Hero

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1. Definition – the hero as 'heroic figure'

Attempts to capture the terms 'hero(ine)' and 'heroic' in supertemporal and essentialist definitions are rooted in a subliminal need and seem obvious due to the persistence and topicality of the subject. However, heroic properties (and their theoretical analyses) are, as a vast number of studies on the subject shows, specific to a culture, group and era. To date, all-encompassing definitions have not been able to reflect this historicity. Against this background, a heuristic working definition and delimitation of the concept appear sensible and necessary.

The definition of hero(ine) proposed herein is based on an understanding of 'heroic' as a culturally constructed, relational and processual phenomenon: hero(in)es substantially contribute to the establishment of collectively potent models of order, are created subject to certain social and historical

conditions and are represented in various media. This understanding directs our attention towards the processes of heroization and heroism, i.e., firstly, towards the question of how a real (living or dead) person or a fictional character becomes a hero(ine) of a collective and, secondly, towards the collective guidance from and adoption of conduct considered heroic. Heroization and heroism occur within the framework of communicative processes that serve not only the social functionalisation of the heroic, but also have their own dynamic and creative power.[1]

The terms 'hero' or 'heroine' refer to individuals (or groups)

> 1) who are implicitly presented as heroic figures or explicitly designated as a 'hero', 'héros', 'Held' etc.;

> 2) to whom a heroic deed, i.e. an extraordinary, agonal achievement exceeding the human norm, is attributed;

> 3) who are ascribed a special presence, an auratic 'radiance', a 'charismatic' affect in connection with invoking that deed, but often also because of their appearance and/or their behaviour;

> 4) and who in the course of which are admired or adored by a community of followers ('*gefolgschaftlich*' – M. Weber)[2] of whatever size because they uniquely embody that community's unifying values.[3]

> 5) This admiration/adoration seems paradoxical insofar as individuals designated as hero(in)es do not assimilate into the community without complication. On the contrary, in committing their deed (and in ways going beyond that) they transgress certain norms of conduct held by the community. Hence, they stand at a transgressive distance to the everyday: '*il n'y a pas de héros dans la proximité*'.[4] The qualities attributed to hero(in)es are an expression of collective needs despite or, rather, precisely because of their transgressive character. They are historically variable and must satisfy the criterion of veridicality, which is the case if the individual adored as a hero(ine) is considered sufficiently suited to constitute a "*Gestalt*-like focal point" of a collective ('gestalthafter Fokus eines Kollektivs' – H. Plessner).[5]

> 6) Because hero(in)es are persons, they are characterised by elementary human qualities, all extraordinariness and transgressiveness notwithstanding: while hero(in)es may be idolised and/or deified, they nevertheless share with common humans corporal and emotional properties, agency and the capacity to feel pain.

On the one hand, this core definition describes a relational framework and specifies the necessary conditions for a (real of fictional) individual to be designated a hero(ine). On the other hand, it points to typological properties such as *exceptionality*, *affective potential*, *agonality*, *transgressiveness* and *strong agency* that are attributed to heroic figures in the course of the constitutive processes of heroization.[6]

The variety and heterogeneity of heroic phenotypes in the European tradition from antiquity to the beginning of the 20th century, however, results from a combination of additional characteristics. These accidental characteristics of the heroic can be described as a kind of family resemblance, i.e. as a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing".[7] In them, the historical variability of manifestations of the heroic is expressed, on the one hand, and on the other hand the generic similarity guarantees the coherence of the subject matter. Attributions such as 'overcoming adversity', 'sacrificing oneself willingly', 'protecting / saving / liberating others' and 'having virtue / honour / generosity' can thereby give a concrete form to the heroic relational framework (human person, superhuman achievement / deed, charisma / allure, admiration, transgression).

The accidental attributions do not just reflect the variety that there is in the heroic. They are instead the key to precisely discerning cultural as well as historical differences between hero(ine) constructs. Moreover, the meaning of the heroic can only be understood in relation to and in distinguishing from other forms of the exceptional such as the superhuman-outstanding or the merely exemplary, the divine, the holy or the generally admired, but also to and from antitheses such as the everyday and the 'anti-hero'.[8] Therefore, heroic figures can be explained only within the framework of this complex web of interrelation between family resemblances in their historical conditionality and simultaneous persistence. That web must be explained in further detail.

2. Symbolic character and appellative power

Taking a stance on hero(in)es is obligatory: heroic figures are unifying elements of cultural systems of meaning. They offer a *Gestalt*-like surface on which to project collective desires, ideals and values, but also conflicts and contrarian needs. Heroizations and heroisms nevertheless elude clear definitions of their functional purposes; they yield unplanned and idiosyncratic surplus meanings, unexpected effects and divergent reactions. Hero(in)es are therefore social resonance phenomena that allow considerable potential for the imagination.

