 For more on Napoleon’s heroizations, see Marquart.

13 For this source, we thank Benjamin Marquart.

14 25 August 2014 <<http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/objekt/16564>>; Fittschen/Zanker 85-90, no. 78; Hannah; von den Hoff, *Commodus* 115-135; Dubini.

15 For more on Commodus and Hercules, see Meyer-Zwifelhofer; Hekster.

16 See Bergmann’s interpretation in *Strahlen der Herrscher* 38-39 and Maderna 122; also see Hallett, *passim*; as well as Claus’s critical view.

17 For more on this, see Hallett 238-240, 242-247. For more on the idea of the *aemulatio* in this context, see Green.

18 See Anzelewsky 171-172; Hess and Eser 360; Knacker.

19 Hercules nude and seen from behind in a lunge position primarily reminds us of prints by Antonio Pollaiuolo and Andrea Mantegna. See Hess 143; Knacker 318.

20 This does not refer to yet another picture of a hero, as indicated in many translations. We thank Felix Heinzer for his support in rereading the Latin passage.

21 For more on the epigrams of Konrad Celtis, who called Dürer a “second Phidias and Apelles”, see Grebe 78-89.

22 See Thieme/Becker, vol. 29, 300-301; id., vol. 32, 306-314; Glaser 202-203, no. 13; Pigler, vol. 2, 125-127; de Hoop Scheffer/Boon no. 556; and Strauss no. 7001.437.

23 The inscription reads: “VIRTUS Huc Jove nate gradum flectas, hac itur ad astra, / Honos principium, finis Olymus erit. / VOLUPTAS Huc o flos juvenum propera, per amaena rosarum / Atria te ducam, regna beata vides. / HERCULES Cui parebo miser: placet haec, placet illa, sed ambas / Qui sequar: haec coelum, cogitat illa stygem. / IUPITERI fer opem Pallas virtuti fractaque cedat / Altera, namq; stat hoc ordine agone salus.”

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Andreas Gelz

The Radiance of the Hero

Representations of the Heroic in French Literature from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century

L'éclat du héros

The analysis of representations of the hero and the heroic in French literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century is interesting, in terms of not only literary history, but also in terms of the fundamental questions about how we approach heroes, and how we understand heroism. The relationship between the heroic and literature is not an arbitrary one; rather, it is fundamental to the process of heroization, without which there would be neither heroes nor heroism. In 1965, the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot wrote in an article titled “Le Héros” (“The End of the Hero”) that heroism can only exist through deeds, and heroes only in and through words (Blanchot, *End of the Hero* 370-371). Art “guarantees the name by its renown” (“assure le nom dans la renommée”) and “eternalizes, and itself becomes eternal” (378). I also want to point out that this close connection between literature, art and the heroic has far-reaching consequences for the artist’s self-understanding. Artists’ representations of heroes offers them the chance to bask in the hero’s radiance, while also allowing them to understand their own artistic achievement – the presentation of heroic deeds and the creation of the hero in the first place – as a heroic deed in and of itself.

The reference to the artists who begin to glow in the light of their created hero brings forward an attribute that can be found in countless representations of heroes, some of which will be the focus of this discussion. I am referring here to the idea of a hero’s radiance: a heroic leading light or a radiant hero who represents the ideal of unbroken strength has a powerful allure that

captures our imagination. The fascination with the radiant appearance of the hero has proven to be so timeless, resistant to change and the crisis of historical images of heroes, that it has long been regarded as the essence of heroism. The corresponding French expression for this is *l'éclat du héros*.¹ In its many variations, this expression refers not only to the allure or aura of heroes, but also to the radiant and glorious heroic deed with which they make a name for themselves. In his article, Blanchot writes: “Heroism is revelation, this marvellous brilliance of deed that joins essence and appearance. Heroism is the act’s luminous sovereignty. Only the act is heroic, and the hero is nothing if he does not act – nothing outside the clarity of the act that illuminates and brings him to light” (370).² In addition, the *éclat* of heroes is an expression of the close connection between heroes and their followers. The heroes’ radiance and charisma captivate their followers, and this captivation serves to reflect and magnify the radiance back onto the heroic figures.

In light of this view of heroes, heroic deeds, and the relationship between heroes and society, one would think that the appearance of heroes – their presentation as a leading light in literary works or as an analogy of omnipresent light of their unquestionable presence – should render questions of origin, legitimacy, social function and nature of heroes superfluous. And yet, the sublime and radiant appearance of heroes is mysterious and ambiguous for several reasons. Heroes, by example, actualise social norms through their deeds; if they did not, society would not elevate them to heroic status in the first place. However, heroes also transgress the very norms of society, thereby proving their own exceptionality. Heroes emit a radiance that both illuminates and blinds the audience. Heroes’ actions inspire imitation, although they are inimitable. A hero’s status must be earned, affirmed by society and repeatedly defended. Nonetheless, their *action d'éclat* seems absent of presuppositions; it is evident, a revelation free from all

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causality. In the following, I will examine several examples from French literature (for a more detailed analysis, see Gelz). Through literature, I will get to the root of the mystery of heroes in the light of their glory; a light whose waning they fear and must reignite time and again: “At any moment, we must overcome darkness and duration, return to the light by bringing it back to life” (Starobinski 60).

The apotheosis of the hero

Exemplary representations of this phenomenon can be found in many French classicist works. In Corneille’s tragicomedy *Le Cid* (1637), the term *éclat* describes both the heroic deed and the exceptional position of the hero in society. When The Cid explains the radiance of his heroic deeds, he turns to the term: “L’éclat de mes hauts faits fut mon seul partisan” (Corneille, *Œuvres* 716) (“My glorious exploits were my sole support” [Corneille, *Le Cid* 22]³). Moreover, after The Cid kills Chimène’s father in a duel, she demands that The Cid be executed in order to deny him the radiant and glorious death that would elevate him above others (“I seek his death, but not a glorious one. [“Non pas dans un éclat qui l’élève si haut”]/ I’d have the locus of his dying be / No field of honor, but the gallows tree” [93]⁴). *Éclat* also describes the aura of the hero, the radiance of his way of being: “For though Rodrigue’s renown is bright” (“Et que dans quelque éclat que Rodrigue ait vécu”) (100).⁵

Still, more than a century later, the entry for “Héroïsme” in the *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772) – an important work for the self-fashioning of the French Enlightenment – denotes *éclat* as essential for distinguishing true heroism from other exceptional human qualities, such as greatness of spirit: “heroism differs from the simple grandeur of the soul in that it supposes virtues of brilliancy, which excite astonishment and admiration” (Anonymous 181).⁶ Here, the reversal of what is essential for the definition of the heroic is remarkable: the virtue of the *éclat* itself, rather than the aura of the virtue, evokes astonishment and admiration in the audience. Furthermore, in Marmontel’s entry for “gloire”, also in the *Encyclopédie*, glory is described as a “renommée éclatante”, “glowing fame” (Marmontel 716) that spreads like light and creates a direct connection between the hero and society that is stronger than the concept of honour, which refers to the estate. On the other hand, in Voltaire’s entry on “gloire, glorieux, glorieusement, glorifier”, he writes that glory always presupposes “des

choses éclatantes”, or “radiant things”, by which he means actions, virtues, talents and the overcoming of great difficulties (Voltaire, *Gloire* 716). Of the three elements that constituted the heroic code at the time – honour, glory and emulation (*aemulatio*) – it was primarily glory that, due to its *éclat* and hence its social radiance, was regarded as an end in itself. As a result, the heroic became somehow disconnected from its societal function and became a grand entity that seemed to need no questioning. This assumption is the basis for its legitimizing function in regard to notions about ideal behaviour in society. The assessment that the bedazzlement or blinding of the audience (“l’éblouissement”) forms the core of the visual identity of French Classicism and its poetics (Guyot 127) – its “poétique de l’éclat” (Pavel 53) – an identity in which the presence of a transcendental, seemingly unalterable order (such as a political order or an order of knowledge) can ultimately become perceivable in an aesthetic sense, is illustrated by the first sentence of Madame de Lafayette’s novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), which evokes a sublime image:

Grandeur and gallantry never appeared with more lustre [*éclat*] in France, than in the last years of Henry the Second’s reign. This prince was amorous and handsome, and though his passion for Diane of Poitiers, Duchess of Valentinois, was above twenty years standing, it was not the less violent, nor did he give less distinguishing proofs of it [“des témoignages moins éclatants”] (Lafayette, *Princess of Cleves* 1).⁷

The term *éclat* here does not only refer to the hero, in this case the ruler, it also characterizes the monarchy and the gallant courtly culture overall; indeed, *éclat* characterizes this radiant era in France’s history. High birth, marks of favour, offices, wealth, clothes, beauty, generosity, courage, esprit, politeness, and an aptitude for conversation and games are all attributes of *éclat* in courtly society, and can be found in many works during this age (Niderst 86-87).

Given the many different social contexts that can be linked to one another through the term *éclat*, it is no surprise that it also has a political meaning. In a number of works in the tradition of the courtesy book, or treatise from political philosophy – such as Nicolas Faret’s *L’honneste homme ou l’art de plaire à la cour* (1630) or Guez de Balzac’s *Le prince* (1631) –, the term *éclat* is used as a normative description of the order of the absolute monarchy (see Disselkamp). Considering the history of the image of the sun,

which has been used as a metaphor for the figure of the ruler since ancient times (Telesko, *Erlösermythen* 43-44), these works compare the relationship between the king and the aristocracy to that of the sun and the planets: “Princes and great men are about a king like goodly stars, which receive all their light from him, but it is all confounded in this great light” (Faret, *Honest Man* 3).⁸ In his *comédie-ballet*, *Les amants magnifiques* (1670), Molière writes this kind of self-understanding for the role of the King, who appeared as an actor himself between 1651 and 1670, both in this play and in numerous other *comédies-ballet* and *ballets de cours* at court (Quaeitzsch 87):

Verses for the KING representing Apollo.
/ I am the source of brilliant Light, / And
not the proudest Star / That circles around
my Car, / Without my bounteous Rays is
bright. / Seated on my resplendent Throne,
/ Nature entire I see / Big with desire of me
/ Due to my Light it's Blessings own. (Molière, *Magnificent Lovers* 182, 184)⁹

From an aristocratic perspective, however, the radiant past, or the glory of one's ancestors, was the source of one's political legitimacy – “The Splendor of his Family” (Molière, *Man-Hater* 17),¹⁰ or “illustrious Blood” (“éclat du sang”) (Molière, *Psyche* 221).¹¹ Molière also demonstrates this idea of genealogy in his play *Don Juan* (1665): Dom Juan's father criticizes his son's scandalous behaviour by referring to the glorious deeds of his forefathers, arguing that their *éclat* represents an obligation to their descendants. In this case, however, “on the contrary, their Lustre reflects upon you only in your Dishonour, and their Glory is a Torch which shews the Infamy of your Actions in the most glaring Light to the Eyes of the whole World” (Molière, *Don John* 339, 341).¹² Here, not only can *éclat* be traced back to the heroic deed as a quality of aristocracy, Molière also plays upon the dimension of light in the context of a revelation or an enlightenment by stating that the glory of his forefathers is a torch that reveals the truth – the truth about the morally reprehensible and anti-heroic behaviour of Dom Juan.

The transformation of models of the heroic

The portrait of the ideal type generated by the quotes above, which imply that the essence of heroes is nothing more than the brilliance we can

see on their faces due to their glorious deeds, is sometimes revealed as a phantasm. The hero's radiant appearance (see Vogel/Wild) thus proposes several questions regarding the real and fictitious elements of heroic representations or self-presentation, questions regarding the deception of others, self-deception and doubts, all of which often form the driving force of different heroic narratives.

The ‘demolition’ of the hero?

This particular image of the hero underwent a revision as part of the political and/or socio-cultural developments of the seventeenth century (however, I will not go into the details of this here). Moralists such as Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and La Bruyère focused on the wonderful radiance of heroes, the “*éclat prodigieux*” (La Bruyère, *Caractères* 97), or “prodigious brilliancy” (46), as La Bruyère calls it in his 1688 work *Les Caractères ou Les mœurs de ce siècle*. These heroes are like the stars; we know very little about their origins and their future, they have no ancestors and no descendants and are content with their own company: “These men have neither ancestors nor posterity; they alone are their whole race” (46).¹³ La Rochefoucauld attempted to penetrate the brilliant surface of heroic allure in his *Maximes et réflexions morales* (1664) by examining the actions of the self-absorbed hero for hidden motives or emotions, such as self-interest. In this work, great and brilliant heroic deeds that fascinate the audience are often not the result of a superior plan. Rather, the hero is driven by either whims and passions, or by pure vanity: “Great and brilliant deeds that dazzle the onlooker are depicted by strategists as the result of great plans, whereas they are usually the result of temperament and passion” (La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims* 5)¹⁴ and “Apart from the greatness of their vanity, heroes are made like other men” (11).¹⁵ Here, La Rochefoucauld condenses concepts of heroism into maxims that demonstrate the fundamental ambivalence of the heroic, the radiance of which could even make a crime appear justified: “There are crimes that become innocent, and even glorious, because of their brilliance, number, and enormity” (173),¹⁶ and “There are heroes in evil, just as they are in good” (53).¹⁷ These transformations in the evaluation of the heroic during the seventeenth century have been dubbed “*la démolition du héros*” (the demolition of the hero).¹⁸

From hero to *grand homme*

In the eighteenth century, ideas of the Enlightenment, rather than moralistic or religious notions, led to a critique of aristocratic military heroism (for more on the transformations of the heroic, see Ritter 2004; Menant 2007; Menant/Morrissey 2010). New ideas of the heroic evolved, such as the concept of the *grand homme* (great man) (see Bonnet, *Culte des grands hommes* and *Naissance du Panthéon*; Gaetgens). There was talk of a cult of great men without sceptre and sword (Menant 441). They appeared among others in Voltaire's fresco featuring *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and became institutionalized by the Académie Française through a system of annual eulogies to the nation's famous men from 1759 to 1765. "Achievements in the areas of science and art that had merit, or were important and useful for society, became a criterion for heroization (Bell 715) and characterized the *grand homme*. According to Rousseau, the *grand homme* or 'true hero' surpassed the traditional hero – who Voltaire had described as a scavenger (Voltaire, *Correspondance* 554-555)

– in that the true hero no longer stands above the people, but rather stands on the same level as them. As Montesquieu writes in his *Pensées* (1726/1727–1755): "to do big things, [...] one must not be above men, one must be with them" (*My Thoughts* 294).¹⁹

All of this resulted in the differentiation and problematization of types of heroes – for example, in Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre's *Discours sur les différences du grand homme et de l'homme illustre* (1739). This differentiation and problematization was accelerated and amplified during the French Revolution, despite the remilitarization of the concept of the hero during this time (see Vovelle). The acceleration of these differentiation processes can be traced in the chequered history of the integration of various revolutionary heroes and great men into the Pantheon (along with their successive 'depantheonization'), where France has been honouring its outstanding sons and daughters since 1791 (see Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon*; see [fig. 1](#)). By referring primarily to ancient contexts and by elevating concepts like patriotism (Rousseau believes "that all patriotic virtues should be



Fig. 1: *Aux Grands Hommes*. Le Panthéon, Paris (Freepenguin, Wikimedia).

glorified” [(“qu’)on donnât de l’éclat à toutes les vertus patriotiques”] [*Political Writings* 170]²⁰), heroism was intended to be understood as a human quality, and no longer as an attribute of an estate. This was especially true for *philosophes*, writers, journalists and other representatives of the evolving *République des Lettres*, who promoted the concept of the *grand homme* in works and speeches, as well as in a comprehensive programme of pictures and sculptures (see Pigéaud/Barbe; Gaehtgens). One reason for intellectuals to partake in this process was their interest in augmenting their own role in society (for more on the *République des Lettres* see Goodman; Gordon). For this purpose, they did not hesitate to use key concepts like *éclat* or *gloire* or to borrow methods of (self-)heroization from contemporary systems of heroes that they otherwise vigorously criticized. As Claude-Adrien Helvétius writes in *De l’Esprit*,

If the military art is the most useful of them all, why have there been so many generals whose glory is more eclipsed in their life-time, and so many illustrious men of all kinds, whose memory and exploits are buried in the same tomb, when the glory of the authors and their contemporaries is still preserved in its first state [“conserve encore son premier éclat”]? (Helvétius, *Essays* 98)²¹

Some authors compare the situation of earlier times with the situation of their own day and age. For example, Voltaire believed that if the radiance of glory could conceal certain cruelties in the past, it was now tainted by such cruelties: “In the former ages cruelties of this kind were hidden in the blaze of success [“l’éclat de la gloire”], but now they sully the glory of a conqueror” (*Russian Empire* 176).²² There are further examples of satirical approaches to traditional ideas of heroes and key concepts, such as the *éclat*. One such example is Voltaire’s novella *Candide*, in which a battle is described as a “boucherie héroïque” (*Romans et contes* 150), or a “heroic carnage” (*Candide* 20). These are accompanied by ironical approaches, for example, in libertine novels, such as Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons dangereuses* from 1782, where the seduction of the innocent Cécile de Volanges is referred to as a heroic adventure, or “digne d’un Héros” (Laclos 2011, 18) (“worthy of a hero”, Laclos 1961, 25). These and other literary methods, like the parody of ‘heroic’ literary genres such as the ode (see Menant/Quéro), not only document the historical and cultural contingency of traditional notions of the heroic, they have also made an

essential contribution to the emergence and further development of literary genres over the centuries (Menant 439). This is especially true for the genre of the novel, which developed rapidly in the eighteenth century. ‘Novelesque’ heroism increasingly complemented or replaced ‘tragic’ heroism, and the novel’s protagonist became successively interchangeable with the novel’s ‘hero’ (436). This empirically defined portrayal of a multitude of human lives beyond the traditional norms of behaviour and model-like biographies accelerated the rethinking of traditional images of the hero.

As a result of this acceleration of differentiation, the public engaged in discussions about which concepts of the heroic were suitable for a new kind of society. What is remarkable is that these processes of heroization were now located on different levels, featuring different agents, such as individuals, groups (for example *Les vainqueurs de la Bastille*) and the ‘people’ as a collective subject, and even the revolution as a historical process *sui generis*. Against the backdrop of the radical historical changes during this time and due to its performative character and appeal, the concept of the *éclat* was therefore also used as a category in the philosophy of history, expressing a historical dynamic that determined individual and collective action in light of the heroic.

The term *éclat* therefore became gradually separated from the traditional and defining socio-cultural and historical key concepts of specific heroisms and underwent a re-contextualization. This explains the transition from the aforementioned relevant categories of aristocratic heroism in the seventeenth century – *gloire*, *générosité*, *magnanimité*, as well as the religious connotation of the term *éclat* – to concepts of an *éclat de la raison* in the eighteenth century and an *éclat de la liberté* in the nineteenth century. The particularities of the semantic transformations of *éclat* are evident in the term’s transition from an expression of older, asymmetrical public structures, and thus instruments of absolutist propaganda, to a representation of a communicative dynamic in a (post)revolutionary, modern public, characterized for example by scandals in which the hero falls and new heroizations occur.

