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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]

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 another.

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]

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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 belligerent 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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