Sociology's theory of institutions provides an explanatory model for the function and impact of heroic figures. According to this theory, the systems and institutions of social rule are only able to gain legitimacy and survive if they are made 'visible' and convincingly communicated through symbolisations. Symbolisations can occur in different forms: for example, through pure 'representative symbols' or through 'symbols of presence', which represent with greater immediacy that which is absent. In the latter sense, the symbol serves as a 'marker of a shared identity'. 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".[9] These symbols of presence consist not only of rites and rituals, which have attracted more and more attention in scholarship recently, 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" of a society, which relies on them to assure itself of its identity and set of values.[10] Symbols serve as way of identifying an affiliation (already implicated in the meaning of the Greek word *symbolon*).[11] According to Gehlen's theory of institutions, they also enable relief and a certainty of what to expect, thereby providing a stabilising effect.[12] 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.[13] It has long been assumed that heroic figures emerge especially in crises of adaptation, when social orders erode or are not yet fully established.[14] 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 harmonisation".[15] They allow "the dissonances of contradiction to be transformed into aesthetic consonances" in an especially effective way.[16] 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".[17] 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".[18]

Unlike many other symbolisations, heroes also oscillate between acting as human individuals and being ascribed superhuman achievement, between confounding and stabilising 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.[19] 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.[20] 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 medialisation.

3. 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".[21] Following approaches of media theory, we propose that medialisation develops a dynamic of its own in the composition of the meaning of the heroic.[22] The representation of heroic figures in different media has an institutionalising power. We therefore analyse 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'[23], 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 medialised

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.[24] 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' (borrowing from the term 'language of discourse' coined by John Pocock[25]).

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.[26] Heroes make an impact through 'embodiment' and through their 'aura'. Their influence unfolds through their immediate 'presence' and aesthetic intensity[27], rather than through conceptual signification. 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. The distinctive contribution of media and their materiality to the formation of meaning has increasingly gained attention in media and cultural studies.[28] 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.[29]

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[30]; 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.

4. Historical overview

In the *longue durée* of the heroic phases of radical change, critical intensification and reorientation can be identified. In these situations of transformation traditional and new heroizations, heroisms and different social forms of appropriating the heroic collided. Moreover, concepts of the heroic originating from different eras coexist and superimpose on each other such that the notion of 'sediments of time' ('Zeitschichten' – R. Koselleck)[31] attains analytical significance (see Temporal Structures of the Heroic). Without the plurality of heroisms, which has resulted from criticism,

differentiation and negation, the manifold complementary phenomena of the heroic, the conflicts and competition, the deheroizations and anti-heroisms, which have received too little attention in scholarship to date, cannot be understood. They can be regarded as significant indicators and factors of the transformation processes through which the notions and terms of the 'hero' changed again and again.

4.1. Antiquity

The hero(in)es that developed in the early period of Greek history by the 8th/7th century before Christ are characterised by a semantic vagueness unfamiliar to modern understandings of the heroic: the humans of the 'grand' past were called *heroes*, whose frequently agonal, martial deeds were imagined as 'intentional history' in *mythoi*. However, the term *heroes* was also used to describe religious figures who were often revered in the funerary cult, represented local identities and stood between gods and humans. A third semantic component arose in the 5th century before Christ from the fact that outstanding individuals of the present such as prominent athletes could also be approximated to *heroes*. However, it was not until a new sociopolitical situation emerged that a fundamental change in the understanding of the heroic occurred: with the establishment of monarchically ruled territorial empires, Alexander the Great and his successors, who were called charismatic rulers, asserted their legitimacy through explicit imitation of *heroes*[32], but also by instituting new formulas of representation by which the ruler was singled out. However, the reference to extraordinariness was in conflict with the kings' aspirations for presence in ordinary life; their sacralisation through god-equivalent adoration stood in contrast to their appearance and their (re)presentation which was modelled on *heroes* adored in a completely different way in the public sphere.[33] In the Hellenistic successor states, specific traditions of deifying the monarch arose in some cases as well. Alexander himself created a heroism model linked to the person of the ruler, but initially unrelated to familiar *heroes* imagery. Moreover, he himself became the object of an *imitatio heroica*.[34]

With the heroisms of Hellenistic monarchs, the military elements of the heroic intensified, which pointed to a need for new forms of legitimation. But it was not until roughly two generations after Alexander's death that the heroic potential of his persona was used to legitimate political rule through (partial) approximation and identification (or even differentiation). However, these processes also yielded an intensified aesthetic effect, which allowed the Alexander code to become routine, a semantically reduced fad and a pictorial cliché by the 2nd century before Christ; explicit references to him were only seldom recognisable even in other *heroes* imagery. The transfer of Alexander imagery into new, non-Greek cultural spaces simultaneously led to specific adaptation processes. Social elites were beginning to also set themselves apart by invoking and comparing themselves to *heroes* while, in the funerary cult, the term *heros* was used for nearly every deceased citizen – an initial tendency of 'embourgeoisement' was manifesting itself. Latin, however, had no term of its own for *heros*, which permits the inference that the heroic in Rome constituted a guiding principle primarily as an exemplary quality relating to specific conduct and not a religious quality.