The return of the hero

The contextual shift in the use of *éclat* visibly signalled historical changes and, especially after the French Revolution, raised the question of the social role the aristocracy, as the heroic estate *par*

excellence, could play in a society governed by postulations of equality. On the other hand, the continuity of revolutionary heroism was equally virulent, due to the restorative tendencies of society in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Various works of literature in the first half of the nineteenth century would comprise what could be called the 'return of the hero' narrative, through which writers were able to revise the existing images of heroes, while also experimenting with new ones. Campbell referred to the hero's return as one of the essential stages in the life of a hero, alongside the 'departure' and 'initiation'. However, these works no longer described the social benefits of the extraordinary abilities and powers acquired by heroes during their adventures. Rather, the return of the hero from the battlefield and the attempt to reintegrate them into society acted, for the most part, as a trigger for nostalgic reminiscing about the glorious past. Especially in light of the defeat at Waterloo, which marked the end of the Napoleonic era and which was often addressed in nineteenth century literature, this trope was used as a symbol of the end of a heroic age (see Descotes). This perception characterizes many works of French Romanticism and the beginning of Realism, including Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830) and *Lucien Leuwen* (1834), Victor Hugo's *Les chants du crépuscule* (1835), Alfred de Vigny's *Servitude et grandeur militaire* (1835) and, especially, Alfred de Musset's *La confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836). The protagonist of this last book represents a generation that, according to the novel, was born between two battles, born in and for the war and now mourns the heroic life that is no longer obtainable: "Never had there been suns as unalloyed as those which dried up all the blood. People said that God had made them for that man and called them Suns of Austerlitz" (*Child of the Century* ch. 2).²³ This led to the (romantic) and proverbial "maladie du siècle" ("sickness of the present century").

But what happened to the heroes of the Napoleonic campaigns, the ones who survived and returned to French society, worrying about their social recognition after the final downfall and exile of Napoleon during political restoration (see Mascilli Migliorini)? A number of works explored this question in unexpected, poignant ways. Stendhal begins his novel *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839) with the heroic narrative of Napoleon's troops' glorious crossing of the Alps and the 'liberation' of Italy: "On the 15th of May, 1796, General Bonaparte marched into the city of Milan, at the head of the youthful army which had just crossed the Bridge of Lodi, and taught the

world that, after the lapse of centuries, Caesar and Alexander had found a successor at last" (Charterhouse 1).²⁴ The novel goes on to depict how, after the statues of Charles V and Philipp II are toppled, the people who had lived in the darkness of absolutism become illuminated by light; Stendhal thereby suggests that the censorship of the church is no match for the *éclat* of the *Encyclopédie* and Voltaire. Later in the novel, "La masse de bonheur et de plaisir" (*Œuvres* 145), the "volume of happiness and pleasure" (Charterhouse 3), that flows into the country with the French troops shows the Italian people that happiness also means patriotism and the striving for heroic deeds. However, even after the young protagonist Fabrice del Dongo, who wants to serve under Napoleon, has made his way alone to the battlefield at Waterloo, has seen combat and experienced it as a sequence of individual, seemingly disconnected skirmishes, and has fled with the scattered French army, he does not know whether he has actually participated in a real battle. His dream of heroism falls apart, just as Stendhal's innovative, highly fragmented 'realistic' description of the battle deconstructs it as a place where heroes can prove themselves.

In *Le colonel Chabert* (1844), Balzac's narrative of the unexpected and miraculous return of a presumably dead hero of the Napoleonic army is more radical and more pessimistic. The essentially impossible return of the hero from the dead (impossible also because the death of a hero is one of the conditions for their heroization by society) enables the hero to observe, in a way, what effect their ascribed glory has on posterity. That the sudden appearance of the hero presumed dead is regarded as a disturbance – even his wife, who has remarried and risen in society, denies who he is – and that he is considered a threat to society is the force that drives the plot of the novel. At the same time, the return of the hero indicates that a certain model of heroism has become obsolete. It is not by chance that, when Colonel Chabert tells his story to a lawyer at the beginning of the novel and asks the lawyer to represent him in court to defend his identity as person and hero, he describes his heroic death by referring to its mention in a military history book on the Napoleonic wars, *Victoires et Conquêtes*. Although this book is the basis of his heroic fame, it is this very book that, at the same time, prevents him from living as a hero after rising from a mass grave on the battlefield of Eylau: "I've been buried beneath the dead, but now I'm buried beneath the living; beneath certificates, facts – the whole society would rather have me buried underground!" (Balzac, *Colonel Chabert* 26-27).²⁵ The hero's

éclat thus defines the beginning of Balzac's novel, at least indirectly, through this reference to a history book on Napoleon's victories and conquests that lists Colonel Chabert's heroic deed, as well as through Chabert's own vivid and mesmerizing account that transfixes the lawyer. However, Balzac arranges the entire plot of the novel around the *éclat* in an even more fundamental way by creating semantic tension between its different elements of meaning: 'radiance', 'splendour' or 'charisma' on the one hand, and 'splinter' or 'shard' on the other. As a result, Balzac suspends the affirmative use of *éclat* as an expression of the presence of the heroic in society. The Colonel is described as the following: "The passerby, only to see him, would have recognized at once one of the noble wrecks of our old army, one of the heroic men on whom our national glory is reflected, as a splinter of ice on which the sun shines seems to reflect every beam" (*Colonel Chabert*).²⁶ This comparison of the Colonel's brilliant appearance with the *éclat* of a shining mirror (rather than with the *éclat* of a "splinter of ice", as *glace* has been translated into English here) is diminished when Balzac also describes him as a national hero and representative of a perished *grande armée*. The reference to him as a "beaux débris", one of the "noble wrecks", is a rather contradictory oxymoron; as the word *débris* also means 'shard', *éclat de glace* can be logically interpreted not as a mirror, but as a shard of glass that captures and reflects the sunlight. The ambivalence of this image is remarkable because Balzac thus portrays the old radiance of Colonel Chabert and the Napoleonic era he represents as broken and damaged, as well as a visible object of nostalgic idealization. Furthermore, the reference to the "passerby" means that the focus shifts from an audience who recognizes the hero in a traditional heroic context, to the uninvolved observers of an urban environment. Balzac is thus anticipating a structural feature of modern society: anonymity and heterogeneity make a common identification with a heroic leading figure much more difficult.

Because Chabert's painful experience is shared by an entire generation, it plays a role in many other works from this time. Jules Sandeau's novel *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* (1847), for example, concerns a soldier who allegedly died in the battle of Moscow and returns as a revenant. His miraculous and brilliant appearance – "the military stamp on his look" ("le belliqueux éclat de son front") (Sandeau 1902, 166)²⁷ – is the driving force behind this plot full of conflicts. The story ends with the death of this hero of Napoleon's army and, at the same time, with the certainty that the restored and artificial

radiance of the aristocracy will not prevail in the age of democracy: "under the fictitious brilliance that has just been restored to him, she already has the melancholy air of a star which is becoming pale and declining" (204).²⁸ In order to survive, the aristocracy must coalesce with the new bourgeoisie, as if – as written in the text – it were a rare melted metal, forced to alloy to harden itself.

Chateaubriand's autobiographical *Memoires d'outre-tombe* (1848–1850), on the other hand, ultimately elevates these reflections on the death and miraculous resurrection of the hero to a metatextual level. In this work, Chateaubriand makes the lucid remark that he had been admitted to the Order of Malta at the exact time the National Assembly abolished noble privileges. Despite his intermittent engagement in the *Armée des émigrés*, he knew the ideas about aristocratic heroism that he had grown up with were changing. Therefore, Chateaubriand's works are dominated by the question of what possibilities exist – new and old – to present oneself as an exceptional figure. As a result, Chateaubriand's works are preoccupied by the fact that he ranks among the great literary figures, diplomats and politicians of the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as the fact that he was one of the founding figures of French Romanticism. Chateaubriand is self-confident enough to present Napoleon as not just a contextual factor in his own biography, but also as a leading light who must be surpassed and who can and must be used as a benchmark for his own success in life (see Marquart).

The points of departure for Chateaubriand and Napoleon could not have been more different, however, as can be seen in Chateaubriand's comparison of his depression during his exile in London with the "élévations et l'éclat de Napoléon" ("Napoleon's height and radiance", Chateaubriand 739-740). The use of metaphors to characterize Napoleon as radiance and light runs as a leitmotif through *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* and corresponds in an astonishingly similar way with how Napoleon presented himself in public (see Telesko, *Napoleon Bonaparte*). This characterization can be seen, for example, in the description of Napoleon's Egyptian campaign (see [fig. 2](#)): "Bonaparte turned to the East, in a double sense befitting his nature through despotism and radiance" ("par le despotisme et l'éclat") (Chateaubriand 694).²⁹ This formulation, which echoes the public praise of Napoleon as the rising sun, as *Oriens Augusti*, also recalls the description of Moscow in flames after the French army had taken the city. Napoleon not only threatens Chateaubriand's life as a royalist,



Fig. 2: Antoine-Jean Gros. *La bataille des Pyramides*. 1810 (oil on canvas, 389 x 505 cm), Château de Versailles (Wikimedia/Public domain; Achim55).

Napoleon's radiance also threatens to overshadow Chateaubriand's literary project: "The previous book was written under Bonaparte's expiring tyranny and by the light of the last sparks of his glory" (75).³⁰

Chateaubriand thus worked against Napoleon's omnipresent heroization in contemporary French society by heroizing himself and his own work. This required the heroic field of reference to shift to the literary field – an area where Chateaubriand could be dominant, just as Napoleon was on the battlefield. Chateaubriand was not the only author to focus on the parallelism of military and literary glory, to refer to Napoleon or even to use the (retrospective) mythologization of military heroism. It was quite common among the generation of writers active around 1830 to express their reaction to the *ennui* – the boredom and tedium of the 'prosaic' situation during the July Monarchy – in this way. For example, Stendhal, who admitted in 1804 to having an outright thirst for glory ("passion excessive pour la gloire" [Boussard 171]) that he shared with Fabrice, the protagonist of his novel *La chartreuse de Parme* (1839), had also taken

part in Napoleon's campaigns. In his novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), Stendhal criticizes the hypocrisy of the bourgeois society that believes freedom arises from the striving for material possessions by presenting the older, heroic military virtue and glory as the measure of social ambition and advancement of Europe (Crozet 370). For his monumental novel cycle, the *Comédie humaine* (1829–1850), Balzac claims that he strove to complete with the pen what Napoleon did not achieve with the sword (Garval 84).

Chateaubriand, in his autobiographical *Mémoires d'outretombe*, gives a detailed description of Napoleon's tomb on St. Helena – the starting point of the emperor's heroization and sacralization in public consciousness – and juxtaposes it with his 'memoirs from beyond the grave' as the central site of his own heroization. As a result, the text itself becomes a literary monument, a kind of tomb. The memoirs form an apparatus through which the return (of the voice) of a seemingly dead hero can be presented; in this way, allowing the heroized and sacralized author to achieve what Chabert, as a kind of revenant, could not in Balzac's book. Namely, the

ability to dictate to posterity as a voice from the next world, as a ‘posthumous’ narrative voice, the desired representation of one’s own life as a heroic narrative. In these latter works, the paradoxes revealed in the presentation of the narrative agency, treatment of time and processes of heroization represent a complex literary reaction to the crisis of heroism in a post-revolutionary age.

Nonetheless, although these attempts were typical for this time, Balzac had already problematized the idea of the heroism of the artist in his novel *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843), by juxtaposing the life of a writer with that of a journalist. He thereby also criticises the notion that had been popular from Romanticism to Hugo of an independent intellectual aristocracy that should be able to take over the role of a preceptor in society. Flaubert did not hold back with his criticisms of the bourgeoisie in his novels, especially in *Éducation sentimentale* (1869). However, he simultaneously deheroizes the people singing the Marseillaise during the Revolution of 1848 when he writes about the storming of the king’s palace: “Heroes don’t smell very nice!” (*Sentimental Education* 313).³¹ His attempt to formulate a literary project focusing on the aesthetic ethos of *impassibilité*, *impersonnalité* and *impartialité* in order to imply both heroic and a-heroic ideas at the same time reveals a new way of talking about the further development of the heroic (and artistic) self-understanding of modernity. Baudelaire’s remarks in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863) on modern art and the dandy as the founder of a new aristocracy, and as the symbol for a time of transition between aristocracy and democracy, point in a similar direction: “Dandyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages [“le dernier éclat d’héroïsme dans les décadences”] [...] Dandyism is a setting sun; like the declining star, it is magnificent, without heat and full of melancholy” (Baudelaire, *Painter* 421–422).³² Here, the dandy is the embodiment of the hero and artist merged into one figure. The dandy merges art and life; he presents himself as a hero to a society that is indifferent to the artist, art, and art’s ideals – and thus anything extraordinary – and he unites art with social action. The figure of the dandy is therefore not about a so-called ‘aesthetic heroism’ or, as Nikolas Immer put it, the “shifting of the heroic from social and political reality to aesthetic experiential spaces” that, according to Immer, has been so decisive for the history of heroism since bourgeois modernity (Immer/van Marwyck 12). Rather, it is more about a development that spans from Baudelaire to the avant-garde movements of the turn of the twentieth century – movements with socially

subversive aesthetic programmes in which the abolition of art and its translation into practical life was always an option.

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1 In French, *éclat* originally means ‘splinter’ as well as ‘noise’, ‘bang’, ‘radiance’ and ‘charisma’. Since the seventeenth century, it can mean ‘splendour’, ‘sensation’ or ‘scandal’. Some of these rather heterogeneous meanings have emerged in the history of the term of *éclat* in the heroic context and can be regarded as an indicator of the ambiguities and historical changes in certain ideas about heroes.

2 “L’héroïsme est révélation, cette brillance merveilleuse de l’acte qui unit l’essence et l’apparence. L’héroïsme est la souveraineté lumineuse de l’acte. Seul l’acte est héroïque, et le héros n’est rien s’il n’agit et n’est rien hors de la clarté de l’acte qui éclaire et l’éclaire” (Blanchot, *Héros* 104).

3 “L’éclat de mes hauts faits fut mon seul partisan” (Corneille, *Œuvres* 716).

4 “Je demande sa mort, mais non pas glorieuse, / Non pas dans un éclat qui l’élève si haut, / Non pas au lit d’honneur, mais sur un échafaud” (*Œuvres* 761). For more on the notion of *gloire* in Corneille, see Kablitz; for more on the affect logic of classicist theatre, see Willis, *Emotions and Affect*.

5 “Et que dans quelque éclat que Rodrigue ait vécu” (Corneille, *Œuvres* 766).

6 “l’héroïsme diffère de la simple grandeur d’âme, en ce qu’il suppose des vertus d’éclat, qui excitent l’étonnement et l’admiration” (Anonymous 181).

7 “La magnificence et la galanterie n’ont jamais paru en France avec tant d’éclat, que dans les dernières années du règne de Henri second. Ce Prince était galant, bien fait et amoureux; quoique sa passion pour Diane de Poitiers, duchesse de Valentinois, eût commencé il y avait plus de vingt ans, elle n’en était pas moins violente, et il n’en donnait pas des témoignages moins éclatants” (Lafayette, *Œuvres* 331).

8 “Les Princes et les Grands sont autour du Roy comme de beaux Astres, qui reçoivent de luy toute leur splendeur, mais qui confondent tout leur éclat dans cette grande lumière” (Faret, *Honneste homme* 7).

9 “Pour le ROI, Représentant le SOLEIL / Je suis la source des Clartés, / Et les Astres les plus vantés / Dont le beau Cercle m’environne, / Ne sont brillants et respectés / Que par l’éclat que je leur donne. / Du Char où je me puis asseoir / Je vois le désir de me voir / Posséder la Nature entière, / Et le Monde n’a son espoir / Qu’aux seuls bienfaits de ma lumière.” (Molière, *Œuvres* vol. 1, 994–995.)

10 “l’éclat de sa Race” (650).

11 “[l]’éclat du sang” (Molière, *Œuvres* vol. 2, 439).

12 “au contraire, l’éclat n’en rejailit sur nous qu’à notre déshonneur, et leur gloire est un flambeau qui éclaire aux yeux d’un chacun la honte de vos actions” (Molière, *Œuvres* vol. 1, 889).

- 13 "ils n'ont ni aieuls, ni descendants: ils composent seuls toute leur race" (La Bruyère, *Caractères* 97).
- 14 "Ces grandes et éclatantes actions qui éblouissent les yeux sont représentées par les politiques comme les effets des grands desseins, au lieu que ce sont d'ordinaire les effets de l'humeur et des passions" (La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes* 8).
- 15 "qu'à une grande vanité près, les héros sont faits comme les autres hommes" (12).
- 16 "Il y a des crimes qui deviennent innocents et même glorieux, par leur éclat, leur nombre et leur excès" (150).
- 17 "Il y a des héros en mal comme en bien" (47).
- 18 For a critical discussion of this thesis, see Willis, *Glanz und Blendung*.
- 19 "Pour faire de grandes choses, [...] il ne faut pas être au-dessus des hommes; il faut être avec eux" (Montesquieu, *Pensées* 391).
- 20 "[qu]on donnat de l'éclat à toutes les vertus patriotiques" (Rousseau, *Œuvres* vol. 3, 962).
- 21 "Si l'art militaire, de tous les arts, est le plus utile, pourquoi tant de Généraux, dont la gloire éclipsait, de leur vivant, celle de tous les hommes illustres en d'autres genres, ont-ils été, eux, leur mémoire et leurs exploits, ensevelis dans la même tombe, lorsque la gloire des Auteurs leurs contemporains conserve encore son premier éclat?" (Helvétius, *De l'esprit* 123).
- 22 "Autrefois l'éclat de la gloire couvrait de telles cruautés, aujourd'hui elles la ternissent" (Voltaire, *Empire de Russie* 457).
- 23 "jamais il n'y eut de soleils si purs que ceux qui séchèrent tout ce sang. On disait que Dieu les faisait pour cet homme, et on les appelait ses soleils d'Austerlitz" (De Vigny, *Enfant du Siècle* 10).
- 24 "Le 15 mai 1796, le général Bonaparte fit son entrée dans Milan à la tête de cette jeune armée qui venait de passer le pont de Lodi, et d'apprendre au monde qu'après tant de siècles César et Alexandre avaient un successeur" (Stendhal, *Œuvres* 143).
- 25 "J'ai été enterré sous des morts, mais maintenant je suis enterré sous des vivants, sous des actes, sous des faits, sous la société tout entière, qui veut me faire rentrer sous terre!" (Balzac, *Colonel Chabert* 328).
- 26 "À le voir, les passants eussent facilement reconnu en lui l'un de ces beaux débris de notre ancienne armée, un de ces hommes héroïques sur lesquels se reflète notre gloire nationale, et qui la représentent comme un éclat de glace illuminé par le soleil semble en réfléchir tous les rayons" (ibid., emphasis AG).
- 27 "le belliqueux éclat de son front" (Sandeau 1887, 175).
- 28 "sous le factice éclat qu'on vient de lui rendre, elle a déjà la mélancolie d'un astre qui pâlit et décline" (217).
- 29 "Bonaparte se tourna vers l'Orient, doublement congénial à sa nature par le despotisme et l'éclat" (Chateaubriand 694).
- 30 "Le livre précédent fut écrit sous la tyrannie expirante de Bonaparte et à la lueur des derniers éclairs de sa gloire" (75).
- 31 "Les héros ne sentent pas bon!" (Flaubert, *Éducation sentimentale* 320).
- 32 "Le dandysme est le dernier éclat d'héroïsme dans les décadences [...] Le dandysme est un soleil couchant; comme l'astre qui décline, il est superbe, sans chaleur et plein de mélancolie" (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 711-712).

