

# Transformations of Heroism

## Fame, Celebrities, and Public Performances

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As the audience, we have a propensity to seek the “truth” about stars and heroes. We want to know “how they really are” and see the reality “behind” the public performance. Thus, heroes and celebrities are increasingly depicted as common people in the media, which in turn indicates a revaluation of ordinariness. Since the Great Men therefore belong to the past, classical expressions of heroism are antiquated while new forms emerge. These new forms are required by the modern search for identification that presupposes a “bringing down” of the hero to the level of ordinary people. The transformation of heroism results in hybrids that blur the boundaries between the star’s role as hero and average person, due to the fact that the ordinary becomes a constitutive element in the charisma. Hence, the medialization of celebrities tends to expose formerly hidden roles and spheres. Especially television has increased the focus on emotional expressions and private life. This eager attention to the hidden indicates that we live in an age of curiosity. Secret affairs ought to be discovered, fishy stories should be revealed. This tendency is explained in the light of the fragmentation and mobility of everyday life that create numerous stashes in every personality, to which importance and truth can be ascribed and which thereby can be transformed into desirable secrets. Thus, information about these hidden recesses becomes indispensable to stipulate identities.

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### Patterns of Fame

Every day we meet celebrities and famous people. Their faces keep gazing at us from advertising signs, centrefolds, newspaper pages, and television screens. As the successful conquerors of publicity, they are always at the center of attention, and the constant invention of new channels of publicity brings us a continuous flow of new celebrities. It seems, however, that different media epochs create different kinds of heroes and, at the same time, different forms of public reception of them and their public performances. In the age of bards and rune stones, princes and warlords used to gain priority in the consciousness of posterity. With the diffusion of mass media and the increased plurality of values in our times, the roads to fame have been multiplied. Not long ago, vast media attention was paid to Lorena Bobbitt, the wom-

an who chopped off the penis of her husband John Wayne Bobbitt, who nevertheless regained his former virility with the aid of modern surgery and signed a porn-film contract. Such life stories appear “mesmerizing” or “thrilling” and are therefore well suited as consumer products in advanced media society. Thus, the old idea of fame as the glory of achievement seems antique.

Notoriety does not necessarily presuppose deeds, but it does require publicity. Public heroes or villains are thereby created with the capacity to survive their biological existence. Hence, the theme of fame has been put in relation to death. Whereas Christianity held spiritual immortality as a reward or a punishment, which was dispensed with bodily death and which retrospectively was to give meaning to the finished life, secularized civilization has posed fame as the replacement of the belief in

an afterlife (cf. Bauman 1994/1992:40 and *passim*; Braudy 1986:28). Thus, the modern world has found its own ways to individual transcendence. Since more and more cry out for attention, it has, however, become increasingly difficult to stay in the public focus. Different characters create different forms of enthusiasm, devotion, prestige, or abhorrence, and their ability to make lasting impressions therefore also differs. Some heroes play the roles of History. Characters like kings, warlords, artists, authors, scientists, explorers, inventors, airmen, politicians, or traitors are sometimes inscribed in the annals of nations, civilizations, or peoples. Thus, their time is extended. While the aura of hero or villain can survive their physical appearances for several centuries or even millennia, some achieve a similar prominence only after death. The significance of these characters is generally far greater in mythology than in the course of history.

Every epoch has its own symbols of heroism or villainy, undermining the historical stability of devotion or identification. Since, for example, nationalism is under constant transformation, changing its forms of expression and its rhetorical pitch, the appeal of various national heroes differs. Yesterday's kings and princes appear to be ruled out as national symbols or incarnations of heroic qualities and replaced by more up-to-date characters. Their place has been taken by, for example, sports heroes, whose informal and ordinary personalities are better suited to symbolize the nation in accordance with its contemporary shape (cf. Löfgren 1993). Thus, heroism has changed and its traditional idolatry no longer seems a self-evident feature. My aim is to analyze this transformation and outline some of the modern trends of heroes and fame. Since renown presupposes an audience, all features like fame, heroism, celebrity, and notoriety are relational constructions. Hermits can never be famous and, accordingly, the public has to be considered. The admiration of heroes and celebrities creates community. Nations, fan clubs, and supporters' clubs are such communities that are generated and reinforced by this interplay. In this study, sporting stars will be particularly in focus, as they provide significant examples of the plain ordinariness

and authenticity that I believe is characteristic of modern heroism.