4.2. The middle ages

With Europe in late antiquity and in the early middle ages being strongly influenced by Christianity, the suffering Christ appeared as a model of ascetic-heroic self-denial and of the transgression of death, a model that was propagated for example as an exemplary ideal in the *imitatio Christi* of the saints and paradigmatically in the figure of the martyr.[35] However, even given this new underlying situation, older concepts of heroism, some also rooted in pre-Christian notions (for instance that of the *athleta Christi*) persisted during this phase and fostered a greater veneration of certain saints.[36]

The social relevance of heroizations and heroisms in the high middle ages manifested itself in the concept of agonally proven family honour, to which the traditional elites had adhered since antiquity.[37] However, publicly staged manliness competed with new ideals of courtly culture.[38] The *vir curialis* could engage in downright anti-heroic courtly love without risking his heroic status because of it. In the reform movements of French monasteries, a monastic ideal of sainthood came to the fore that had to struggle with the fact that it was hardly realisable for secular elites. Attempts to render laymen as saints encountered major difficulties. At the same time, the heroic-agonal trial allowed the knight to distance himself from courtly ideals of life. Thus, an important realignment of the heroic habitus took place performatively on the stage of the medieval court.

Furthermore, as a result of the Crusades, the *miles Christianus* became even more established as a new model of the heroic, in which the ideal of Christian devotion was linked to the aspiration of the agonal-martial habitus. This model also corresponded to the widespread reference to historical hero figures as individuals, which can be increasingly observed in the 14th and 15th centuries. Although this individualisation was directed against the royal court and the pull of territorialisation and state formation proceeding from that court, it can in no way be equated with privatisation: the new heroism was made politically and socially potent through public monuments to heroes and thereby gained a trendsetting presence in public spaces.[39]

Characteristic for the middle ages was the concurrence of and connection between persisting classical and new Christian hero(ine) models and not their strict delimitation from one another. In this regard, a pronounced superposition of different models in different 'sediments of time' can be seen.

4.3. The early modern period

The early modern period constituted a decisive era not just in respect of the intensive examination of the entire arsenal of classical hero figures and their revival, particularly in royal representation. In the 16th century, as the Western Church split into Protestantism and Catholicism and military conflicts between territorial states intensified, a pluralisation of notions of the heroic occurred and the competition among them grew.[40] Urban monuments to heroes were now accompanied by new media such as printing and pamphlets that diversified the publicness of the heroic[41] and fostered new visual links between prefigurative heroic models and the self-(re)presentation of social elites. The ideal of heroic virility was supplemented with elements such as self-control or religiously defined ideals like internalisation. Moreover, in the late 16th and early and mid-17th century, models of a heroic piety developed a strong subversive power, first in France and subsequently in England (Puritanism) as well.[42] The established ecclesiastical and political order with its many compromises

saw its very existence threatened by that power. A greater spiritualisation and internalisation of piety (e.g. asceticism instead of conflict with the heretics) partly managed to stem this subversive power. However, this in turn provoked tension between a religious rigorism and the willingness to compromise with a secular morality.

In the course of the 17th century, the concept of the *honnête homme*, a rather unmartial and courtly model, confronted the martial hero. The courtly and the noble milieu once again proved to be social focal points for transformations of the heroic. Many of these changes did not become structurally dominant until the 17th century, when they intensified and caused a fundamental change: on the one hand, the ruler became nearly the sole subject of the *imitatio heroica* of classical *heroes*; on the other hand, in hearkening back to classical prototypes that to an extent already embodied internalised ideals, many heroic models forfeited their previous veridicality and appellative power, which allowed heroism to be criticised as mere superficial affectation.[43]

Starting in ca. 1650 in France, a transformation occurred in respect of the auratisation of the hero. The radiance (*éclat du héros*) metamorphosed from a figure of medialisation and articulation with many aesthetic and appellative effects into a reflexive figure of the heroic.[44] An affirmative (re)presentation of the heroic *éclat*, e.g. in panegyric, historiography and political treatise, contrasted with a reflexive and analytical use of the term in literary texts.[45] This problematisation of forms of representing the heroic aura points to the fragility and ambivalence of the societal anchoring of the heroic.