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Ronald G. Asch

The Hero in the Eighteenth Century – Critique and Transformation

The eighteenth century is generally considered a period of deep crisis for the classical hero. A look at France in particular offers strong arguments for the validity of such an interpretation. While Louis XV was initially able to enjoy a number of victories in the War of the Austrian Succession that made it possible for him to portray himself as a military hero, his and France's fortunes turned during the Seven Years' War. The heroic charisma of the monarch suffered enduring damage. However, long before this time the enlightenment had already started to call into question the dominant position of the noble or royal hero. In 1739 the Abbé de Saint Pierre had noted a distinction between the mere *hommes illustres* and the *grands hommes*; the latter were those who had not only attained personal glory, but had been of service to humanity, or at least to their country. Such a view did not entirely abandon the veneration of military heroes of the past, but it did subject them to a fundamental critique and simultaneously introduced new intellectual heroes – the scientist or the philosopher – alongside the traditional ones.¹

We will return to this crisis of the hero in enlightenment France in more detail later. First, however, we turn our gaze to England. Here a plurality of images and models of the heroic had existed at least since the Civil War. It is hardly possible to imagine a greater contrast than that between Cromwell – a warrior fighting in a holy war – and the royal martyr Charles I. This polarization of heroic models continued after 1660. On one side there was the memory of the heroes of the 'Good Old Cause', although by the end of

the seventeenth century this was increasingly re-interpreted by partially secularizing the political, as also happened with the veneration of the Whig martyrs of the year 1683 (see Asch 105). On the other side, the Tories for a long time only had the memory of Charles I to offer as a counter-image, and he, as a martyr and saint of the Anglican Church (or at least its conservative wing) did not really fit the classical image of the hero. Neither of the Stuart kings were a victorious *roi connétable* (warrior king) whose triumphs could be celebrated, although James II had had a military career before his accession to the throne (cf. Callow, *Making of King James* 214-237). But when confronted by his son-in-law's approaching army in 1688, he did not hesitate to flee; in exile he could be portrayed as a martyr who had shown heroic strength of spirit in his suffering, but hardly as a military hero (cf. Callow, *King in Exile* 302-339). This role was reserved for the man who had ousted him: William III. As a foreigner who never completely severed his ties to his homeland, the Netherlands, he was greeted in England with a strong dose of mistrust. Thus it was all the more important for him to legitimate his rule through a self-image that was acceptable to as many of his subjects as possible. A prominent place in this portrayal was given to the heroic battle against the French universal monarchy in which William III participated as a soldier and military commander. This heroization of the king as a fighter against tyranny also drew on the veneration of Elizabeth I, who had successfully defended the country from the Spanish (Sharpe 416-417). The new monarch also used Biblical models such as King Josiah, who had fought against idol worship in Judah and who in the past had already been seen as a prefiguration of English monarchs such as Edward VI or Elizabeth I who had fought against Rome to preserve the true Protestant faith (Claydon 62). However, William III had to be careful not to focus too much on the role of the heroic fighter against Rome and the Papacy, for he was dependent on Catholic allies abroad, in particular the House of Habsburg. In addition,

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in his homeland he pursued a policy of tolerance towards his Catholic subjects and his army included many Catholic soldiers (on the king's politics, see Troost). While preachers in England may have emphasized that the Prince of Orange was a pious ruler and a sworn enemy of all forms of idolatry, the official image of William III was dominated by other models of the heroic. Hercules was one such important figure, although in the Netherlands even this identification was employed with some caution. The park of Het Loo Palace included a Hercules sculpture, but it portrayed the hero as a small child strangling the snakes sent to kill him (Mörke 355; Baxter).² Another key aspect of the portrayal of the heroic military deeds of the Stadtholder and king was that he was shown as serving some higher cause rather than seeking glory for himself and his dynasty. In this respect the heroization of the Prince of Orange drew more strongly on the panegyrics that had been applied to Cromwell in the 1650s than on purely monarchic traditions (Rose 22-24; cf. Sharpe 420-421), although of course the republican traditions of the Netherlands also played an important role. William III was, like William the Silent before him, a heroic defender of freedom and a warrior chosen by God himself to defend the gospel; he was also a true patriot and father of the fatherland, but, unlike Louis XIV, not a semi-divine figure standing unreachably high above all other people, including the nobles who served him (Mörke 352-357). Furthermore – as has been claimed with some plausibility – it was probably easier for the English and British subjects of William III to accept him as a heroic warrior than as their king. After all, his wife Mary, a Stuart, had more of a claim to the throne by birth right than the Prince of Orange, who was seen as a foreigner all his life (Baxter 102).³

By contrast, it was much easier for William's successor, Anne, who was the sister of Mary and daughter of James II, to legitimate her rule dynastically. However, as a woman, Anne could not lead her army into battle herself. This role was filled principally by the Duke of Marlborough, who was celebrated as a general to a degree previously unheard of for any other military commander, and was portrayed as a military hero nearly on a par with the monarch. His residence, Blenheim Castle, resembled a royal palace more than the country estate of a noble military commander.⁴ But Marlborough was not uncontroversial as a military hero. While his supporters saw him as a Caesar or Cato, his opponents from the Tory camp identified him with Sulla, one of the destroyers of the Roman Republic.⁵ In the case of Queen Anne, the sacred attributes of queenship were given prominence, in contrast

to William III, where sacrality scarcely played a significant role.

However, Marlborough was not the only one to be celebrated as a soldier-hero during the rule of Queen Anne. For a long time, England did not have any substantial standing army, and officers and soldiers were accordingly not figures who enjoyed much public esteem. But now they saw an overall improvement in their image. Numerous theatre pieces took as their protagonist the patriotic gentleman-hero, who represented a form of manliness tamed by decorum and self-discipline. After 1660 career officers were often portrayed as socially problematic figures with an inclination for sexual and other excesses, much like the rakes of Restoration comedy; however, as England became increasingly involved in military conflicts in continental Europe, the reputation of the military improved apace (see Smith, *Politics, Patriotism and Gender*, esp. 73). Richard Steele's 1701 tract *The Christian Hero*, which was reprinted multiple times in the course of the eighteenth century, also made an important contribution to the moralization of the military hero. Later, as editors and contributors to the *Tatler* and other journals, Steele and his collaborator Joseph Addison developed the project of a far-reaching 'reformation of manners'. The aim of this was to replace the courtly behavioural norms with their tendency towards dissimulation and demonstrative assertion of one's own superiority and in their place introduce a new canon of urbane manners adapted to the emerging commercial society of the eighteenth century in which the differences between the social strata of the urban ruling class and the aristocracy were becoming less prominent.⁶ There was still a place for the military hero in this new vision of society, but only on the condition that his striving for glory and honour was combined with the ability to exert self-control and interact with other people in an unforced, natural manner. Soldiers were not exempt from expectation to master the art of conversation and adhere to the conventions of the coffee house and salon. Later, around the mid-eighteenth century, David Hume would emphasize that such a process of civilizing refinement was in no way incompatible with a 'martial spirit' – provided the elites continued to preserve a strong sense of honour, as was the case in France and England, but not in Italy, where war was being left in the hands of mercenaries and soldiers of fortune (Hume 274-275). The debates about politeness and a new form of urban manliness brought about deep and lasting changes in the attitudes towards heroic ideals in England. As Philip Carter writes,

[t]he net result was a superior form of courage which, though still partly configured in terms of industry, vigour and warriorship, now also required a generosity, eloquence and refinement only attainable by active participation in a modern environment of commercial exchange and polite sociability. (Carter 76)

To be sure, debates like those in England also took place in France to a certain degree. La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, written after the failure of the Fronde, turn away from the ostentatious pursuit of glory and the *éclat* of the heroic deed visible for all to see. The *honnête homme* with his greatness of soul is still portrayed with certain heroic features, but his actions are for their own sake and he is no longer concerned with compelling the admiration of a wide audience, for by doing so the *honnête homme* would make himself dependent on his audience. Other theorists of *honnêteté* and the polite codes of behaviour developed in the salons included the Chevalier de Méré (d. 1684), who went even further and aestheticized the ideal of heroic greatness, even while subordinating it to the man of quality's goal of gaining recognition among members of good society through his courteous and charming manners (Chariatte, *Transfigurations*, esp. 39-44; cf. *ibid.*, *La Rochefoucauld* 152-158). There were, then, indeed certain parallels with the debates dominating public discourse in England in the early eighteenth century, and in fact the discussions in France had some influence on the developments in England. In addition, the penchant for resolving personal and even political differences by a resort to arms, namely in the form of a public duel, declined significantly in the late seventeenth century. This is not to say that the duel – which continued to be practiced in England as well – died out entirely, but rather that it was carried out more discreetly, and generally no longer involved a fight between the representatives of feuding alliances of noble families, but only between two individuals and often concerned more banal matters like erotic rivalries.⁷ One difference between France and England, however, was that *honnêteté* – unlike the English politeness – took its point of reference either from the court or from Parisian salon society where the courtly aristocracy met with other groups of nobles. There was no real equivalent in Paris to the commercial society of eighteenth-century London that had completely emancipated itself from the court (see Marraud). Second, in social interactions in France there was a perceptible rivalry between the military elite, the *noblesse d'épée*, and the *noblesse de*

robe, the nobility whose identity centred on the possession of administrative offices and judicial training. While the boundaries between these two groups had undoubtedly become much less distinct than a hundred years previously, they still existed, and courtly etiquette and its hierarchy caused these differences to come to the fore again and again.⁸ What distinguished the 'nobles of the sword' from the 'nobles of the robe' who served the state was the fact that their life course was a potentially heroic one, regardless of whether or not one had actually taken part in battles as an officer. This was precisely what attracted the sons of administrative nobles to switch to a military career and integrate themselves into the *noblesse d'épée*. This was not impossible, but required breaking with the past of one's own family to some degree and sometimes even rewriting the family history; above all, it required a willingness to renounce one's own previous social identity (Haddad) – an attitude that was not necessarily unusual among the sons of the magistrates of the *parlement*. Melchior Grimm, an observer of Parisian society in 1760, wrote about the young magistrate that

he talks about horses, spectacles, sexual adventures, the races, battles, he is ashamed of being competent in his own profession. (Mercier 95)⁹

Problems of this sort did not exist in England. To be sure, English society of the eighteenth century was also aristocratic and it was difficult to ascend into the highest ranks of the ruling class of landowners, who set the agenda in Parliament and out of whose numbers most ministers and the holders of many other offices came. However, the lower ranks of the elite were significantly more open to newcomers, for membership in the elite – at least if the gentry rather than the peerage was meant – was not defined in strictly legal terms (cf. Wasson). Additionally, unlike France, England lacked a class of 'nobles of the sword' who identified themselves in contradistinction to merchants, judges, and urban rentiers. Thus it was easier in England than in France for a military hero to see himself as part of a society in which the soldier was just as much at home in the urban social circles as on the battlefield. The court, by contrast, no longer played a central role in defining social status. However, an additional circumstance must also be considered: the military heroes of England were often naval heroes, certainly much more frequently than in France. In the seventeenth century a strict separation was still maintained between gentlemen and mere seamen (see Davies). Even if a seaman

managed to ascend to the rank of captain, he defined his claim to authority above all in terms of his nautical accomplishments rather than the heroic valour of a noble officer (Ronald 61). The gentlemen, by contrast, were essentially land soldiers who had been transposed to the deck of a ship, and they often had little knowledge of sailing. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, however, the number of young aspiring officers in the navy who had started out as midshipmen and learned their craft from the ground up had increased appreciably. Thus, in the late eighteenth century naval warfare became, even more than before, the domain of gentlemen – but of gentlemen who were receptive to the tendency towards the professionalization of military careers. This was one reason why the ideal of the aristocratic hero proved to be more resistant to criticism in England than in France (on the context, see Ronald, esp. 55-77).

In England even the members of the peerage, the nation's true aristocracy, were not based around the court, and this likely made it easier to adapt to new challenges, as in the example of the changing career structure of naval officers. However, the diminished significance of the court after 1714 did not mean that the Hanoverian monarchs abstained from a self-fashioning that tried to strengthen the legitimacy of their rule. An essential part of this self-fashioning was the heroization of the ruling monarch. Indeed, after the death of Queen Anne, presenting the king as a warrior hero even acquired a renewed importance. While the scope of the Hanoverians' domestic authority was much smaller than it had been for their Stuart predecessors and the allure of the court as a cultural centre had declined in comparison with the late seventeenth century (see Blanning), the crown still enjoyed the prerogative of waging war and controlling the military. In England the army was traditionally rather unpopular, for unlike the navy it was considered a possible instrument of arbitrary rule by the monarch. The memory of the *de facto* military rule in the 1650s also played a role (Schworer). Nevertheless, both George I and George II cultivated a military-heroic image.¹⁰ George II could at least invoke the Battle of Dettingen in 1743, in which he personally had led his troops to a major victory. It was the last battle in which a British monarch participated personally. George II's father and predecessor, George I (Georg Ludwig of Hanover), had fought in his youth in the Holy Roman Empire's campaigns against France and in the 1680s against the Turks. This battle on behalf of Christendom could be used for propaganda purposes in England, unlike the House of Brunswick-Lüneburg's emphatic loyalty to the

Emperor and the Empire (cf. Wrede, *Die Welfen im Reich*). But George I in particular also actively portrayed himself as a successor of those English monarchs who had gone down in history as heroic warriors in the fight against England's neighbour and rival France. These models included William III as well as Edward III, the great military victor of the middle ages. Likewise, George I's self-portrayal referenced St. George, the English national saint; in the great fresco of the Painted Hall in Greenwich that celebrated the succession of the Protestant Hanoverians, for example, the painter Thornhill placed St. George beside the king (Smith, *Georgian Monarchy* 23-28). It must be noted, however, that Thornhill himself had doubts about whether it was still appropriate to surround a contemporary personage with mythologized characters and figures from the legends of the saints, or whether, instead, a more realistic style was to be preferred. Already in the early eighteenth century, then, there are signs that presaged the later dispute about what kind of heroizing imagery was appropriate and plausible (Busch 59-60).

In any case, this was not the only problem that had to be faced in efforts to present the Hanoverian kings as true heroes. In France, Louis XIV was able to use the court and the academies to control the public image of the monarchy and thus also his own – although to be sure, this did not prevent the French from articulating their criticism in printed materials and pamphlets abroad or underground, nor could he suppress the hostile propaganda of foreign nations. In England, however, by the late seventeenth century it had already become nearly impossible for the monarch to suppress public criticism of his person. For some, George I and George II may have been heroic rulers – at the least, it would have been useful for a certain circle, particularly the Court Whigs, to propagate such an image. For others, such as the poet Swift, who supported the Tories after 1714, the first Hanoverian monarch on the British throne was a figure of derision who allowed himself to be manipulated at will by his leading ministers.¹¹ Likewise, the Country Whigs, although they rejected the House of Stuart's claims to the throne – just like king's ministers did – also had reservations about the official royal panegyrics and instead chose to celebrate their own heroes.

The possibilities for doing this in England outside the court's sphere of influence with a corresponding public impact were significantly greater than in most monarchies of continental Europe, including France. To a certain extent, Westminster Abbey in the capital may have already fulfilled the function of a national pantheon even in

the early eighteenth century, but it was controlled by the abbey's dean and chapter, which allotted places for funerary monuments largely based on financial criteria (Craske, *Westminster Abbey*, esp. 58-59). Prior to 1750/60 there were isolated exceptions to this rule. Queen Anne, for example, had Parliament pass a resolution to erect a monument in the Abbey for Admiral Cloudesley Shovell, who went down along with his fleet in a shipwreck at the Isles of Scilly (Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda* 9-10). But such exceptions were rare. The first funerary monument to be erected by parliamentary decree in Westminster after 1714 was dedicated to the memory of another naval hero, James Cornewall, who fell in 1743 (Craske, *Westminster Abbey* 57; Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda* 121-122). In general, naval heroes had a particularly prominent place in the pantheon of military heroes in England – and not just because the navy had long been a more important military weapon than the army. The navy was also less strongly associated with the person of the monarch, and therefore the glorification and remembrance of naval heroes was better suited for articulating opposition to the court and the government. In addition, the navy had long enjoyed more popularity than the army. The fact that, as we have seen, during the course of the eighteenth century aristocratic 'heroes' in the navy were more likely to share the tribulations of their subordinates, at least at the beginning of their career, likely helped to further strengthen this popularity.

One naval hero who enjoyed great popularity in oppositional circles of the 1740s, for example, was Admiral Edward Vernon, who gained a number of initial victories in 1739 in the war against Spain. In spite of later setbacks he continued to be considered a patriot hero, a reputation that he owed not least to his political involvement as a critic of the Ministry, but also to his leadership of the Admiralty. His criticism eventually led George II to deprive him of his command and send him into retirement. For critics of the court he was a political martyr, and after his death in 1757 his nephew had a large monument erected for him in Westminster Abbey in 1763 (Jordan/Rogers 110).

However, apart from erecting funerary monuments in Westminster Abbey, opponents of the government also had other possibilities for celebrating their heroes. One venue was the vast grounds of the English country houses, which, while not accessible to everyone, were frequently visited by the members of the political and social elite. One of the most famous examples for the visual celebration of heroism outside strictly public spaces is the park of Stowe House, which was originally created by Richard Temple, Viscount

Cobham, in the 1730s and 1740s (he died in 1749). Cobham and his relatives in the Grenville family belonged to a network of oppositional Whigs who had fallen out with the all-powerful Minister Walpole in the early 1730s and criticized the political corruption of the Walpole regime as well as what they felt to be the leading politicians' lack of patriotism. The Temples and Grenvilles were furthermore supporters of an active, aggressive foreign policy which did not shy away from conflicts with the Bourbon powers Spain and France, ideally hoping to confront England's foreign rivals at sea. This attitude is reflected in the column that Cobham had erected in Stowe in memory of his nephew Thomas Grenville, a captain who had been killed in action at sea in 1747 in a battle with the French navy off Cape Finisterre. The inscription on the column praises Grenville's heroic courage, who is compared to Sir Philip Sidney, and contrasts it with the unheroic spirit of a decadent age (Rogers 154-158). In this hero cult, features of an oppositional cultural criticism directed against the supposed decadence of the time are clearly evident. This was also the case for what is probably the most famous monument in the Stowe House gardens, the Temple of British Worthies. Although many of the heroes whose busts decorate this temple do not explicitly connote a particular political party, for example Alfred the Great or the poet and playwright Shakespeare, others could be considered symbolic figures of the struggle against tyranny and Papism – John Locke and Edward Hampden (a member of the Long Parliament), or in their own way even Drake and Raleigh.¹² The Stowe House park with its visible politics of remembrance represents a particularly ambitious project, but other owners of country houses also created their own small pantheons with sculptures of great men (and occasionally great women, such as Elizabeth I) of the past. What was missing in Britain, however, were patrons prepared to commission large-scale history paintings, or sculptures of a similar scope and dimension. The dominant genre was the portrait, in which painters such as Joshua Reynolds specialized.¹³

A primary characteristic of the development in England after the 1720s and 1730s can be seen in the way the hero was portrayed. Regardless of whether he was the subject of a portrait in the heroic mode or a funeral monument, or was celebrated by other media such as historical works, biographies, or plays, insofar as the hero was a politically relevant figure, he was portrayed as a patriot and defender of his country and of liberty rather than as a loyal servant of the monarch.¹⁴ Patriotism, specifically a patriotism that was opposed to the court and the king, and heroism

thus became closely associated in England at an early stage. This may have been one reason why there was never any lasting devaluation of military heroes, for they could be invoked by the political opposition for their own purposes and portrayed as defenders of freedom. Additionally, a large portion of the upper classes, the aristocracy and the gentry were committed to an ethos of patriotism from an early period, at the latest since the Revolution of 1688, and this patriotism derived some of its vitality from republican traditions. The presentation of themselves as heroic patriots was even a key element in the way that the members of this upper class legitimated their claim to power; in comparison with the period before 1750, this emphasis was particularly prominent in the later decades of the eighteenth century and during the wars against France starting in 1792 (Colley 155-193). That is not to say that there was no criticism in England of the military hero or the brash and boastful hero more generally. Such criticism could take the form of irony or exaggeration to the point of absurdity, as in Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.¹⁵ Or the transgressive elements of the heroic might be criticized from a Christian perspective. Evangelical Protestants tended to distance themselves particularly strongly from traditional heroic models of behaviour. But in England this Christian criticism of the martial and heroic was, in turn, eventually reintegrated into an ethos of heroic patriotism, in which fighting on behalf of one's country could be seen as fighting for civilization and the good of humankind. This perspective also influenced ideas of heroic greatness, as Holger Hock reminds us in a recent study (Hock 173-177). An additional factor also played a role: over the course of the eighteenth century English military heroes increasingly won victories on battlefields outside of Europe, often in battles against non-European opponents. If there was still some reluctance to unleash the full extent of triumphal rhetoric when celebrating a victory in the European context, this hesitation vanished when the defeated enemy was, for example, an Indian prince. This new triumphalism, which can be observed in funerary monuments starting around the mid-eighteenth century, also attracted the notice of French observers, for in France Ludwig XIV and his incessant self-aggrandization and quest for personal glory still served as a warning example (Craske, *Making National Heroes*, esp. 47-49). But the English culture of the heroic was free of such burdens, a fact which allowed it to flourish more strongly than in France in the late eighteenth century.

However, even though older models of the heroic could be adapted and integrated into a

changing political culture, every heroization of a figure from the recent past or the present was also at risk of becoming entangled in the maelstrom of political debates. Non-partisan criteria for measuring heroic accomplishments were simply no longer available in connection with figures of potential political relevance – and this was the case for most military heroes. Some, like Admiral Vernon, pursued political careers in parallel with their military ones, and in any case decisions about foreign policy and the wars that resulted from such decisions were generally highly controversial, so that a consensus about what constituted true heroism in war hardly ever emerged.

All of this was substantially different in France, where the court and the official institutions which it controlled, such as the academies, had the power to largely determine what was considered heroic and had assumed a position of final arbitrator in debates about individual historical figures who might be considered candidates for the status of heroes. Because the traditional military hero was so strongly associated with the self-glorification of a power-conscious monarchy, criticism of this figure was much more pronounced in France than in England (although to be sure, there, too, the traditional hero had become more strongly moralized and purged of his transgressive traits by the beginning of the eighteenth century).

Towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the traditional heroic ideals were beginning to be directly attacked by men such as Fénelon. In his *Adventures of Telemachus* he particularly criticized Louis XIV's thirst for glory and the bellicosity of his politics. In France and even abroad, *The Adventures of Telemachus* would become one of the most influential works of the early eighteenth century (see Riley). Fénelon's criticism of the traditional ethos of the heroic warrior was taken up by both Montesquieu and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, whose *Discours sur les différences de Grand Homme de l'Homme Illustre* of 1739 contrasted the great man who had contributed to the happiness of mankind and his fatherland with the merely famous personage – here Alexander the Great served once again as an example – who had only been interested in glory and sacrificed everything else to this passion (see note 1). Saint-Pierre did not categorically condemn the pursuit of glory, and he was even willing to consider monarchs like Henry IV among his great men, but even more than before it was necessary for this striving to be subordinated to some higher aim. Similar arguments were made by Montesquieu and other enlightenment thinkers (Bonnet 39-40).

It is important not to overstate the distinction between the *grand homme* of the enlightenment and the classical hero; the boundaries between the two were often fluid and, as Antoine Lilti has argued, the *grand homme* was

the *grand homme* [is] rather a redefinition, a re-articulation, perhaps even a rehabilitation [of the hero] after the ‘destruction of the hero’ carried out by the Augustinian moralists and Jansenistes in the second half of the seventeenth century. (Lilti 125)¹⁶

One phenomenon was new, however: the seemingly average man who lacked both the status of noble birth and the lustre of an existence outside the sphere of the everyday could now be attributed with heroic qualities, or with the attributes of a *grand homme* – in practice there was, in the end, often little difference between the two. An example of this was the cleric and councillor of the Paris *parlement* Henri-Philippe de Chauvelin (1716–1770), who distinguished himself both by his attacks against the Jesuits as well as his criticism of the crown’s policies. Physically Chauvelin was not a particularly impressive man, and while his small stature had inspired his enemies to compare him to an ape, some of his admirers portrayed him as a veritable David who had defeated the Goliath of the Jesuit order. But above all Chauvelin was a symbolic figure who was rather arbitrarily endowed with heroic characteristics in a political propaganda war. It is therefore unsurprising that he quickly returned to obscurity once this struggle had died down (Wachenheim, esp. 237).

Another factor contributing to the change, reflected in such examples, in the way that historical greatness was determined, was the emergence of a new public sphere for the discussion of such questions (Keiser; Jones 212–225). Equally important was the fact that the elites and other cultural milieus which provided the social basis for the enlightenment increasingly challenged the authority of court and church in discussions about the true nature of heroism or historic greatness. This challenge was not without success: while the traditional funeral sermon, a classical medium for the construction of heroic reputations, became a largely obsolete, old-fashioned genre, the literati and intellectuals of the enlightenment laid claim to a virtual monopoly on a new form, the ‘philosophical eulogy’, which could be used to present historical greatness and virtue to the educated public (Bonnet 54–56).

One major reason that the *philosophes* were able to play such a central role in shaping the

debate about greatness and the heroic from the second third of the eighteenth century onwards was the fact that the king was increasingly unable to play the traditional role of heroic warrior and commander convincingly. Louis XV attempted to prove himself once more as a leader in battle in the War of the Austrian Succession, and at Fontenoy (1745) he even succeeded to a certain degree, although the actual command was held by Maurice de Saxe. However, the disappointing outcome of the war in political terms – in the Treaty of Aachen, France was unable to transform its military successes into conquest of territory, either in Europe or overseas – discredited his claims to military glory. And this claim became completely implausible during the disastrous Seven Years’ War starting in 1756, in which the king refrained entirely from personal involvement in the fighting. To be sure, his predecessor had not really fought on the front either, but until 1693 he had at least participated in sieges and other military operations such as fording rivers.¹⁷ All of this was now absent. This lent strength to the doubts of the king’s critics, who wondered how a monarch could plausibly be depicted as a hero when his mistresses were apparently more important to him than the good of the country he ruled. This attitude was reflected in the reactions to the public celebration of the ruler as a victorious military commander. In 1763, after the end of the Seven Years’ War, an equestrian monument of the king was solemnly unveiled. Commissioned by the city of Paris in 1748, the statue depicted the king as a *roi connétable* in the garments of a Roman emperor. In 1748 this portrayal may still have seemed plausible, for the War of the Austrian Succession from 1740 to 1748 was still a success, albeit a success that did not pay any further political dividends. But in the years from 1756 through 1763 this had changed, for France had suffered catastrophic defeats in nearly all theatres of the war. Erecting a war memorial which portrayed the king as a victorious *imperator* now seemed grotesque. People responded accordingly. The monument was defaced with graffiti and texts were pasted to the pedestal which ridiculed the king or even made him appear as an enemy of his own people. To prevent further offences, a permanent guard had to be placed at the monument (Clay; McClellan).

The visible foundering of traditional strategies for heroizing the monarch starting in the 1750s made it significantly easier for enlightenment thinkers to offer up their new ideal of heroic greatness as an alternative to the monarchical and aristocratic tradition. Some philosophers styled themselves as heroes or even as heroic

martyrs; for example, in his *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) Rousseau preached a “héroïsme de la valeur” that was sharply distinguished from the aristocratic pursuit of honour connected with rank. But he by no means rejected the idea that the heroic virtues of the great man went hand in hand with a yearning for glory and with a profound desire to transcend the limits usually set upon human action in everyday life (Bonnet 30-31, 201-202, 207).

When *Nouvelle Héloïse* was published, an intense discussion in France about the role of *grands hommes* in history and politics and their relationship to traditional ideas of the heroic was already underway. The looming defeat in the Seven Years' War posed the question of whether France, like its opponent England or, in a different way, Prussia, was not perhaps in need of a new kind of hero, one that could serve as a model for all Frenchmen rather than just the noble elite and motivate them to serve the fatherland heroically. In Prussia the monarch himself, Frederick the Great, was represented as such a hero and presented himself in this manner (see e.g. Hellmuth; Füssel). Thomas Abbt's *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* (1761) is an example of a treatise expressing this new form of patriotism (cf. Abbt; cf. Leonhard 181-214).

In England, as we have already seen, there was a certain tradition of celebrating national heroes, but hardly any public institutions that attempted to create a coherent canon of heroes for the nation. The court's role as a cultural centre was no longer significant enough to do so, and other institutions which could have taken on this function did not exist. In England, too, the voices calling for creating a pantheon of national heroes became louder during the Seven Years' War. When the decision was made upon the suggestion of Prime Minister Pitt to erect a state monument at Westminster Abbey in memory of General Wolfe, who had died in Canada in 1759 during the conquest of Quebec, this church, long the site of royal coronations and burials, officially assumed the role of such a national pantheon; later it would cede its place to St Paul's Cathedral in London (Craske, *Westminster Abbey* 76-77; Hoock 40-45, 132-161). In Saint-Denis on the outskirts of Paris, by contrast, the burial grounds of the French kings seldom served as the final resting place for members of the nobility who did not belong to the royal family. One of the rare exceptions was the Maréchal Turenne (1611-1675), whom Louis XIV wished to honour for his *vertus héroïques*. But it was not followed by additional tributes of this kind. In the case of Turenne, the honour bestowed upon the dead commander may have been due in part to

the efforts of his family, who after the death of the old soldier sought to claim a status for their house that came dangerously close to that of the royal dynasty (Le Gall 467-470; see also Wrede, *Zwischen Mythen* 17-43). Less convincing are arguments, such as that proposed by Joël Cornette, which go further and suggest that the bureaucratized absolute monarchy no longer had any need for heroes (Cornette 202, 314) and therefore deliberately marginalized them. At the behest of the king, the Maréchal Maurice de Saxe, a Protestant, was given an elaborate funeral monument in a Lutheran church in Strasbourg after his death in 1750; the monument was completed in 1776.¹⁸ Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, the monument's creator, portrayed the marshal in a traditional manner wearing the armour of a knight – although a relic of the past, armour was still considered an essential attribute of a hero (even if it was now the knightly armour of a seventeenth-century cavalryman). Standing majestically before a pyramid, the marshal is shown looking disdainfully at the personified figure of death who opens the coffin for him, while Hercules looks on, shaken by grief, and a female personification of France attempts to hold back death. As striking as this monument may seem today, in the eighteenth century it attracted criticism from people who were offended by the fact that the mythological figure of Hercules, who was also intended to represent the French soldiers grieving for their commander, was placed next to a rather realistically conceived statue of the deceased, who was not clad in the Roman or Greek style, but wore armour instead. Similarly, critics complained that Hercules, an emblem of pure strength, was shown grieving (cf. Steinruck 64-69).

The difficulty of finding a suitable visual language for a heroic monument in the late eighteenth century can also be seen in the monumental tomb, completed in 1773, for General Wolfe in London. The sculptor Joseph Wilton, who was commissioned for the work following a public call, chose a completely different style of heroization than Pigalle had. Wolfe's funeral monument was to set the trend for the hero cult of the late eighteenth century, much as, in its own way, the 1771 painting by Benjamin West depicting the death of the British general during the storming of the French lines near Quebec.¹⁹ In Wilton's monument, Wolfe was portrayed – unlike the aristocratic Maréchal de Saxe in Pigalle's sculpture – as an entirely 'modern' hero, in essence an everyman who had sacrificed his life for his country under exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, the monument in Westminster Abbey, which tellingly refrained from attempting to heroize Wolfe's rather sickly and weak body, was

not free of a certain “unctuous sentimentality” as a recent study has noted.²⁰ Holger Hoock has shown that the monument marks an important point in a transformation process in which iconographic means of expression and rituals that had until that time been reserved for the veneration of martyrs (or, in Catholic contexts, saints) began to be assigned to the new national heroes (Hoock 164).

A similar claim can perhaps also be made for West’s painting, which focuses strongly on the emotional response of Wolfe’s companions and officers witnessing his death and which draws on the iconography of Christian motifs like the Pietà or the Deposition of Christ. Yuval Harari has noted that when West gave the soldiers and attendants of the general such a prominent role in his image, he was following a general tendency visible in the late eighteenth century: “Death in battle is no longer just heroism. It has also become ‘an experience’.” (Harari 225) Memoirs from this period, as well as artwork such as that of West, suggest that witnessing the death of a comrade or commander in battle served as a special form of revelatory experience that was itself imbued with a heroic quality. In this way, the witnesses were to discover their real selves (ibid., 224–225).

When it was created, West’s painting was controversial because it portrayed Wolfe in contemporary clothing and not in the costume of a Roman general – much less in armour like the Maréchal de Saxe – as had been the standard practice until that time. Critics, such as the painter Reynolds, argued that a hero could only be presented as a figure laying claim to eternal, timeless glory if the portrait used the aesthetic vocabulary of classical antiquity rather than the more banal one of the present. The sculptor Wilton had partially circumvented the dilemma of ancient versus modern by portraying Wolfe mostly naked, clad only in a piece of cloth that could be interpreted as a blanket rather than a toga. However, the figures surrounding Wolfe did wear contemporary uniforms, which even at the time attracted criticism on account of the conspicuous aesthetic eclecticism (Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda* 140–141, 144; McNairn 64–68, 127–133). The parallels with the discussions about the funeral monument for the Maréchal de Saxe are striking. These debates show that in England in the last third of the eighteenth century, as in France, it had become extraordinarily difficult to find a system of imagery for portraying heroism and historical greatness that was convincing and acceptable to all.

During the Seven Years’ War, France did not have a victorious commander comparable to

General Wolfe to whom a grand monument could have been dedicated. But the sense of urgency of finding French heroes who could compare to the English and other foreign heroes was all the greater, even if after 1750 these heroes had to be sought in history rather than in the present – at least, if they were to be military heroes. In this context it is significant that plans for creating a national pantheon were developed in the 1770s. But initially it was not the visual arts that took up this theme, but rather other media, namely literature and drama. The War of the Austrian Succession from 1740 to 1748, in which France still enjoyed military victories, even if these victories could not be transformed into political gains, had acted as a catalyst in this respect. The courage displayed by the ordinary soldiers of the elite regiment of the Gardes Françaises at Fontenoy in 1745, when for tactical reasons they stoically allowed the English musket fire to rain upon them without firing the first shot, was a decisive turning point (Drévilion, *L’individu et la Guerre* 133). In stark contrast to the past, the heroism of the ordinary soldier was now honoured, not just that of the noble officer. In 1749, for example, Claude Godard d’Aucourt de Saint-Just published a novel with the title *L’académie Militaire or Les Heros subalternes* that became a great success, and the material was later even adapted into a play (Smith, *Nobility Reimagined* 147–148; cf. Drévilion, *Secondary Heroes*).

Patriotism, too, was a theme that, although it had existed in political discourse before the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War, had mostly been considered a feeling that was typical of the citizens of a republic but not of a monarch’s subjects. When patriots were mentioned, it was often in reference to members of other states. However, as Edmond Dziembowski has shown, after the second half of the 1750s a definite semantic shift took place (Dziembowski 385). The Seven Years’ War was perhaps the first war waged by the French crown that was not depicted as the war of one monarch against another dynasty, but was seen and officially portrayed as a war by the French nation against other nations, the first and foremost of which of course was England. Terms like *patrie*, *patriotisme* and *nation* also appeared in publications significantly more often than before 1756 and this was also true for the term *citoyen* (the citizen of a state). This new patriotic discourse was encouraged by the court – and in particular by the head of foreign policy and temporary Minister for War, the Duc de Choiseul. In 1760/61, when the impending French defeat in the Seven Years’ War was evident, he had a series of pamphlets published appealing to the French to make sacrifices for their

country, even if only by giving money, and his appeal was by no means unsuccessful (Drévilion, *Secondary Heroes* 350-368, 375-376, 444-453, 458-463). A few years previously, in 1757, the idea of patriotism became the central subject of a play performed in Paris, in which the Carthaginian Hasdrubal defended his fatherland against the perfidious Romans and sacrificed himself in this struggle (ibid., 411-412). After the inglorious end of the Seven Years' War, which produced a general sense of crisis in France, these prior efforts were taken up by an otherwise fairly undistinguished actor and dramatist, Pierre-Laurent Buirette de Belloy. His play *Le Siège de Calais* was performed in Paris in 1763 and became a spectacular success (see Moeglin 177-202; de Belloy 447-516).