As new needs for representation emerged, the nobility sought forms of affirmation and differentiation of traditional heroisms through reference to exotic heroes in the court drama of the late 17th century. Heroic properties were also projected onto 'foreign' figures[46], which can be described as transcultural forms of the heroic that brought attention to fractures and destabilisation of cultural notions. However, through their stylisation into heroes of the faith in the Latin dramas of the Jesuit Order, the heroic habitus of Japanese martyrs for example served as a mirror to a European audience. With the projection of the heroic onto intellectual personalities[47], an extension of the concept took place alongside an expansion into non-noble, bourgeois circles.

In the extent to which royal benefactors were attributed a heroic habitus as peacemakers and patrons of the arts[48], the notion of the heroic was no longer constrained to martial heroic deeds. Even in Louis XIV's self-dramatisation as the *roi connétable* within a *guerre spectacle*, the heroic role gained autonomy from any overly narrow reference to reality. It was enough for Louis XIV to show himself at the fore of his troops to underline his aspiration that the victories ultimately were due to his genius, vigour and charismatic aura.[49]

4.4. The Enlightenment and the *Sattelzeit*

In the age of the Enlightenment, the classic hero figures were joined by the genius. Semantically, the *grand homme* embodied the virtues of the citizen of a *res publica*, while the classic hero(in)es and those who emulated them oriented towards the ideal of aristocratic honour that tied back to monarchy. However, the 18th century cannot be described in general as a crisis of the heroic. Rather, this was a period in which new models of historical greatness overshadowed and replaced traditional role

patterns. The trend towards moralisation and domestication of the hero is clearly recognisable, and the affinity of traditional martial hero figures towards violence became a problem at least in the French Enlightenment.

More greatly than previously, style and aesthetic languages of heroizations became the object of controversies – there was no really established canon of artistic forms of expression any more.[50] No one believed any longer that mythological figures could be drawn upon, but there was no new, authoritative imagery to replace mythology and mark the boundary between the hero and the everyday. A stronger pluralisation of heroic models and their representation in the media was already manifesting itself. It would later be a defining characteristic for the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the present.

In the course of the upheaval in politics and society that marked the French Revolution and Revolutionary Wars, hero(ine) concepts, some of which had already become bourgeois, were transplanted onto new value models, primarily *patrie* and nation, but also the defensive-bellicist republic. The historical semantics of the lexical field underlines that 'hero'/'Held'/'héro' does not fit into the scheme of classic 'concepts of movement', the semantical contours of which changed during the *Sattelzeit* between 1770 and 1850, but was rather a term of tradition in which historically asynchronous elements were linked to one another. Invariably older patterns remained recognisable next to new elements of meaning. With the French Revolution, a novelly accentuated political-social hero cult emerged under the banner of the sacralised nation proceeding from the history of violence that was the revolution. The hero became a figure that marked the boundaries of his own national community and, simultaneously, possibly already stood on the edge of that society.

In the propaganda of the revolutionary regimes, the community of fraternally bound defenders of the fatherland appeared alongside the heroic individual, while internal and external violence more than ever became a constitutive element for defining the hero(ine). The political hero Napoleon, stylised into a model and amalgamating new and old heroisms (the social climber and war hero, the conqueror of nature and history, the Moses-like law-giver, the republican, later imperial *roi connétable*), had a suggestive and polarising impact precisely for that reason. However, from the period of revolution and Napoleonic rule, no uniform model of heroism emerged, rather a strong tension between universalist claim and a spectrum of nationally connoted hero(in)es (Lord Nelson, Queen Louise), who gained a presence in the politics of memory by struggling against revolution and Napoleon.

The particular quality of the period around 1800 as a critical phase of transformation for the heroic can also be seen in that entirely different societies also developed new heroisms: besides Bonapartism/Napoleonism as a political hero narrative, there was the hero worship of republican presidents in the United States[51] and the differentiation between national and folk heroes in Russia.[52] The societal transformations of this era, the end of estate-based society and the emergence of socially defined classes, was also mirrored over the course of the 19th century in heroic qualities becoming applicable to representatives of new bourgeois professions such as inventor, engineer and scholar, and in the process casting doubt on social boundaries. Even more so than in the latter part of the 18th century, in the age of mass armies and conscription, public attention was devoted to the 'common soldier' and no longer just to the noble officer, just as the social range of the

heroic began to expand to also include the working class.[53] In the course of ideological differentiation, however, political hero(in)es in particular became more disputed, less self-evident and increasingly in need of explanation; hero(in)es were producing counter-hero(in)es more and more often. Revolutionary heroes and national heroines may have been attributed a unifying impact, but in the dynamic of ideological disputes, after 1789 and 1849, heroizations often tended to be catalysts for political and social destabilisation and ideological fragmentation.

4.5. The modern period

The image of the hero in the 19th century was also fundamentally changed by a transforming media landscape, which included periodicals intended for a mass audience. In England, consumer magazines, for example those aimed at adolescents, propagated less an uncritical adoration of hero(in)es than an admiration intended to encourage emulation. That admiration could certainly also be associated with a criticism of the transgressive, violent traits of the heroic.[54] In the end, moral greatness counted more than the spectacular deed. The emphasis on moral heroism over heroism in deed also allowed room for feminine heroic life scripts. Notions of masculinity and femininity were in part debated anew in discourses on the heroic. Although the traditional hero figures were mostly male, the more silent female heroism could be presented as being superior.[55] However, in this way, the transgressive potential of heroine figures was also intentionally curtailed. Overall, in periodicals, the hero(ine) as a provocative transgressor of boundaries and violator of norms was largely edited out. That notion was replaced by the hero as an exemplary conformist.

However, in the 19th century, confronted with the challenge of demystification and rationalisation, which were widely recognised and subjectively experienced, the demand for extraordinary hero(in)es and their deeds also rose. The active boom of new heroizations and laments over an allegedly hero-less era underlined that, under the banner of mass societies that were increasingly being unified through media, the need for special figures of identification did not lessen – quite the opposite. To counter the banalisation of the heroic, Richard Wagner dramatised the hero holistically in opera and through voice.[56] Thomas Carlyle[57] and Friedrich Nietzsche[58] also objected to the 'trivialisation' of the heroic, the latter creating an alternative script with his theory of the 'Übermensch': his concept transferred heroic properties such as self-mastery, discipline and body control into a heroic individualism, but detached them as a "metaphysic substitute" from the social and historical context.

The new science of sociology struggled with the exceptional and the irregular – which included the figures of the genius and the hero – and focused its theories more on the '*homme moyen*' (Quételet), social averages and regularities than on exceptional phenomena.[59] Nevertheless, heroic motifs also appeared in sociological discourse, such as in Auguste Comte's self-stylisations[60] or Max Weber's fundamentally tragic heroism of enduring in a world deemed an 'iron cage of serfdom'.[61] Moreover, with Weber's notion of 'charisma', a novel descriptive and analytical category of the heroic emerged, which documents an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon.[62]

Around 1914, new heroic concepts formed, be it in economics – for instance the figure of the entrepreneur in Joseph A. Schumpeter's writings – or in the opposition of 'merchants and heroes'[63] coined by Werner Sombart as a result of the culture war of 1914. Against that background, the First World War constituted a profound crisis of the heroic. Mass death and the reality of industrialised

warfare no longer allowed conventional notions of the heroic warrior as defender of the fatherland, even if long handed-down models of the heroic were referred to again and again.

A particular yearning for heroic figures or idolatrous stagings of the heroic can also be found at the start of the 20th century in literary groups, paradigmatic among them being the cult circle that formed around Stefan George.[64] The circle especially distinguished itself from Wilhelmian heroic patterns by criticising how these became misconstrued and flat in the bourgeois-national canon. George and his circle used an elitist concept of the heroic habitus to counteract the structurally dominant national discourse. In this discourse, heroization served to outwardly distinguish the nation's superiority over other nations, while inwardly homogenising it behind the idea of a shared heroism. An "expectation of the heroic" proclaims the "coming hero," without the heroic requiring further definition. This let the circle form a group identity and raise its profile as a group of disciples with an affinity to heroism – or as so-called "heroes of demeanor".

4.6. Postmodernity and 'post-heroism'

After the paroxysm of heroic-martial life scripts and until the mid-20th century, Western Europe, but in particular Germany, experienced a largely 'post-heroic' age.[65] However, after the attack on the Charlie Hebdo editorial staff in Paris in January 2015, Berlin visual studies scholar Horst Bredekamp postulated the end of the 'post-heroic society' with the observation that in Western Europe sacrifices were again being made out of conviction .[66] Even Herfried Münkler, the most prominent advocate of the post-heroism theory in the German-speaking world, has posited that terrorists were "forcing us to readopt elements of the heroic" and that the post-heroic society was "unviable without invoking a remnant of the heroic".[67] This debate, which further gained steam as a result of the attacks in Paris in November 2015, exemplarily makes clear how the discussion on the possibility or necessity of heroic conduct directly informs the social and political self-interpretations of societies.

Hence, a renaissance of hero(ine) figures can be seen recently. Heterogeneous and hybrid notions have emerged as a result of manifold needs and references to traditional concepts of heroism. While competing political convictions are instrumentalised, there are also cultural contradictions. In current debates, an enduring scepticism, an 'anti-heroic reflex', even a heroism taboo[68] has manifested. However, a persistent and seemingly natural need for heroic figures remains and has been passed on for generations.[69]

In the creation of 'new heroes' – between 9/11[70], sporting events[71] and first-person shooters – current needs are dominating. Even the current public and scholarly debates surrounding hero(in)es are characterised by a presentist perspective. The contemporary boom of the heroic can also be seen in everyday and popular culture.[72] In the day-to-day, the inflationary use of the term 'hero' and 'heroine' has frequently entailed a banalisation of heroic models. For instance, advertisements use heroic semantics to attract attention and civil society organisations attempt to extol socially desirable conduct by selecting exemplary 'everyday heroes'. The popularity of superhero figures in film, comics and computer games persists, although the figures continue to be adapted to changed societal role models. Even if they are often ironically broken, hero narratives continue to possess an enormously attractive power.