During the Hundred Years' War, Edward III of England had conquered Calais in 1347 after a siege lasting eleven months. Although the rules of war of the era meant that the victorious English king could have had all adult residents of the city killed, he instead simply drove most of them out – even if most of the expellees were in fact able to return relatively quickly. The richest citizens had to do penance for their resistance by leaving the city on foot, clad only in a shirt and with a noose around their necks, and going before the king to plea for clemency, which was then granted. However, from early on the medieval chronicles strove to reinterpret this symbolic punishment, suggesting that six burghers, led by the merchant Eustache de St. Pierre, offered themselves so that they might buy the lives of the rest of the city's residents with their own. Only after the intercession of the English queen did the vengeful king consent to pardon them (Moeglin 79-89).

De Belloy took up this myth. However, his usage of the material as the subject of a play was not entirely new (ibid., 175-176): it had already found its way into the school dramas of the mostly Jesuit-run *collèges*. Today, the play *Le Siège de Calais* is largely forgotten, probably justifiably so. But in the 1760s it enjoyed great success and created a new image of the national hero, in this way playing a similar role as General Wolfe's celebration as a hero in England.

In the preface to his drama, de Belloy explained that his goal had been to create a national tragedy modelled on the history plays of Shakespeare. The viewer of the play should be able to say that he had seen a French hero and recognized that he could also be such a hero.²¹ The summons to a patriotic *imitatio heroica* was thus built into the play, and the heroes presented within it were intended as everyday citizens – not aristocrats with a lineage going back generations

or exceptional figures such as characters from mythology or ancient history, but rather people like you and I, only with the ability to rise above their ordinariness in a situation of crisis. Significantly, one of the anti-heroes in the play is a nobleman, the Count of Harcourt, who only at the last minute changes his position and defends his king and country instead of the English.

The play thus belongs firmly within the trend of the more bourgeois hero, but at the same time it is also directed against the criticism, not untypical of this phase of the enlightenment, of traditional ideas of the hero. Beginning with Fénelon's *Adventures of Telemachus*, the aristocratic military hero had fallen into disrepute, or at least this ideal was now greeted with considerable scepticism (see Asch 22). Consequently, de Belloy did not provide aristocratic heroes, but rather citizens who were prepared to die for their fatherland – not for humanity in general, although this would have better reflected the ideals of the enlightenment; consequently the play was sharply rejected by Diderot and other enlightenment philosophers. De Belloy anticipates this criticism, for in the fourth act of the play an English nobleman announces to the residents of Calais that love of one's country is self-evident: "The Englishman is a citizen; and the spirit and logic of his life proclaim the idea that a nation should love herself".²² Therefore, he says, it is only natural that one feels more closely tied to one's own compatriots than to people of other nations:

I hate the cold hearts which feel nothing for their country, men and women who observe their country's misery with the greatest detachment and claim for themselves the proud name of a citizen of the world, pretending under all possible circumstances to love humanity, so that they do not need to serve their own city. (de Belloy 493-494, Act 4, Scene 2, the Englishman Mauniaddressing the "six bourgeois")²³

By thus celebrating the patriotism of the citizens of Calais – compared with the actual events of 1347, this celebration is, of course, quite anachronistic, for the *patrie* of these citizens was their city more than it was France – de Belloy rejects an influential, cosmopolitan variety of the enlightenment. In other ways, however, his image of the heroes of Calais did not depart so far from the dominant enlightenment ideals, for his heroes are not untamed warriors in search of glory and driven by personal ambition and desire for recognition. Their heroism is of a more passive variety, characterized by the willingness

to sacrifice themselves. In addition, it is a collective heroism, for they do not go alone to their deaths, but as a group, thus embodying the *sens civique*, the public spiritedness that the enlightenment required of its *grands hommes* (cf. Moeglin 187-188).

At the same time *Le Siège de Calais* represents an attempt to bring a new patriotism centred on the nation into harmony with loyalty to the royal dynasty and the person of the king. The patriotism of de Belloy's citizens of Calais is consistently loyal to the king. National pride cannot be separated from loyalty to the dynasty whose right to reign is granted them by the *Lex Salica*; however, the king himself is no longer the focus of this loyalty – that privilege is given to the nation – but he is instead the first among a legion of patriots. The king embodies the patriotism of the French, but he does not necessarily stand at the centre of this patriotism (cf. Moeglin 182). In his engagement with the source material of the drama, the playwright even relegates the king still further into the background and makes room for an interpretation in which the six burghers become heroes who defend a homeland that their own king had nearly abandoned. The accusation that their leader, Eustache de Saint-Pierre, levels against the English king in response to the king's efforts to make him betray his country could also be read as a criticism of monarchy itself:

One observes Edward, how he tries to recommend an infamous act; with the intention to corrupt a subject, he mobilizes all his intellectual capacities. Who among the mortals would not look with admiration and jealousy upon my fate? You force me, Sire, to be greater than you.²⁴

The subject or citizen as a hero whose moral greatness surpasses that of the ruler was a figure of definite subversive potential.

De Belloy's play was a great success on the stage in spite of its rather limited literary quality. In 1765 it was performed fifteen times just in Paris, and an additional performance was held for the king in Versailles; the king also arranged for the *Comédie Française* to hold a free performance in Paris – a rather rare occurrence in the eighteenth century. And this free performance was also a great success with the public. At the end of the performance de Belloy appeared on stage and was greeted with calls of "Vive le roy et Monsieur de Belloy" [Long live the king and Monsieur de Belloy; transl. R.G.A.]. Following the performances in Paris, the play went on tour in the provinces, where it continued to draw large audiences (cf. Moeglin 183-184).

But de Belloy's attempt to create a synthesis of the new ideal of heroic bourgeois patriotism and the older traditions of serving the country and king was not the end of the story. The more deeply the *Ancien Régime* fell into crisis after 1763, the more attractive such a programme became from the perspective of the court and the ministers, particularly since the rivalry with France's old enemy England continued to be a determining factor in French politics into the 1770s. One attempt to continue the patriotic momentum of *Le Siège de Calais* and other works was undertaken by Claude Flahaut de La Billarderie, Comte d'Angivillier, whom Louis XVI named *Directeur Général des Bâtiments, Arts, Jardins et Manufactures de France* in 1774. This minister not only developed plans for a national museum in the Louvre, a kind of pantheon of the great figures of French history, but also commissioned important sculptors to create a series of statues of the *grands hommes*, or perhaps more accurately the *hommes illustres*, of France. Among these *hommes illustres* – and significantly, there was not a single woman among them, for this new ideal of greatness was almost exclusively a masculine one in a way that had not been the case for heroic figures of the past – were poets and thinkers as well as painters, for example Poussin, great magistrates and statesmen like the Chancellor d'Aguesseau, and de Molé, a president of the Parisian *parlement* from the period of the Fronde. But even at this time, during the height of the enlightenment, military commanders like Turenne or Condé and knightly warriors like the Chevalier Bayard still found a prominent place in this canon, even if they did not dominate it to the degree they once had.²⁵ These military commanders celebrated as heroes had distinguished themselves not least through their loyalty to the monarchy, even to the point that they obeyed orders they considered to be wrong, as the Admiral Tourville had done at the naval battle of La Hougue in 1692. The philosophers and artists whom Angivillier glorified often had risen to fame thanks to the patronage of the king, or at least, it could be made to seem that way (cf. Gaehtgens 158-159).

Among the national identification figures of Angivillier's series of statues was the Maréchal de Catinat, whose statue, created by Claude Dejoux in 1781, still stands in Versailles. Angivillier called him

an army commander who deserves our praise not just because of his military talents but also because of his integrity, his humanity and because his mind and heart marked him out as a true philosopher.²⁶

This expression of praise clearly shows that the heroization of Catinat was the glorification of a modern hero who was free from the faults of impetuous bellicosity or excessive personal ambition. A few years before Dejoux's completion of the statue, Catinat had also been the subject of a rhetorical competition at the *Académie française*, showing clearly how drastically the image of the military hero had changed in the era of the enlightenment, at least in France.

Rhetorical competitions, the goal of which was to produce the most powerful panegyric to a *grand homme*, had become customary at the Académie since 1758 and reflected the enlightenment determination to gain control over the construction of glory rather than allowing the court and the clients of the aristocracy to define it as in the past. Although the French philosophers attempted to replace the aristocratic and military heroes of the past with new symbolic figures, the historical personages that were celebrated by the members of the Académie were still in their majority warriors and high ranking royal office-holders of the monarchy. To be sure, a few individuals who were civilians, such as Descartes or Molière, were also honoured, but the most prominent place was occupied by figures like the Maréchal de Saxe (1759), Colbert (1773), Vauban (1787) or Catinat. Nonetheless, the year of 1758 marks a significant change: for over a hundred years the orations at the Académie had been concerned with religious topics, but now, for the first time, they focused on the heroes and great men of the nation (Bell 111-112; see also Ritter 7).

The man to whom the 1775 rhetorical competition was dedicated was Nicolas de Catinat. Born in 1637, he was the son of a noble of the robe and had initially practiced law before embarking on a military career. In 1681 he was promoted to *maréchal de camp* and at the height of his career won a number of victories in the Nine Years' War. In 1693 he was named Marshal of France and in 1703 he retired to his estates, where he died in 1712. In the competition in his honour, Jean-François de la Harpe gave the prizewinning eulogy. It emphasized that in an era in which the entire culture focused on the veneration of the monarch, Catinat had looked to his fatherland, the *patrie*, as the highest ideal (de la Harpe 5). It noted further that in Catinat's time the conditions for military courage on the battlefield had undergone dramatic changes, for contemporary sieges and battles were characterized by an 'industrie meurtrière', a killing industry that was completely unknown to the ancients. These were conditions that could make a hero even out of a simple soldier. This had been a topic of

great relevance in France, at least since the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745, as we have seen. The heroic courage of the simple soldiers, of these *machines héroïques*, often consisted merely in steadfastly awaiting death:

awaiting death without resistance against such a fate, seeing death before one's eyes without taking flight, accepting death without taking revenge. (de la Harpe 19)²⁷

With statements like this, the speech qualified Catinat's status as a hero, for the modern military hero was now no longer an absolutely exceptional phenomenon, a member of the aristocratic elite who alone had the capacity of presenting themselves as a hero; instead, he was the first among equals, still a model, but not an unreachably distant one. De la Harpe also suggested that Catinat, precisely because he had not been a great aristocrat like Condé or Turenne, had as a soldier demonstrated the reasoning of a philosopher and the sentiments of a citizen. In war he had seen only a public crime and misfortune for all peoples. Striving for victory had only been justified by the fact that victory would bring about an end to war (de la Harpe 26, 65). For him every unnecessary battle was to be considered a misfortune. While the military heroes of the past had made senseless sacrifices for glory, Catinat had always been concerned with saving resources, and that included the lives of the soldiers entrusted to his care (*ibid.*, 27-28). What was to be desired, in war as in peace, de la Harpe argued, were not "genies brillants" [brilliant geniuses; transl. R.G.A.] and the "âmes naturellement prédominantes" [and souls which were by nature capable of dominating everything and everybody; transl. R.G.A.], but rather "esprits justes" and "les coeurs vertueux" [men with the right spirit and virtuous hearts; transl. R.G.A.]. It was time to celebrate reason and virtue, which had long been relegated to the background by the words 'greatness' and 'genius' that had blinded so many. And Catinat, who was called "Le Père Pensée" [Father Thoughtful; transl. R.G.A.] by his soldiers, had matched this ideal (*ibid.*, 96).

De la Harpe's prizewinning speech thus demonstrates, on the one hand, the criticism levelled by proponents of the enlightenment against the traditional image of the military hero, as had previously been outlined in the treatise by the Abbé de Saint Pierre on the difference between the *grand homme* and the *homme illustre* (see Asch 97). On the other hand, Catinat was ultimately still a soldier, regardless of how wise a philosopher he had been, and naturally the panegyric also mentioned his victories and

successes. In de la Harpe's eulogy to Catinat it is once again evident that the distinction between the great men and the aristocratic heroes of the *âge classique* was in fact fairly fluid. However, even when the *grands hommes* of the eighteenth century were military men, they were soldier heroes that had been tamed and largely lost their transgressive characteristics. In addition, ordinary soldiers and citizens now joined officers of noble heritage among the ranks of the great men, while poets, thinkers, and scientists embodied a new type of historical greatness. They, too, were not without aspirations to a heroic image, which in the case of philosophers like Rousseau was even a conscious self-presentation, but their heroic qualities were defined more by strength of spirit and virtue rather than the readiness to sacrifice one's life in violent struggles.

Even more than de la Harpe's speech, another eulogy to Catinat demonstrated the prevalent criticism of traditional heroic models. This speech was written by the military reformer Comte de Guibert, who was also the author of a play about the *connétable* [Lord High Constable of the Realm] Charles de Bourbon in which the role of the actual hero was filled by the Chevalier Bayard. Guibert saw Catinat as a model that he himself strove to imitate, as Voltaire also noted (Groffier 134-138). In his eulogy Guibert portrayed the Dutch and the English as the true defenders of higher ideals because they fought for freedom against Louis XIV. At the same time, he vehemently insisted that it must be possible for the simple citizen to ascend to the greatest heights of military glory (de Guibert 9, 16). He also emphasized that France – and here he meant the nation, not the king or his court – understood more clearly than any other nation how to honour her heroes, and that this was a veneration which the monarch could neither command nor control, for it had to be expressed spontaneously (cf. *ibid.*, 1-2, 56-57). Guibert was one of a number of officers and military theorists of the late eighteenth century who attempted to reform the army even while they saw this reform as part of a renewal of French society. Key to his reform plans was the idea that the entire nation must share in the aristocracy's feeling of honour and that only a heroic patriotism could halt or reverse the decline of France. All citizens were to become soldiers and all soldiers citizens (Smith, *Nobility Reimagined* 195; cf. Blaufarb 12-45). Guibert and other reformers did not necessarily want to abolish the nobility, but their particular role as the heirs of a special ethos was increasingly called into doubt during the reform debates prior to 1789. In many respects, so the military

theorists thought, the army was to replace the nobility in taking on a new role as the embodiment of a heroic patriotism (Smith, *Nobility Reimagined* 204).

In England the reaction against the traditional hero, who as a rule was a member of the landowning elite, was less pronounced than in France, although there was criticism, stemming from the Church, of the strong presence of heroic warriors in the public consciousness (Craske, *Westminster Abbey* 66). But in a country in which the upper ranks of the military were often also politicians – this was true of Marlborough at the beginning of the century as well as of Admiral Vernon after him – and in which the transition from a military career to civilian life was often fluid, these debates did not have the same intensity as the debate about the *grande homme* in France. There was also no closed circle like that of the philosophers in France who tried to establish their concept of historical greatness against the competing ideas favoured by the court and the traditional elite. However, in England there was a clear trend of heroizing individuals who stood out from the masses as a result of a single event, for example death in a victorious battle. An example of this would be General Wolfe, who did not always show exceptional talent as a military commander, but due to fortunate circumstances was able to win a great victory and who died at a decisive moment. Timeless greatness was replaced, at least in individual cases, with a fame that was tied to specific circumstances, and sometimes highly ephemeral.²⁸

In general, however, the English elites showed a remarkable talent for adapting themselves to the changing models of the heroic in the eighteenth century. A revival of the traditions of medieval chivalry which emerged in the late eighteenth century and found its most developed form in romanticism undoubtedly facilitated the reformulation of the ideal of the aristocratic hero in England.²⁹ While not every army or naval officer would have said, as Nelson claimed to have done in 1776, that “I will be a hero and confiding in Providence I will brave every danger”,³⁰ there is no doubt that the “new cult of elite heroism” in England also shaped the behaviour of individuals (Colley 182), which was influenced by a glorified image of antiquity and historical paintings like those of Benjamin West and other artists. The class of English elites who oriented their lives around the ideals of “patrician valour and self-sacrifice” (Colley), or at least, portrayed themselves in accordance with these ideals, demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive in the decades after 1790. The French nobility, by

contrast, found it increasingly difficult even before the Revolution to formulate a self-image that could be brought into alignment with the new ideals of the enlightenment without too much conflict. Too strongly was the ideal of the *grand homme* based on its conception as an alternative to the traditional noble hero, and too loud were the voices that called for the whole nation and its citizens to share in the aspiration to honour and glory and the heroic self-portrayal that had previously been reserved for the nobility.

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1 Charles Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre’s treatise was first published as an addendum in Abbé Seran de la Tour, *Histoire d’Épaminondas pour servir de suite aux hommes illustres de Plutarque, avec des remarques de M. le Chevalier de Folard sur les principales batailles d’Épaminondas*, Paris 1739; it is cited here according to de la Tour XXI-XLIV. Cf. also Briant 208-221.

2 On the wider context, see Niggemann, esp. 6-8.

3 On the weaknesses of the self-portrayal of the king and the general erosion of the monarchy in light of a public that now demanded to determine itself what royal image was appropriate, see Sharpe 502-506.

4 On Marlborough, see Smith, *Heavenly Birth*, esp. 146-147; on Marlborough as a sort of surrogate monarch, see also Johns.

5 On Marlborough as a controversial opera figure in the context of characters that can be interpreted as references to him, see McGeary 30, 35-36.

6 On Steele and the “reformation of manners”, see Peltonen 228-229; Carter 70-76; Phillipson 225-227.

7 Carroll 324-329; Briost et al. 305-328. On the afterlife of the duel, compare also Asch 142.

8 Cf. Horowski 62-73. On the separation of the nobility of the robe and the sword in terms of lifestyles and careers, cf. Bluche.

9 “il parle chevaux, spectacles, histoires des filles, courses, batailles. Il rougit de connoître son métier” [transl. R.G.A.].

10 On George II, see Smith, *Georgian Monarchy* 108 regarding a comment of his daughter highlighting his “affectation of heroism”.

11 Langford; Pearce 333-335; Rowland 147-153 on Swift’s “Directions for a Birthday Song”, a particularly biting satire of George II.

12 Rogers 148-151; a more cautious assessment is given by Sullivan 45-46.

13 Sullivan, esp. 60-65. On Reynolds, see for example Postle.

14 On the portrayal of heroes at Westminster, see Craske, *Westminster Abbey* 72-75. The patriotism of the hero was of course clearly evident at the temple in Stowe, but also in the many heroizing sculptures of Cromwell that began to appear

more frequently in English country houses and city residences starting in the 1730s. Cf. Sullivan 48-59, although it is to be noted that Cromwell was often an ambivalent hero in such portrayals.

15 On the genre of the mock-heroic, see Terry; cf. Williams.

16 “plutôt une redéfinition, une reformulation, peut-être même une réhabilitation, après la ‘démolition du héros’ à laquelle s’étaient livrés les moralistes augustiniens et les Jansenistes dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle” [transl. R.G.A.].