5. Research overview

5.1. Current research

A comprehensive, systematically organised report on the heroic in recent cultural history scholarship (*Das Heroische in der neueren kulturhistorischen Forschung*) has been available in German since 2015.[73] The report was written by members of the Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB) 948 "Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms" in Freiburg and covers the period between roughly 2003 and 2014. In addition, since 2015 the SFB has published an annotated Online Bibliography of Hero Scholarship.[74] We only want to summarily mention the SFB's numerous own publications that have been released since its establishment at the University of Freiburg in 2012.[75]

Among the notable publications that have been released since the scholarship report was completed or that are not mentioned therein, Hans Blumenberg's posthumously published study *Präfiguration. Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (2014)[76] deals with the questions of the *imitatio heroica* and repeating structures with regard to the heroic (see Prefiguration), and Veronika Zink's sociological dissertation *Von der Verehrung* (2014)[77] differentiates between the relations between hero(in)es and followers, admirers and adorers. With analyses of not only 'modern masculinity', but primarily also martyrdom, self-sacrifice and societies moulded by Islam, Ulrike Brunotte's monograph *Helden des Todes* (2015)[78] examines the relational framework of hero(in)es and gender. An extensive edited volume published in 2017 addresses 'cultural heroes' such as poets, scholars and intellectuals who are deemed to have a culture-creating role (Andronikashvili et al. 2017).[79] Another publication brings together systematic examinations of inter alia the violence, sacrality and resilience of heroes with case studies (Rolshoven et al. 2018).[80] Equally pertinent is an edited volume published in 2014 on forms and notions of a changing Christian martyrdom (Blennemann/Herbers 2014; also cf. Bergjan/Näf 2014).[81] A book on visual and literary notions of masculinity after 9/11 also touches on this topic (Tanrisever 2016).[82] Postcolonial perspectives are accentuated in several recent publications, including Hirsbrunner 2012 and Sèbe 2013 on heroic imperialists for example.[83]

Current scholarship on hero(in)es focuses on a number of characteristic fields of study: the historically conditioned, constructed nature of the heroic; its functions for negotiating values, in many cases while at odds with the religious; its unifying and mobilising capabilities; its popularity and its link to gender questions. However, there is an apparent lack of studies on the explosiveness of the heroic; on conflict intensification associated with the heroic; on its polarising and boundary-setting capabilities and on its unpredictable dynamic. Moreover, the current public and scholarly debates surrounding hero(in)es are characterised by a presentist perspective. In analytical terms, that perspective often does not extend further back than into the 19th and early 20th centuries when certain heroic figures and deeds were instrumentalised in the context of major ideologies such as nationalism, fascism and communism. Such an approach to the heroic risks committing the fallacy of retrospective causality, which focuses too greatly on the outcome. Moreover, diversity and individualisation in manifestations of the heroic necessitate comprehensive, supertemporal explanations for notions of the heroic. However, where the presentist view dominates attempts at explanation and coincides with the need for exhaustive explanation, it runs the risk of too greatly disregarding the diverse, competing and in some cases even fractured concepts of heroism, many of which are rooted in far older traditions and

transformations. *Longue durée* studies thus continue to be overshadowed in current scholarship by studies and analyses of the reception of individual figures that examine the subject with hardly any theoretical approach or do not investigate it as a phenomenon of historical appropriation. Above all, theoretical approaches that in many cases provide (ideal) typologies or that are grounded in examples require historical verification through individual studies on different fields and eras of experience in order to avoid a too one-sided European perspective.

5.2. Earlier scholarship (until 2010)

The humanities first began to examine hero figures and the heroic as early as the 19th century (Hegel 1835/1970; D'Anvers 1878; Hager 1887/88; Bethe 1891)[84], which with Carlyle's and Nietzsche's reflections for example provided a thought-provoking impetus for later scholarship. The earlier, comprehensive analyses that – in the footsteps of Carlyle or Nietzsche – seek to explain hero(in)es as fundamental phenomena of culture from religious, ethnological and/or psychological perspectives (such as Bloomhardt 1941; Hook 1943; Campbell 1949; Jung 1985)[85] have not been continued, however, and have themselves become objects of academic study (Momm 1986; Higgins 2003).[86] Today, they are considered symbols of embrittled concepts of heroism and of a 'heroic revival', which Max Horkheimer describes as the 'panacea' for the crisis-ridden capitalism of the 1920s and 1930s (Horkheimer 1934, quoted according to Faber 1991/92)[87], i.e. they are deemed indications of a fundamental change discernible in that era.

The scholarly research that has been published to date is extensive and heterogeneous; these publications have originated primarily in the study of classics, history, literature and art and have been supplemented increasingly by writings in sociology and cultural and media studies. The research landscape is dominated by a hardly fathomable abundance of publications devoted to individual heroic figures and their configurations, appropriations and receptions, particularly of those of antiquity (foremost among them being Achilles, Odysseus and Heracles), which are a part of the established repertoire of European hero figures and situated at the beginning of Greek-influenced European literature, art and religious history (cf. inter alia Stanford 1964; King 1987; Riha/Zelle 1989; Kray/Oettermann 1994a/b; Latacz 1995; Andreae 1999; Brinkmann/Wünsche 2003; Barnouw 2004; Albertz 2006; Zimmermann 2004; Gehrke 2009).[88] As every society, culture and era creates for itself the hero(in)es that it requires (cf. Faliu/Tourret 2007; Allison/Goethals 2010)[89], there are also similar studies for hero figures of later eras that emphasise their role as unifying and remembrance figures of national significance (Nora 1984–1992; Makolkin 1992; Mosse 1993; Dörner 1996; Bell 2001; François/Schulze 2001; Hein-Kircher 2006; Gerwarth 2007; Riall 2007; Münkler 2009)[90] and in some cases also take an internationally comparative perspective (Flacke 2001; Boudrot 2001; Gerwarth 2009).[91] The scholarship on national and war heroes has focused mostly on the 19th and 20th centuries; in the 20th century, heroes of fascism (Behrenbeck 1996; Baird 1990; Schilling 1999)[92] and of the resistance against it (Meckl 2000)[93] have garnered particular attention – most recently with regard to discourses on victimhood as well (Sabrow 2008; Stegmann 2010; Kaiser 2010)[94]. The visual perpetuation of nationally relevant heroizations in monuments (Yarrington 1988; Koselleck/Jeismann 1994; Völcker 2000; Bemmann 2007; Schult 2009)[95] and history painting (Hichberger 1985; Mai 1988; Kirchner 2001)[96] has also been examined. Other studies have focused on discourses of the heroic in certain eras or genres of European literature (cf. for example Hepp 1974; Folkenflik 1982; Duncan

1990; Disselkamp 2002; Plett 2002; Wein 2002; Reiling/Rohde 2011).[97] However, typological manifestations of the heroic such as anti-heroes (Thorslev 1962; Lubin 1968; Rollin 1973; Bernstein 1992; Plett 2002; Dallapiazza/Anichini/Bravi 2007)[98] have also been examined. Since the 1990s, gender aspects of the heroic have often been contemplated, both with regard to manliness and notions of feminine heroism (Larson 1995; Plume 1996; Lyons 1997; Götz 1999a/b; Foyster 1999; Böhm 2000; Hagemann 2002 and 2007; Rose 2002; Schilling 2002; Studt 2003; Kollmann 2004; Bohrer et al. 2009; Gerwarth 2009; Keller/Kragl 2010; van Marwyck 2010; Mennenga 2011).[99] Together with gender questions, the emotionality and affectivity of hero(ine) figures have also garnered greater attention (Scholz 2010; Immer/van Marwyck 2011)[100], which is especially evident in such phenomena as the heroic death (Koselleck 1998)[101] and the figure of the martyr (Burschel 2004; Freeman/Mayer 2007; Niewiadomski 2011).[102]