17 Wrede, *Des Königs Rock*, esp. 388-399. On Louis XV, see also Hours.

18 See Steinruck. Louis XV had evidently originally intended to have the *maréchal* buried in Saint-Denis, but refrained from this plan because he was not a Catholic and also merely the bastard son of a German prince.

19 For a general discussion, see McNairn.

20 Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda* 122, also 103-146 on the monument and its creation and 135 on Wolfe as an everyman and on the portrayal of his body. On the historical context of the veneration of Wolfe, see also Leonhard 285-292.

21 Cf. de Belloy 449. Here de Belloy was criticizing plays whose heroes were taken from antiquity, because the audience would be unable to identify with such figures, but would rather say “je ne suis pas né dans un pays où je puisse leur ressembler”.

22 “L’Anglais est citoyen; et sa raison suprême / veut qu’une nation se chérisse elle-même” [transl. R.G.A.]

23 “Je hais les cœurs glacés et morts pour leur pays, / qui, voyant ses malheurs dans une paix profonde, / s’honorent du grand nom de citoyen du monde, / feignent dans tout climat d’aimer l’humanité / pour ne la point servir dans leur propre cité” [transl. R.G.A.]. Cf. Truchet (ed.) 1437 (comments by the editor); on the criticism of the piece by Voltaire and other philosophers, see Moeglin 191-193. Likewise Dziembowski 481-484.

24 “On regarde Édouard conseillant l’infamie / pour corrompre un sujet épuisant son génie / quel mortel de mon sort ne serait point jaloux? / Vous me forcez, Seigneur, d’être plus grand que vous” [transl. R.G.A.]. Cf. de Belloy 507, Act 5, Scene 2 and Moeglin 196-202; on the later reinterpretation of the play by the author, cf. Dziembowski 484-486.

25 On the programmatic statues, see Bonnet 126-129; Bell 111; likewise Gaehtgens 154-161.

26 “un général de terre non moins recommandable par ses talents militaires que par son désintéressement, son humanité et son esprit philosophique” [transl. R.G.A.].

27 “attendre la mort sans la repousser, de la voir sans la fuir, de la recevoir sans le venger” [transl. R.G.A.]. On the Battle of Fontenoy and the debate that it triggered about the hero status of simple soldiers and lower-ranking officers, see p. 7.

28 On the media aspects of the veneration of celebrities in the late eighteenth century who could no longer be considered classical heroes, see Lilti 84-98.

29 Hoock 181-182; on comparable phenomena in France, which, however, also led to a specific veneration of the medieval bourgeois hero, such as the citizens of Calais, see Smith, *Nobility Reimagined* 156-166.

30 Colley 182. Nelson spoke these words – according to his own statement – in 1776 (he was 16 at the time) when he was recovering from a bout of malaria. However, the exclamation is only documented in a biography from the early nineteenth century; Nelson thus spoke about this episode and his experience with the authors long after the fact, in 1802. See Vincent 27; Clarke and McArthur 24. The utterance is recorded as “Well then, I exclaimed ‘I will be a hero’ and confiding in Providence I will brave every danger.”

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Heroism and Modernity

The history of heroism is more than just the reconstruction of hero stories. The ways in which heroes (and less frequently heroines) are conceptualized provide information about the meanings, normative orders, and historical images of the social fabric that brought them forth. Theories of the heroic thus always represent a particular perspective: they document the societal challenges and needs that particular types of heroes respond to, what values heroes embody, what boundaries heroes transgress, and what demands heroes place upon their fans and admirers. For modernity and the patriotic hero cults that dominate it, this means that heroisms and the theoretical reflections upon them are always tinged by national aspects. This is also true of the critical thoughts on the relationship between heroism and modernity presented here. The journey through theorizations of the heroic follows a mainly German perspective: starting with Hegel, Marx, and the Marxist tradition, to the 'heroic realism' of Ernst Jünger and other nationalist revolutionary authors of the inter-war period, and ending with Hans Magnus Enzensberger's ironic farewell to heroic attitudes that anticipates contemporary assessments of Germany as a 'post-heroic' society. Other threads of the theoretical discourse on heroes – for example, Thomas Carlyle's influential lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (London 1841) or Ralph Waldo Emerson's portraits of historical *Representative Men* (Boston 1850) – are omitted.

The choice of this perspective has its reasons: in German-language discussions, the philosophy of history plays a central role in the investigation of the relationship between heroism and modernity. Hegel and Marx, whose explanatory

power and reception have had a historical impact that has resonated far beyond the national context, particularly represent this approach. At the same time, the Nazis' unparalleled crimes against humanity were possible largely due to their mobilization of a militant heroism that preached fighting unconditionally to the death as heroic self-sacrifice. Until 1945, the history of modernity in Germany was thus the history of a 'heroic modernity', to use the terminology of historian Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, whose thesis is picked up in the reflections presented here. For this reason, the constitutive connection between modern heroism and collective violence can be shown particularly clearly in relation to the discursive processing of the First World War in Germany.

This essay traces the ways in which heroes have been thematized, problematized, and theorized in Germany from the era of the Napoleonic Wars to the end of the Cold War. In addition, this essay maps the tensions and links between the deheroizing dynamics of modernity on the one hand and its hypertrophic hero cults on the other.

Hegel's Heroes¹

While the term 'post-heroic' only established itself in the final decades of the last century, the diagnosis is in fact much older: "In the State there can be heroes no more. They appear only in uncivilized communities", Hegel asserted categorically in 1820 in his *Philosophy of Right* (33). The more mediated the conditions of society are, the less space is left for autonomous, self-directed figures of unmediated existence. Where the sum of real historical conditions produced the rational system that Hegel attempted to derive from the process of history, he considered heroes to be both impossible and superfluous. Elsewhere in his writing, however, this same Hegel enthusiastically celebrates the "world-historical men – the Heroes of an epoch" whose

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deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only their interest, and their work. (Hegel, *History* 30)

He finds examples of this not only in the past, but also in his own era: the hero towering above all others in his time was unquestionably Napoleon. Hegel personally witnessed Napoleon's arrival in Jena on 13 October 1806 and he wrote effusively about it to his friend Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer on the same day. He described the "wonderful sensation" of "see[ing] such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it" (Hegel, *Letters* 114; on Hegel's view of Napoleon in general, cf. Broussard).

Hegel's comments on the heroic are contradictory: heroes, for him, are at once anachronistic, present and indispensable. Under the "prosaic states of affairs in the present", every individual

belongs to an established social order and does not appear himself as the independent, total, and at the same time individual living embodiment of this society, but only as a restricted member of it. (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 193-194)

Thus, an individual cannot be a hero. At the same time, the hunger for heroes remains: "But the interest in and need for such an actual individual totality and living independence we will not and cannot sacrifice" (195). The 'world spirit' continues to make use of heroic "agents" in order to set the "necessary next stage of their world" into motion. Without choosing it, and usually without deriving happiness from their role, these "great historical individuals" whose "own particular purposes contain the substantial will of the World Spirit" serve as midwives of progress. They are heroes because they do not merely perpetuate the "calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order". Instead, their actions derive sustenance from a spirit that is

still hidden beneath the surface but already knocking against the outer world as against a shell, in order, finally, to burst forth and break it into pieces; for it is a kernel different from that which belongs to the shell. (Hegel, *History* 30)

Thus, on the one hand, Hegel diagnoses the subject as having been thoroughly socialized and thereby deheroized; on the other, he invokes exceptional heroic individuals. He does

not resolve this contradiction dialectically; instead, the opposing statements stand beside each other – scattered across various writings and lectures – but are never brought together. In so doing, Hegel erects the argumentative framework in which the discussions on the fate of the heroic in modernity have taken place until today.

For his thesis on the outdatedness of the hero, Hegel contrasts "individual independence" (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 179) in the stateless existence of the Heroic Age – by which he means the era of the mythical heroes of ancient Greece – with the "subordinate position of the individual subject [...] in developed states". In developed states, "each individual acquires only an entirely specific and always restricted share in the whole" (183; on the topos of the 'age of heroes' cf. Brandmeyer 264-279). The 'state' here refers to the entirety of social institutions that bind individuals in a net of reciprocal obligations and dependencies, thereby ensuring their freedom. In other words, the 'state' represents – to use Hegel's terminology – the system of social mores (*Sittlichkeit*) and includes civil society.

Hegel demonstrates the obsolescence of heroes under such conditions with the example of the institution of law: in a society mediated by law, individual action is always embedded in the legal order. Regardless of whether the individual obeys the law or transgresses it, the particular qualities of an action always come second to the universal qualities of the rule. No deed, however marvellous or horrific, is exempt from judgement about its lawfulness; misdeeds thus lose their transgressive quality. Under the power of the legal code, deeds are transformed into criminal offences, subjected to orderly procedures, and sanctioned.

Heroes, on the other hand, are individuals who undertake and accomplish the entirety of an action, actuated by the independence of their character and caprice; and in their case, therefore, it appears as the effect of individual disposition when they carry out what is right and moral. (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 185)

Heroes are their own moral authority and therefore assume sole responsibility for their actions. Hegel describes them as borderline figures situated on the threshold between nature and culture. Rather than being subject to laws, heroes become the founders of laws. Their violence is justified, because

on the one hand there is not yet any established order to which one could appeal,

and on the other because it represents the de facto radical shift, by means of which it is possible for the realm of the political to be established and enter into force at all. (Senigaglia 137)

The despotism of the hero is the origin of the law, the beginnings of right and justice are rooted in wrong and injustice. But once the rule of law has become established, the heroic overstepping of boundaries becomes an ordinary criminal offence.

Hegel's argument here is a sociological one *avant la lettre*: translating his thesis on the incompatibility of heroism and modernity into contemporary terms, heroes have lost their right to exist because in the course of social evolution, institutional problem-solving strategies have developed, which accomplish more reliably and more efficiently what was once the concern of exceptional hero figures. In this view, individual heroism and societal institutions are functional equivalents. It comes down to a simple formula: more social integration means less heroism. Either societal challenges are mastered through the sovereign action of individuals, or they are worked through with the help of procedural rules, administrative arrangements, and professional competencies, which replace "the deed with the assignment, the impulse with organization, and valour with teamwork" (Wagner). Institutionalization means not least the division of labour:

The hero shoulders the burden of the collective whole; the citizen, by contrast, distributes it among others of his kind. He unburdens himself in manifold ways, but also makes himself dependent and loses the autonomy that distinguishes the hero. (Früchtl 71)

Not only the division of labour, but also the very character of these tasks undergoes a fundamental change: heroes prove themselves in the face of danger. If, however, it is a matter of managing calculable risks, the role of the hero is replaced by the insurance agent and the accident prevention specialist, and for everyone else there is the disaster protection service. One only need wish for a heroic rescuer when there is no effective emergency service.

Complex problems require more complex response strategies than the dauntless intervention of valiant individuals. At the same time, institutional webs hinder exceptional events from being attributed to individual actions and also prevent the heroization of the actors. Even the monarchs of Hegel's world are anything but

sovereign in their actions. A king who merely governs but does not reign is not hero material. In a "completely organised state", the monarch is reduced to a mere functionary who simply "says 'Yes' and so puts the dot upon the 'i'" (Hegel, *Right* 167). This is even more true for elected representatives in a democracy, one might continue Hegel's line of reasoning, for their autonomy and power to act are not only curtailed by the constitution, budgetary demands, and matters of state, but also depend on unstable party alliances and changing majorities.

What remains are hero stories. In the ancient tragedies and Shakespeare's dramas, Hegel finds the mythical figures of "the perfect freedom of will and production" (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 192) who embody in their persons the ideals that have long since become embedded in social institutions and have thereby forfeited their illustrative power. In the realm of art, heroes can continue to make themselves felt, because here the universal "is still immediately one with particular individuals and their life" (185). A common characteristic of both artists and heroes, artworks and heroic deeds, is that they give vivid form to something that gestures to a greater meaning. This formal relationship leads Hegel to conceptualize the heroic as an aesthetic phenomenon and, in this way, to admit some remnant of the heroic even in modern society. Even if the real world is no longer capable of bringing forth hero stories, the old myths can continue to have an effect on the stage, in literature and the visual arts (today we could add films, comic books, and computer games). What we have historically outlived is at least preserved in the aesthetic imagination. A very different view of the heroic can be found in his paeans to the world-historic individuals who "willed and accomplished something great; not a mere fancy, a mere intention" (Hegel, *History* 31). Here the heroic does not bear the stamp of something of a past era, but rather is a rare event that helps history along its course. Counter to his implicit modernization theory in which the time of heroes has passed, Hegel proffers another narrative in which heroes are the vanguard of "that for which the time [is] ripe" (30). Heroes appear as a personification of the sign of the times, an analogue to the sublime in art and as the pole of a force field, towards which all others are drawn. One may revere or fear them, admire or hate them, but it is impossible to *not* be affected by them. Their charisma has its roots in a spontaneous identification: by the sheer force of their presence, their greatness is immediately obvious to all. They embody "the inmost soul of all individuals" and bring it to consciousness. "[Others], therefore, follow these

soul-leaders; for they feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied" (30-31).

Hegel is sharply critical of "the so-called 'psychological' view" of historical individuals. He suggests that envious, small-spirited people attempt to bring the heroes down to their own level and take pleasure in pointing out their idiosyncrasies and explaining all their heroic deeds as taking place "under the impulse of some passion, mean or grand, – some morbid craving". From this servant or schoolmaster's perspective, the world-historical individuals appear as inconsiderate, reckless individuals without any moral legitimacy. Hegel had little patience with those who force everyone down to the same level. The heroes' all-too-human weaknesses, their narrow-mindedness, escapades, and excesses are irrelevant in comparison to the task of actualizing the universal. The historical mission must be measured according to exceptional standards: "[S]o mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower – crush to pieces many an object in its path" (Hegel, *History* 32). Often enough, heroes pay for this with their lives or are toppled from their pedestals. However, for Hegel, Napoleon's military defeat and exile do not in the least diminish his glory; they only show how Napoleon was ultimately swept away along with the progress that he and his Grande Armée made a reality. In this view, great individuals act merely as instruments of a far greater power: history.

Here is the point where Hegel's otherwise antithetical positions on the heroic come into contact: the mythical heroes of the heroic age are also liminal figures and fulfil a historical mission. In the face of resistance and generally with the help of violence, they create a new order in which, through its institutions, heroic action becomes superfluous. Modern heroes are catalysts under conditions of a difficult transition, expression of a crisis and simultaneously the element that overcomes it. They only appear when the development is ripe for it.

Delivery may be forced, but the child must be ready to enter the world. A heaven-storming Promethean will is doomed to fail unless what it wills is already alive in germ in the conditions of the present. (Hook 65-66)

Heroes require times that need a hero; history must have prepared the ground for them. Once the historical moment has arrived, it is certain that a hero will be found.

This valuation of heroes within Hegel's philosophy of history is also connected to their close

association with war. According to Hegel, war awakens heroic forces because it stimulates the historical process. In periods of peace, by contrast,

civic life becomes more and more extended. Each separate sphere walls itself in and becomes exclusive, and at last there is a stagnation of mankind. Their particularity becomes more and more fixed and ossified. (Hegel, *Right* 193)

In short, peace leads to a post-heroic lethargy, while war begets heroes. War dissolves, at least partially, the institutional bounds that prevent heroic challenges and successes in modernity. This applies to military heroes like Napoleon, but Hegel also implicitly heroizes the common soldiers who put their lives at risk for the sovereignty of the nation. The bravery of the soldier does not serve personal aims like that of the adventurer, who seeks intensity of experience, nor that of the knight, who seeks glory, nor that of the villain, who seeks material benefit. Rather, soldiers "make real the ideality implicit within [themselves]" because in the fulfilment of their military duty they are prepared to deny their individual "possessions, pleasure, and life". In the soldier's obedience unto death, the specific and the universal reach their highest form of mediation:

True bravery in civilized peoples consists in a readiness to offer up oneself in the service of the state, so that the individual counts only as one amongst many. Not personal fearlessness, but the taking of one's place in a universal cause, is the valuable feature of it. (195)

Even if Hegel does not award this title to those fallen in battle, the dead hero is the true hero of his philosophy of right.

This form of heroism is modern for at least two reasons: first, the obligation to fight for one's country is generally extended to include all male citizens following the introduction of universal compulsory military service – like Napoleon, this, too, is a product of the French Revolution. The "[s]acrifice on behalf of the individuality of the state" becomes the "substantial tie between the state and all its members". Second, progress in armament technology means that soldiers fight as a disciplined collective body; consequently, "personal bravery appears impersonal". In the era of the gun, military heroism is "the act not of a particular person, but of a member of the whole" and this, in turn, is directed "not against separate persons, but against a hostile whole"

(195). The heroism of the common soldier is characterized by the courageous fulfilment of duty in the face of death. However, the common soldier lacks the transgressive obstinacy, the autonomous agency and the charisma of both the ancient heroes and the contemporary “great individuals”. He does not loom above the masses; he takes his place as a member of the ranks.

But can this really be considered heroic? Tellingly, although Hegel endows the conscripts in the national army with heroic attributes – readiness to make sacrifices, the will to fight, virtuousness – he does not expressly acclaim them as heroes in the same way he glorifies Napoleon. Hegel does not resolve this contradiction of claiming that heroes are impossible in modernity on the one hand, while on the other hand also granting them an essential role in the processes of modernization. Instead, he attempts to mask this contradiction with the paradoxical figure of a deindividualized hero who has been stripped of his potency and embedded in an all-encompassing organization – in short, a post-heroic hero whom Hegel does not even call a ‘hero’.

Socialist heroism

Hegel's idea that heroes are agents of change who must relinquish their place on the stage once their task has been completed was also adopted by his student Marx. Napoleon, and before him the heroes of the Revolution of 1789, “performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases, the task of unchaining and setting up modern *bourgeois* society”, wrote Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (16). “But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring into being” (ibid.). However, the models from antiquity that were meant to guarantee the engagement of the bourgeois revolutionaries in the service of history produced at best ridiculous caricatures. The heroic scenes appeared as parodies insofar as the struggle against the pre-bourgeois feudal order was finished and the bourgeoisie itself had become an impediment to progress.

The imminent, historically expected “social revolution of the nineteenth century” (Marx, *Brumaire* 18), in which Marx saw the proletariat functioning as the collective hero, would no longer require such reference to historical pre-figurations. The revolution's protagonists could dispense with imaginative exaltation for the purpose of self-authorization because they were

not defending traditional one-sided interests. Instead, their emancipation as a class would coincide with the emancipation of humanity as a whole. In a historical moment that saw the class struggle escalating to open war against the proletariat, however, Marx found no lack of historical pathos: “The working class”, he comments regarding the uprising of the Paris Commune,

[...] know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, and with the heroic resolve to act up to it [...]. (Marx, *Civil War* 61-62)

Where fighting and sacrifice were called for, the appeal for revolutionary heroism was not far behind. However, this heroism was different from its bourgeois counterpart in more than just its political and economic goals; it also did not require a personality cult, for it was a heroism not of great men, but of the little people, many of whom paid with their lives when the Commune was brought down. The “self-sacrificing heroism with which the population of Paris – men, women, and children – fought for eight days after the entrance of the Versaillese” revealed the “grandeur of their cause” (75).