In general, there are only few studies that deal with elementary processes of heroization and the transformation of heroic concepts. As regards antiquity, studies on the religious dimension of the hero cult bear particular mention (Deoudi 1999; Boehringer 2001)[103] as well as studies on the *heros* concept itself (e.g. Brelich 1958; Nagy 1991; Albersmeier 2009; Jones 2010).[104] With respect to the middle ages and the period of transition to the Renaissance, there are a number of comprehensive studies on concepts of heroism (Burns/Reagan 1976; Cauchies/Small/Brown 2001)[105]; however, the examination of changing notions of the heroic remained limited to individual aspects, such as the transition from the classical *heros* to the Christian heroes, martyrs and saints (cf. Crouzet 1990; Müller/Wunderlich 1996; Freyburger 1997; Studt 2003; Freeman/Mayer 2007; Hammer/Seidl 2010).[106] In the scholarship on the early modern period, primarily knightly ideals and their heroic implications have been examined (Adamson 1994; Anglo 1990; Braudy 2003, Wrede 2009).[107] With respect to the late early modern period, rulers as heroes, their *imitatio heroica* and their staging in different media have become a prime object of scholarly interest (Burke 1992; Cornette 1993; Sabatier 1999; Oredsson 1994; Heyde 1995; Goloubeva 2000).[108] Such heroic role models have also been examined for antiquity (Wrede 1981; Huttner 1997; Bergmann 1998)[109], but have not yet been comparatively assessed for subsequent eras. In a provocative study, Harari asserts that there has been a pronounced psychologisation of martial heroism since the second half of the 18th century (Harari 2008)[110], while Drévillon has analysed inter alia the redefining of the heroic warrior as standing armies grew (Drévillon 2005).[111] One study focusing on revolutionary heroes since 1789 (Naumann 1984)[112] describes the late 18th and early 19th centuries as an era in which a heroism originally defined in mythical-sacred terms became secular, but without mentioning the earlier religious connotations of heroism or religious instrumentalisation since the early modern period. As regards long-term processes of change in the modern period, primarily national heroes emerging and competing within European nationalisms have been studied. The transition from the concept of the 'hero of the deed' to the *grands hommes* in the 18th century (cf. Pigeaud/Barbe 1998; Ritter 2004)[113] or to the heroic common man in the 19th century (Smith 2005; MacLeod 2007)[114] has been interpreted as a crisis of the heroic. In general, aspects of crisis in the heroic have been demonstrated during the modern period on the basis of accounts in various media (Coenen-Mennemaier 1999; Kirchner 2001; Plett 2002; Herding 2004)[115], but without competing contemporaneous affirmations of the heroic being sufficiently acknowledged. The competitiveness of rival models, however, has evidently been a central phenomenon from the early modern period until today. It appears symptomatic in this context that Früchtl (2004)[116] in a philosophical and historical study describes

the self as an ambivalent hero of modernity, while Allison/Goethals (2010)[117] take a psychological approach to analysing the competition and diversity of heroes.

In a debate on 'new heroes' ranging between taboo and acceptance, which was often taking place apart from the scholarly discussion, post-heroic ideals and martial heroism's loss of credibility following both World Wars clashed with new needs for hero(in)es in Germany (Körber-Stiftung 2008; Münkler 2006; Münkler 2009; Bohrer et al. 2009; Reemtsma 2009; Essig 2010; Klonovsky 2011; SZ für Kinder 2011; brand eins 2011).[118] However, in other societies as well, individualistic concepts of heroism exist alongside collective ones, just as private heroes exist alongside ones propagated widely through media. At times, these concepts are certainly competitive and contradictory to each other, as can be seen in the heroizations of the actors of 11 September 2001 that were informed by different cultures and ideologies. Here, questions of morality as well as identity and culture come into play that are difficult to relativise (Mayeur-Jaouen 2002 [on the Near East]; Faliu/Tourret 2007; cf. the contrasting between civil courage and heroism in Bohrer et al. 2009; Bultmann 2010).[119] Simultaneously, attention has been drawn to the constant, but in recent years intensified, presence of heroic figures in popular culture – in film, literature and comics, but also in the new digital entertainment media (e.g. Colebatch 1990; Drucker 1994; Sparks 1996; Bongco 2000; Wrigley 2005; Landa 2007; Bohrmann 2009; Kainz 2009; Mittermayer 2009; Shimpach 2010; Heimerl/Feichtinger 2011; Imorde/Scheller 2011).[120] The fact that classical heroes have again been extensively discussed in new surveys and exhibitions (Albersmeier 2009; Trofimova 2010)[121] – including their transmission and transformation over time through to the modern period (Faliu/Tourret 2007; perpetuated on the website http://classes.bnf.fr/heros/index.htm)[122] – shows how references back to a historically grounded identity seem to be greatly important in this context (cf. also Ernstell 2009; Frankhäuser/Paas 2009).[123]

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Category	Theory
Subject Headings (LOC)	Heroes in popular culture, Group identity, Heroes, Heroes in art, Heroes in literature, Heroes in mass media, Martyrs, Sociology, History
Index	Authors: Sonderforschungsbereich 948 Persons and Figures: Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Horst Bredekamp, Thomas Carlyle, Auguste Comte, Stefan George, Reinhart Koselleck, Louis XIV (France), Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (Prussia), Herfried Münkler, Friedrich Nietzsche, Helmuth Plessner, Joseph Schumpeter, Werner Sombart, Richard Wagner, Max Weber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Übermensch (Nietzsche), Horatio Nelson / Admiral Nelson Spaces and Locations: Europe, Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia, USA, Paris Time and Events: Antiquity, Middle Ages, Early Modern Period, Age of Enlightenment / Age of Reason, Sattelzeit (Koselleck), French Revolution, Modernity, Wilhelminism, World War I / First World War, Postmodernity, Postheroism, September 11 attacks (2001) / 9/11, 8th century BC, 7th century BC, 5th century BC, 2nd century BC, 14th century, 15th century, 17th century, 18th century, 19th century, 20th century, 21st century