Meanwhile, Marx had nothing but scorn for the heroic costumes of the bourgeoisie. Through his gaze, the nineteenth century's enthusiasm for great men can be understood as a story of compensation – a symptom of crisis, rather than evidence of strength. The inflated value of the hero thus appears as a final, desperate attempt by the bourgeoisie, who drew upon feudal disguises in order to arm themselves with past greatness and defend themselves against the threats of the present, and who celebrated heroic individuals in order to conceal their insignificance in the face of historical forces. The idea of the nation provided a focus for bourgeois heroisms, which subsequently mobilised large parts of the working class and distracted them from their historical mission, as would become clear at the very latest with the outbreak of the First World War.

However, the historical idealization of great individuals was also able to take root in the

socialist movement, as is documented in Georgi Plekhanov's 1898 *On the Role of the Individual in History*. In this text, the Marxist philosopher, following in Hegel's footsteps, attempts to draw a connection between heroic deeds and the laws of history:

A great man is great not because his personal qualities give individual features to great historical events, but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great social needs of his time, needs which arose as a result of general and particular causes. [...] He solves the scientific problems brought up by the preceding process of intellectual development of society; he points to the new social needs created by the preceding development of social relationships; he takes the initiative in satisfying these needs. He is a hero. (Plekhanov 59-60)

The challenge for the historical materialist lay in finding a way to acknowledge the supra-individual power of the historical process and simultaneously defend the importance of individual action. What role could the individual play when "we cannot make history and must wait while it is being made" (60)? This is a question with direct political implications: how can people who were the product of the conditions of society be able to overturn these conditions? If the development of productive powers progresses inexorably, what need is there for exceptional individuals? How can one prevent confidence in progress from turning into complacency and inaction, paralysing the revolutionary energy? Plekhanov attempted to resolve these dilemmas by identifying an instinct for what is possible and historically due as a crucial quality of the revolutionary hero. Such a person must know not only in which direction the wind is blowing, but also whether the force of the wind is sufficient, and they must remain active even during lulls when there is no wind:

But if I know in what direction social relations are changing owing to given changes in the social-economic process of production, I also know in what direction social mentality is changing; consequently, I am able to influence it. [...] Hence, in a certain sense, I *can make history*, and there is no need for me to wait while "it is being made". (61)

According to this logic, historical greatness is not expressed only in revolutionary situations:

The Enlightenment was heroism in the waiting room of history. Accordingly, any person could advance to become a historically significant individual, so long as they recognized the signs of the times and fought on the side of progress. This was a question of moral choice, rather than one of intellectual capability.

To borrow a phrase from Karl Löwith, Plekhanov regarded "history as a history of fulfilment and salvation [*Heilsgeschehen*]" (Löwith 1). This is evident, among other things, in the way that he imbues the protagonists of history with religious sanctification. Plekhanov concludes:

And it is [...] not only for 'great' men that a broad field of activity is open [...] It is open for all those who have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to love their neighbours. The concept great is a relative concept. In the ethical sense every man is great who, to use the Biblical phrase, 'lays down his life for his friend'. (Plekhanov 62)

Once again, it is ultimately sacrifice that makes one a hero: for Hegel, it was the figure of the dead soldier; for Marx, the murdered workers of the Paris Commune, and so, too, for Plekhanov, the socialist hero has the traits of a Christian martyr.

Here again, two opposing views of the fate of the heroic in modernity contend with one another. On the one hand, there is an analytical view based on the philosophy of history in which the development of society obeys knowable laws and which relegates heroic narratives to the realm of romantic mythology. On the other hand, there is a political view that appeals to the heroic individual and heroic collective as the advance guard of historical progress and tasks them with bringing the imperfectly realized modernity to completion. However, the heroes of both Plekhanov and Marx have dwindled in their roles as catalysts and have instead been degraded to mere assistants of the materialist world spirit, carrying out what the state of the productive forces requires. They are only transgressive with respect to the powers of the old world, their autonomy is limited to recognizing what is necessary, and their political task is above all to ward off fatalistic passivity. Heroizations require a certain amount of voluntarism. When history strides forward according to inexorable laws, the individual cannot demonstrate heroic prowess. Plekhanov attempts to tap into the subjective factor as a source of energy for the revolutionary struggle, but the tug of the deterministic and thus deheroizing current proves to be stronger. While he attempts to rescue the prominent individual

as an entity capable of making history, he is only able to do so if this individual acknowledges the power of history and harmonizes their activity with its movement. If post-heroic means the problematization of heroism, then the heroes of historical materialism are also post-heroic.

Several decades later, a despairing echo of socialist heroism can be heard in Ernst Bloch's apotheosis of the 'red hero' – a hero whose undaunted atheistic courage in the fight against Fascism surpasses even that of the Christian martyr: "His Good Friday is not mitigated or even cancelled out by an Easter Sunday on which he personally will be re-awakened to life" (Bloch 1172). The Communist resistance fighters are not driven by the prospect of eternal life, nor of undying fame, but rather a solidarity "extending most presently to the victims of the past, to the victors of the future" (1174). Their self-negation extends even to the public memory of them, but their death acquires meaning through its service to the collective goal. The personal consciousness merges to such a degree with the class consciousness that "to the person it is not even decisive whether he is remembered or not on the way to victory, on the day of victory" (1173). Bloch's materialist hero myth marks a position of retreat: just as confidence in progress had become diluted to the "principle of hope", so, too, it was necessary for individual fortitude to compensate for what the class had been denied. The philosopher at least paid tribute to the victims; at the end of socialist heroism, by contrast, was a disciplining programme: wherever the communist cadre took over state power, they praised their "heroes of work" as a way – they mistakenly hoped – to increase productivity norms (cf. Satjukow/Gries).

Heroic modernity

The "synergism" of the philosophy of history of Hegel and the Left Hegelians, which delegated to the rationality of historical totality those things that "actors in their limited interaction" could not accomplish even with heroic effort (Kittsteiner, *Form der Geschichte* 149), proved to be fragile. Totality, as became evident during the total warfare of the years 1914 to 1918, existed only as the reign of utter irrationality. A few decades previously, Nietzsche had already rejected the "historical optimism" and its "idolization of the necessary": "If one looks for a plan in history", he wrote in 1875, "one must look for it in the intentions of a mighty person, or perhaps of a race,

a party. Everything else is turmoil." Any attempt to teleologically order this chaotic collection of happenings is doomed to failure. Reliance on the impetus of historical forces was only an illusory hope of holding back the storm, a super-human task. In associating the absent historical telos with the "mighty person", Nietzsche hints at the following conclusion: when it is no longer possible to assume that there is such a thing as progress in an emphatic sense and that history itself assists in achieving it, then only two possible attitudes remain – "a nihilistic confrontation with the meaningless world events, a heroically and sufferingly standing firm – or a last attempt at taming it with heroic might" (Kittsteiner, *Stufen der Moderne* 46).

Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner distinguishes an epoch that he refers to as 'heroic modernity', in which this alternative dominated the historical consciousness in Germany; he dates it as lasting from ca. 1880 to 1945 (West Germany) or 1989 (East Germany) (44-45; id., *Heroische Moderne*). Kittsteiner distinguishes this period from 'stabilizing modernity', which started in the mid-seventeenth century, and 'evolutive modernity', which started around 1770 and continues to the present, but was superseded for a time by heroic modernity. While Hegel and his successors' philosophy of history had weakened the position of the hero, in spite of their enthusiasm for great men and heroic collectives, the radicalized experience of the non-directionality and arbitrariness of history as expressed by Nietzsche incited a downright inflationary demand for heroes. History was no longer a partner and ally; rather, it became an adversary, and this left a void that was susceptible for imaginings of exceptional greatness and mythical missions, of proving oneself in battle and tragic downfall. Heroic modernity meant either facing a problematic present heroically, or transcending that present heroically. In other words, heroic modernity meant stoic endurance *in* or a radical exit *from* modernity (cf. Eßbach).

Representative of the first version is Max Weber's ascetic "heroism of realism" (*Heroismus der Sachlichkeit*, Weber, *A Biography* 662-663)². Here, there is no escape from the "iron cage" (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) that the spirit of capitalism had solidified into (Weber, *Protestant Ethic* 181), but one can derive the demand to bear "like a man" the "fate of our times" with its "rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, [...] 'disenchantment of the world'", and to soberly "set to work and meet the 'demands of the day'" (Weber, *Science as a Vocation* 155-156). Weber, like others, found it difficult to accept the insight that an exodus from modernity

was impossible or only conceivable in the form of regression. His ethos of sociology as a reality-based science that “cannot tell anyone what he *should* do – but rather what he *can* do – and under certain circumstances – what he wishes to do” (Weber, *Objectivity* 54) made it impossible for him to relinquish the rigour of empirical research in favour of a discourse of empowerment that was not supported by the facts (as consoling as it may have been). Apart from the unacceptable options (for him) of apologist whitewashing, revolutionary illusion, avowal of an ethics of conviction, or critical lamentations about the decline of culture, the only path that remained was to calmly face the unalterable without allowing oneself to be shattered by it. “[F]or it is weakness”, he claimed in his lecture *Science as a Vocation*, “not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times” (Weber, *Science as a Vocation* 149). This ascetic pathos also includes the recognition of the irreversible specialization of modern science that distorted any access to the whole. The greatness of the historical researcher was therefore measured by his readiness to passionately immerse himself in the smallest details:

And whoever lacks the capacity to put on blinders, so to speak, and to come up to the idea that the fate of his soul depends upon whether or not he makes the correct conjecture at this passage of this manuscript may as well stay away from science. (135; cf. Thomé)

More powerful than Weber’s heroism of endurance, particularly after the First World War, was a militant heroism that both decisively embraced modernity and simultaneously hoped to leave behind its contradictions once and for all. To this end, this militant heroism demanded an unfettered will to power and unreserved readiness for self-sacrifice. In a book of reflections entitled *Dämmerung: Notizen in Deutschland*,³ composed between 1926 and 1931 and published in 1934, Max Horkheimer identifies a cult of brutality as the ideological centre of the “heroic world view”, even while – symptomatic, perhaps, of the discursive power of the heroic code in the inter-war period – he affirmed a positive counter-model of “real” heroism:

The fight against individualism, the belief that the individual must sacrifice himself so that the totality may live fits in perfectly with the current situation. In contrast to the real hero, this generation is not filled with enthusiasm for a clear goal, but it is

enthusiastic in its determination to attain it. The ruling class in Germany could hardly have wished for anything better than that the strata is ruined would constitute its own vanguard and aspire not even to the sparse pay but to sacrifice, or at least to devotion and discipline. True heroism is unmindful of its own interests but passionately concerned with a socially significant value. The heroic world view, on the other hand, is ready to sacrifice its own life, but takes that life as its most important theme. (Horkheimer 37-38)

An example of this worldview, whose adherents “in practice generally are more concerned with killing than being killed” (345), can be found in Ernst Jünger’s writings from the 1920s and early 1930s, which in the name of “heroic realism” (Jünger, *Heroischer Realismus*)⁴ invoked “total mobilization” (Jünger, *Totale Mobilmachung* [1930]).⁵ Jünger imagined the emergence of unlimited state power, cleansed of all dissonances, in which military destruction and industrial production become one. Even if, semantically, the terms ‘heroism of realism’ and ‘heroic realism’ seem related – both utilize a dramatic rhetoric of inevitability – Jünger’s calls for an expansion of the battle zone that had already been widened during the war have little in common with Weber’s stoic outlook on a world dominated by occidental rationalization processes. Where Weber advocates for an ethos of responsibility instead of moral principled politics, Jünger postulates an avowedly amoral military ethos. Weber’s heroes are virtuosos of sober endurance, while Jünger’s are cold enthusiasts of a general battle that has become the sole source of meaning in life.

Jünger’s heroic realism stems from his interpretation that the First World War was the first instance of total war. However, his heroic realism also blames Germany’s defeat in the war on society’s lack of sufficient focus on the war effort – in other words, the failure of all forces of society to totalize. The logical contradiction of a war that is simultaneously total and not total constitutes the ideological driving force of Jünger’s mobilization prose: what he declares to be a symptom of the present was meant to win over his contemporaries to an unconditional and unlimited preparedness to serve, obey and sacrifice in future wars. The attribute ‘total’ marked an absolute reference point that endowed all expectations with the quality of something incontrovertible and interminable. The total mobilization was, in his view, obligatory because it gave voice to the character of the era. It was “expression of a mysterious and compulsory requirement to

which this life subjects us in the age of masses and machines” and therefore was “much less [something that was] carried out than [something that] enacts itself” (Jünger, *Totale Mobilmachung* [1930] 15). Following the postulate of completely charting, logically arranging, and exhaustively exploiting all social and technological resources, the soldier and worker could be amalgamated into a single entity. It was no longer enough to merely “equip the sword arm”; rather, there was a need for “arming into the very marrow, into the deepest lifeblood” (14). The nation was to transform into an engine, and every individual was to contribute the greatest possible quantum of energy to it. No one, not even “the child in the cradle”, was exempt from this (id., *Totale Mobilmachung* [1934] 131).⁶ Whether the mobilization of society took place in the name of total warfare or total work was ultimately unimportant, because the reign of machines meant that the two would become indistinguishable.

Jünger was by no means blind to the crisis of traditional military heroism. In the mechanized battles of the First World War, technology and organization trumped personal courage, the fighting strength of the soldier was no longer an “individual, but rather a functional value”, and, even in death, the individual was interchangeable – “one no longer falls, one falls out of service” (id., *Arbeiter* 106). With the contempt of the trench soldier for those safe behind the lines, Jünger derided “the foolish drivel of the papers, the tired phrases about heroes and heroic death” (id., *In Stahlgewittern* 9);⁷ however, he responded to this devaluing of the hero not by rejecting the concept, but by radicalizing and generalizing the heroic. A heroism appropriate for the times could no longer be limited to the exceptional greatness of a few; it required total exertion by all. It was not an honour bestowed for extraordinary accomplishments, but a perpetual duty for everyone. Nevertheless, this heroism was anything but egalitarian. It manifested itself either in the form of the leader-figure who deployed himself and others, or in the anonymity of the deployed masses (cf. von Martin). At the edges of the lines of the trenches, in the mobile war zones and the attacks of assault troops, there were opportunities, particularly for officers, to distinguish themselves as military role models. The heroism of the trench warfare, by contrast, demanded unflinching endurance in the death zone and subordination to the machines.

The prototype of the new hero was the figure of the front-line fighter. Jünger elevated him to the most authentic form of a humanity that had overcome the fractures of pre-war modernity. The front-line fighter had experienced hell in

the trenches: “very well, it is in the nature of the Faustian man to not even return from Hell with empty hands”, and thus he “fully recognized the value of man [...] for the first time in the terrible-ness of the sacrifice” (Jünger, *Vorwort* X). His heroism consisted of mimesis of the machinery of war – a process of assimilation that extended into one’s very physiognomy. In this incarnation of militarized masculinity, futuristic modernity merged with mythical archaism. During the course of the war, the visage of the man beneath the steel helmet, Jünger suggested, had gained in clarity and resoluteness what it had lost in individuality:

It has become more metallic, the surface galvanized, the bone structure is more prominent, the features are sharply defined and tense. The gaze is calm and fixed, trained through viewing objects that must be assessed while in states of high velocity. (id., *Arbeiter* 107-108)

The technologization of warfare – that is, the substitution of human workers and fighters with machines – as well as the unfettered, depersonalized violence that came with this, did not, in Jünger’s view, create a deheroizing dynamic that precluded individual heroic deeds; rather, the technology provided a model and framework for the new form of heroism that was required. To mobilize oneself meant, on the one hand, becoming a machine-like instrument of mechanized armament; on the other, it meant directing the apparatus as a general commands his troops. In the fusion of man and machine, the loss of human agency is reversed and, instead, human agency appears immeasurably heightened:

The war of the machines is so mighty that man nearly disappears before it. [...] And yet: behind it all is man. He gives the machines their direction and meaning. He sends shells, explosives, and poison shooting from them. He ascends in them as a raptor above the enemy. He crouches in their bellies when they pound across the battlefield breathing fire. He is the most dangerous, most blood-thirsty, and most determined being that the Earth is to carry. (id., *Kampf* 112)

This monstrous new hero not only placed his own life at risk – whether charging forward or holding the line – he was also distinguished by his ability to destroy the lives of others with great efficiency.

Such self-abnegation in the form of pure fighting energy was impossible without religious pathos. And since every person was only important to the degree that they killed without mercy and sacrificed themselves unreservedly, at the centre of this hero cult was a glorification of death. More important than the goal of the battle was the unconditional pursuing of the cause. While Hegel had declared the fallen soldier an embodiment of the highest morality because he had given his life for “the independence and sovereignty of the state” (Hegel, *Recht* 192), the sacrifice of Jünger’s worker and soldier heroes was no more than decisionist radicality of subjective will. As Jünger concludes his essay on total mobilization, the hero’s death is both a journey of self-discovery and a realization of national collectivity:

[D]eep below the regions in which the dialectic of the war’s goals is of importance [...] the German meets a more powerful force: he meets himself. Thus, this war was also and especially a means for him to realize himself. And therefore the new armament, in which we have already long been involved, must be a mobilization of the German – and nothing beyond that. (Jünger, *Totale Mobilmachung* [1934] 30)

Here, the heroic individual and the heroic collective stand in a relationship of mutual reinforcement: individual duty and the determination of the nature of the nation had become one, for “then as today to be German means: to be in battle” (id., *Heroischer Realismus* 557). Only through plunging into this battle and sacrificing themselves did individuals come to be the apotheosis of the *Volk* that their sacrifice was to serve and justify.

Among the protagonists of heroic modernity, Jünger’s essayistic writings from the 1920s and early 1930s show most clearly the corollary that whoever calls for heroes does so in order to mobilize, and whoever mobilizes requires heroes. The imperative mode dominates all other aspects. Heroism is seen as a power reserve that gains its energy by activating individuals’ readiness to die and kill, in order to “infinitely draw out the perspective of utility” (id., *Totale Mobilmachung* [1934] 13). In the same way that all desire to ascend to the status of heroes, they are also degraded to mere human material. In Jünger’s radicalized logic of maximal exploitation, the universalized syndrome of battle-as-work or work-as-battle is hypermodern. His heroic modernity has no *telos* and does not offer any promise; it is highly threatening to the individual, for it erases individuality and replaces it with a de-personalized type. He describes history not just

as a force that is as inevitable as destiny and that would be fruitless to oppose, he also calls for placing oneself unconditionally in its service. Heroic realism is nothing other than this anticipatory obedience of the modern subject, which attempts to compensate for its disempowerment by helping to foster that which threatens to destroy it. Interpreted psychoanalytically, it is an identification with the overpowering aggressor. Jünger preaches a heroism of the absurd, with its objective impossibility being the very thing that demonstrates the subjective greatness of the hero, who, as Harald Müller suggests, is to prove himself in battle situations

which cannot be understood in terms of any heroic interpretive formula, because the death that could happen at any time does not provide any meaning: not in terms of the outcome of the battle, not in terms of the opponent, not in terms of the immortalization of one’s name, not in terms of the homeland which does not take note of it. (Müller 232)

There are echoes here of Nietzsche’s *amor fati*, hardened into a duty to say yes unconditionally. However, Jünger’s “new race of heroes” (Kosłowski 56) has little in common with its celebration of the “sovereign individual” that has freed itself from the “morality of custom” (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 36; cf. Kittsteiner, *Nietzsches souveränes Individuum*) and it resists the “herd instinct” of the masses. Like Nietzsche, Jünger abhors the liberal idea of progress and its deheroizing urge to bring all down to the same level. However, Jünger does not offer the alternative of “the sense of being noble, of willing to be for oneself, of being able to be different, of standing alone, and of having to live by one’s own initiative” (Nietzsche, *Good and Evil* §212) – in short, an aristocratic “pathos of distance” (id., *Genealogy* 91). Instead, he goes one step further than the liberal myth of modernity and offers an extremist one, in which the heroic sacrifice is generalized as a sign of unlimited readiness to work and fight.

Jünger’s writings from *In Stahlgewittern* to *Der Arbeiter* represent the nationalist version of heroic modernity. He distanced himself from the National Socialists from 1929 onwards, claiming that the mass movement was not radical enough for him (Berggötz 859). Consequently, scholars debate whether he should be considered an adherent of a “conservative revolution” (Breuer, *Konservative Revolution*), “martial nationalism” (Prümm), “planetary imperialism” (Breuer, *Deutsche Rechte* 127-129), “militarism of

conviction" (*Gesinnungsmilitarismus*, Schwarz 59), "militant modernism" (Brennecke), or "Prussian Leninism" (Schwarz 78-79). Despite this, there is no doubt that his programme of total mobilization was fascist. His invocation of heroic existence differed from the Nazi hero cult mostly in its position regarding race. Hitler and his followers derived the German people's calling to collective heroism from their supposed racial superiority, and they made the contrast with the enemy, 'the Jew', a central element of their propaganda. Jünger, however, rejected the idea of a biologically based racial hierarchy, and anti-Semitism did not play a prominent role in his writings (Breuer 89-90; for a detailed study of the National Socialist concept of heroism see Behrenbeck). However, in their focus on death as a way of demonstrating heroism, which included both the justification of ruthless killing and the call for willingness to sacrifice oneself unconditionally, Jünger and the Nazis were in agreement.

While the effects of Jünger's heroic prose were largely in the journalistic sphere, the Nazis made their version of heroic realism into a bloody reality. Hannah Arendt has observed how totalitarian regimes are not characterized by any specific ideology, but rather by the way in which their ideological claims are taken seriously and followed to their logical conclusions; they are embedded into a "stringent logicity as a guide to action" (Arendt 472). Following this thesis, Jünger's polemics, notwithstanding their divergences from the ideology of Hitler and his disciples, can be read *ex post* as a script for the formation and functioning of the total state, which preceded the implementation of the National Socialist government apparatus and their concrete rearmament and militarization measures but, in a general sense, anticipated their trajectory.

The Nazi hero cult as death cult fuelled imaginings of German greatness; it helped to reframe the nation's defeat in 1918 as a historical responsibility and drew on the yearning for devotion to a heroic leader. With its glorification of battle and its exaggerated image of the enemy, the hero cult also functioned as a perception filter that neutralized possible doubts. This filter prepared the way for the unparalleled brutality perpetrated in the war of extermination and the murder of the Jews, and in the treatment of war prisoners and the civilian population of the conquered regions (Behrenbeck 596). Becoming heroic was not least a matter of becoming hardened.

As the war continued and the likelihood of German defeat became more and more evident, the self-destructive dynamics of the Nazi hero myth also manifested themselves all the more

clearly. Not *in spite of* the fact that the final victory – and with it, the fulfilment of the historical mission – remained unattainable, but precisely *because of this*, the German people were supposed to keep fighting according to the will of their Führer so that they might at least prove their heroism in defeat. For the National Socialists, other than Hegel and Marx, history did not have a fixed trajectory that could be accelerated by the heroic action of 'world historical individuals' or a revolutionary class. Rather, the National Socialists saw history as an endless battle without ceasefire or peace treaties, in which the only alternatives were victory or death, and in which the heroes who had already fallen in battle served to inspire the living to imitate their example. Because heroism was the highest duty for the Germans and was characterized by unconditional willingness to die and kill, any attempt to save one's own skin was considered an undermining of military morale (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*).

However, the meaning that this hero cult was meant to create lost much of its compelling power in the end phase of the war:

The heroic myth of self-sacrifice for the collective was forcibly extended *ad absurdum* to its logical conclusion, without tying the sacrificed to a value that was unavailable. As an interpretation of the meaning of life experiences it became unattractive, as an aid for dealing with death experiences it appeared unsuitable. The paradigm of the heroic individual death did not prove successful in the face of a sustained, mass-scale life-threatening situation. Absolutization as collective sacrifice went against the pragmatic desire of the people to survive. (597)

With the victory of the Allied forces, this heroism, which was already stretched to its limits, collapsed; the only element that was preserved in the post-war period was the idea of sacrifice, which transformed from a heroic demand into a plaintive self-description (the sacrificial victim). Post-war Germans did not want to be heroes any more, and instead they saw themselves as the victims of the victorious powers as well as of the Nazis, whom they felt had deceived them and who, of course, were always the other, never oneself or one's family.

According to Kittsteiner's epochal categorization, heroic modernity ended in West Germany in 1945, apart from the occasional attempts to revive it that lasted into the 1950s. In East Germany by contrast, as in the other states of the Soviet bloc, it persisted, though deeply fractured, until

1989. The realization of socialism also required the mobilization of heroic forces, with the help of terrorist means when necessary. However, the socialist hero cult stood not under the auspices of a final battle declared historically necessary. Instead, it reacted to the forced industrialization within the global economic and ideological rivalry between East and West. In spite of the forcibly accelerated armament production and a degree of militarization of everyday life that was considerably rife in the East than in the West, the prototypical hero of Real Socialism during the Cold War years was not the soldier, but the worker. Heroic modernity of the Eastern variety was fractured insofar as it coupled heroic voluntarism with historical determinism:

On the one hand history was hostile, and it was necessary to confront it heroically. On the other hand its conformity to rules – only recognizable through Marxist-Leninist science – filled the heroes with devout assurance. (Kittsteiner, *Gebrochene Heroisierung* 455)

In East Germany, the historical break created by Nazism could not be completely smoothed over, even if the official historiography attempted to dialectically categorize it as a precondition for the foundation of the socialist state on German soil.

Kittsteiner's periodization, drawing on the philosophy of history, interprets heroic modernity above all as a response to the collapse of teleological concepts of the future. The radicalized experience of the contingency of a meaningless historical process elicited either stoic-enduring or militant heroisms, which after the First World War were met with particular resonance in Germany and became radicalized into a totalitarian syndrome of fighting and sacrifice. This 'heroism gone haywire', which summoned each and every German to military heroism in order to set in motion a racist politics of destruction, could not be halted by its own power even when the military superiority of the Allied powers was unmistakable and any attempt to continue the fight was paramount to self-destruction. This logic of escalation and one-upmanship is what made the Nazi mobilization of the heroic a modern phenomenon, rather than a pre or anti-modern behaviour pattern. Kittsteiner then interprets heroic modernity as a temporary deviation from the "evolutive modernity" that preceded it and emerged once again after its demise – a modernity sustained by a belief in progress based on the economic dynamics of the world market (id., *Stufen der Moderne* 53).

The limitation of this model stems from its narrow focus on German history, which ignores

the temporal disparities and contrary developments in other countries and parts of the world. In the victorious nations of the Western Bloc, there was no sign of an abandonment of military heroism after the end of World War II. The fallen soldiers and the veterans of the 'good war' could be counted among the nation's heroes and included in an unbroken military tradition without any difficulty. In the USA, the UK and France, heroic modernity had not assumed as excessive a form as in Germany, but it also ended in these countries much less abruptly and it lives on in a diluted fashion today. For the former colonies, on the other hand, heroic modernity only entered into play with the national struggles for independence in the 1950s and 1960s, as is reflected in the numerous anti-colonial hero figures from this time.

Deheroizing modernity

It is hardly surprising that there was initially little desire for hero stories in West Germany in the early post-war period. After the collapse of Nazism and its ideology in 1945, the idea of the heroic in general seemed contaminated. Even the remembrance of those who had died in the war and the mass extermination campaigns could hardly be integrated into a hero cult: a retroactive heroization of those killed by the Nazis was improbable in Germany in any case. The former perpetrators, in turn, had been so morally discredited as faithful servants of a criminal regime that they were not suitable material for becoming posthumous heroes. Instead, they were recognized under a generalized category of "victims of war and dictatorship" and the Day of Commemoration of Heroes (*Heldengedenktag*) of the Nazi period was renamed the People's Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*; cf. Kaiser). Any contention revolved around the issue of how to honour the men and women who had been executed for their participation in the resistance. To some, they were symbolic of the survival of moral integrity, and yet, as heroes who had tragically failed, they seemed at the same time to demonstrate the futility of acting against the regime and to reaffirm the choice of the ordinary German to go along with it passively. Others flatly condemned them as traitors to their country (cf. Baur). In general, during the economic miracle and the manic eagerness to rebuild, there was little enthusiasm for hearing about the past war and its heroes. More appealing were civilian forms of proving oneself, such as sports, with

the most prominent example being the ‘heroes of Bern’, the members of the national football team who secured the 1954 World Cup victory for West Germany.

Opposing these symbols of national greatness (at first deeply yearned for, and later reclaimed) were the ambiguous, contradictory hero figures that Georg Baselitz presented in a series of large-format artworks in the 1960s, which seemed like the phantoms of the past that had been so painstakingly buried. The series, which was exhibited for the first time in Hamburg in 1973 as a group of works entitled *Ein neuer Typ* (A New type), evokes in a provocative fashion the brokenness of the old type of hero:

Their figures, always male, claim a clear position of dominance in the image, but the sparse formats force them into the restriction of narrow boundaries; the costumes, attributes, and landscapes suggest historical events, but compositionally they are completely dehistoricized; their bodies, frequently endowed with too-small heads, are of powerful vitality, yet swaying and with awkward unease the figures seem trapped within themselves; their bearing is martial only at the first glance, ultimately their visual existence is defined by woundedness, uncertainty, and powerlessness. (Fleckner 51)

Such damaged heroes are not suitable for memorial calendars and representative spaces of remembrance, nor for serving as icons of political protest. In Baselitz’s forceful images, heroic modernity reaches its aesthetic end point. The task of breaking free of this was left to another aesthetic vision, where, in the medium of literature, heroes and their injuries could be left behind with ironic ease.

No one has observed the post-war German abandonment of the excesses of heroism more acutely or welcomed it more emphatically than Hans Magnus Enzensberger. In his essays, he sketches another modernity that is unlike the one that Weber calls us to endure heroically, and unlike the imperative of mobilization that Jünger heeds. To describe the aggregate condition of the present, Enzensberger chooses not the metallic hardness of the “steel-hard casing” or the “Storm of Steel”, but the metaphor of “purée” (Enzensberger, *Konsequenz*).⁸ While this produces a notable “yearning for the definite”, the amorphous consistency cannot be mastered with perseverance and a “pathos of decisiveness”: “One cannot fight the porridge to the bitter end – it is too yielding; one cannot refute it – it

is too tough; one cannot get rid of it – it is too voluminous. But one does not die from porridge.” There is thus no more a call for self-sacrifice than there is for other rigid principles. Enzensberger recommends to his compatriots instead the “joys of inconsistency”, and he defends normality and praises mediocrity and opportunism as civilizational accomplishments (13, 11, 15, 27, 18; id., *Normality*; id., *Mediocrity and Delusion*). As written by Enzensberger in the early 1980s, uncompromising heroes, unable and unwilling to do anything by half measures, led the world to the brink of the abyss, and the “only chance to survive” henceforth consists of a completely unheroic practice of muddling through:

Bad times for charismatic hero-patriarchs and true Führer figures. Fortunately Really Great Men are nowhere to be found. World politics increasingly resemble a repair shop in which worried mechanics, bent over sputtering engines, scratch their heads and ponder how they could make their clunkers roadworthy again. (The bills are correspondingly high.) Alexander the Great would be as out of place here as Napoleon or Stalin. (id., *Konsequenz* 19–20)

At the end of his programmatic article on the *Stages of Modernity* (*Stufen der Moderne*) from 2003, Kittsteiner leaves open the question of whether deheroization will be permanent, or whether “a new ‘heroism’ unfolding in the framework of other cultures and religions” is coming into being after 9/11, possibly as a reaction to the subjectless violence of the unfettered world market (Kittsteiner, *Stufen der Moderne* 53). In any case, the end of heroic modernity is not, for him, synonymous with the beginning of a post-heroic era; one would search in vain for the descriptor ‘post-heroic’ in the writings of this historian who died in 2008 (the same is true, as it happens, for the writings of Enzensberger). He makes it clear that there have always been heroes and that they continue to exist, even outside of his epochal category that is based only on Germany. Kittsteiner vehemently disagrees with the idea that not just the heroic version of modernity, but modernity as a whole has worn itself out. Against those who proclaim the era of fragmented postmodernity, he holds fast to the vision of the unity of history and argues for a new “great narrative”, in which capital is the automatic subject (the world market as a restored world spirit). Because it makes do without teleological backing, this narrative should, he thinks, also be able to do without the justification of human sacrifice

as collateral damage of progress and without the heroic appeals connected to it (id., *Fragmentierung der Geschichte*).

By understanding heroic modernity as a deviation, Kittsteiner implicitly draws on the line of argument created by Hegel, which starts from the fundamental antiquatedness of heroes in modern society and sees them as unavoidable only in periods of war and crisis. Hegel demonstrated this in the context of the institution of law, which embeds the actions of the individual within a comprehensive system of rules. The deheroizing dynamics can, however, also be shown for other processes that are constitutive of modernity, such as democratic participation, marketization, mechanization, the weakening of the individual in mass society, and the erosion of traditional models of masculinity.

But this does not mean that heroes disappear. Quite the contrary: they may intrude into the present erratically as relics of bygone eras, but the heroic formula has proven flexible enough to hold its own today. The figures change and there continues to be no lack of replacements. They may disturb the post-heroic order, but it is precisely the excessive demands of this order that maintain the need for hero stories.

Hero figures, new and revived, populate the worlds of comics, films, and computer games, and competitive sports also deliver a constant supply of new personnel. Rescuers during catastrophes are declared heroes, as are peace and human-rights activists and whistle-blowers. Admirers revere political freedom fighters such as Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, Mahatma Gandhi and the anonymous Tank Man who stood alone against the approaching tanks in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989. What is notable about this new humanist heroism is the way that it is no longer linked to fulfilment of duty or loyalty; rather, the new heroes are characterized by nonconformity and insubordination. Heroic courage becomes civic courage. This is paralleled with the democratization and banalization of the heroic. In the end, anyone can become a hero – even if only for the brief “fifteen minutes of fame” conjured up by Andy Warhol to describe the possibilities of the era of mass media. One can view this critically as a trivialization, but one can also see in it a healing detoxification of the heroic: letting some of the air out of overinflated hero figures and ironically playing with their symbols is a more humane approach than dispensing exhortations to heroically “stay the course”.

However, with the rise of populist leaders, another heroic type is returning to the political stage: the loud-mouthed lout who takes the spotlight in order to rally the establishment to clean

out the national Augean stables and lead the country to new greatness. Not a father figure who embodies the authority of the law, but the ring-leader of a horde of brothers who rise up against the legally established authorities because they are not authoritarian enough for him. This figure invokes a violent world in which strength is all that matters and only those who show no mercy have a chance to come out on top. To his adherents, he promises not safety and prosperity, but emotional venting: whoever follows him can let out their feelings with impunity on those who are weaker. The posturing of these folk heroes draws its inspiration from the mafia film: the offensive display of one’s own wealth, a habitus somewhere between that of a business tycoon, a people’s tribune, and a military commander, as well as aggressive machismo with sexualized masculine posturing meant to signal – not just to women – that the patron can do whatever he wants.

These figures cannot be dismissed as anachronisms any more than the heroes of civic courage can. Rather, it is in such antagonistic hero models, and even more in the collision of heroic and post-heroic principles, that the conflicts and fault lines of contemporary modernity are rendered visible.

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¹ The subheading is borrowed from Früchtl, *Das unver-schämte Ich* 67. Additionally, the following discussion has been greatly enriched by Früchtl’s readings of Hegel.

² Marianne Weber quotes Jörg von Kapher, a student of Weber’s: “He was realistic [*sachlich*] through and through. The full heroism of realism which presumably is the heroism of our age, came alive in him. And that is why his *Sachlichkeit* was such an inexhaustible experience. That is why his practical discussions, his lectures were like works of art – not in form, but in their essence. [...] The important thing was not what he said about a subject, but the subject itself seemed to come before us in its inexhaustibility, and he was its interpreter” (Weber, *A Biography* 662-663).

³ Published in English as part of the collection *Dawn and Decline* (1978), from which the passage below is quoted.

⁴ The term can be traced back to Werner Best, who defines the corresponding attitude as “affirmation of fighting a lost battle for a lost cause”: “What counts is fighting well, not the ‘good cause’ and the success” (Best 152). For more on this trope, see Merlio.

⁵ The following discussion draws on reflections that I have previously published elsewhere; see Bröckling.

- 6 The cited passage is not included in the original version of the mobilization essay published in 1930.
- 7 On Jünger's transformation of the image of the hero, see also Gamper.
- 8 Enzensberger's essay "Das Ende der Konsequenz" was first published in the 1982 collection *Politische Brosamen*. The central metaphor of the original German essay is the image of 'purée' (*Püree*) respectively 'porridge' (*Brei*), describing a general state of intellectual mediocrity and complacency in 1980s Germany. While the collection has been translated into English as *Political Crumbs* (1990), the English volume does not contain a direct translation of this particular essay but replaces it with a revised version entitled "Second Thoughts on Consistency". This version conveys the core idea of the original but drops the metaphor of 'purée' entirely. Passages from the original 1982 essay which are not included in the 1990 translation are therefore quoted here in a translation by the author.

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