Heroes of sport have national (or local) relevance without being cast in the traditional parts of History, that is, without carrying up the historical greatness of the nation. Even if Björn Borg, Diego Maradona, and Jesse Owens are said to be prominent figures of "sports history," such stars primarily cause outbursts of emotion at the moment of victory. People might rejoice retroactively over these "unforgettable moments," but in the long run they nevertheless tend to be forgotten or at least faded. New generations, who were not present during the event, are more attracted by contemporary sports heroes, rather than looking back at exploits they never witnessed. Since the ability of sporting stars to attract the public attention is temporary, their fame tends to be episodic. Therefore they represent the contemporary, rather than the historical, greatness.

Compared to rock stars, sports heroes seem to play slightly different roles on the public stage. The world of rock music consists of both well-behaved "mushy singers" and subversive or "insufferable" stars. The subversion of the latter is based on different strategies, depending on what is oppositional at the actual moment. Sexual "indecentcy," political protest, glorification of drug abuse, "disorderly conduct," "brutal" music, long hair, abusive language, and the smashing up of hotel rooms or guitars are some of most popular methods.

The world of sport is distinguished by a shortage of controversiality. Of course, athletes are sometimes suspended, for example, for drug abuse, but generally the limits are narrow. Sport is characterized by a norm of conscientiousness. When the British football player Paul Gascoigne responded to a provocative question by burping in the microphone, he was fined, and when the German midfielder Stefan Effenberg made a pejorative gesture to the audience during the World Cup in 1994, he was immediately sent home and has never since played in the national team. Sometimes the stars frustrate the audience's hopes by not participating in the national team. In that case, no measures are taken by sports organizations, but mass media often depict them as traitors and praise the

loyal ones who consider it an honor to represent their country. The examples are numerous. In the world of sport, there is a continuous effort to put an end to undesired forms of behavior, although these are not necessarily violations of the rules and therefore cannot always be classified as cheating. Fair play, decency, and loyalty to the team mates and the country are virtues that *should* characterize sport. Sports organizations and the media are therefore engaged in punishing breaches of etiquette. Thus, sporting stars are demanded to serve as models of behavior, which is a demand that would be impossible (and seem ridiculous) to impose on oppositional rock stars like Sid Vicious, Johnny Rotten, or Jim Morrison.

Accordingly, rock stars never have to radiate health or conscientiousness or worry about breaches of etiquette. They attain their positions in an interplay with the audience. They might benefit from musical competence and successful distinctions, but since they completely operate on a market, they are always dependent on the approval of the consumers. Without this approval, they wouldn't be rock stars. Of course, the hierarchic positions of sports heroes can also be dependent on image, but without victories there would be no stardom. In the world of sport, hierarchy is primarily based on medals, records, and world rankings. Even though popularity also can be the outcome of looks, style, and profile, there are hardly any shortcuts. Thus, it is impossible to base one's career as sports hero on provocation and "insufferability." Whereas the rock star as *agent provocateur* appear hyper-individuated, the sporting star is hyper-socialized.

As the audience, we have a propensity to seek the "truth" about these stars or heroes. We would like to know how they "really are," to meet their "true selves" and get to know the reality "behind" the public performance. This quest for authenticity has a regulative effect on the public perception. Mass media is the necessary precondition of the "highness" of stars and celebrities, but it is paradoxically also the instrument for the scrutinization of their personalities and, consequently, for the "bringing down" of the modern hero.

## Charisma and Heroic Unaffectedness

Heroes and celebrities not only create sensations and passions among the public. Sometimes they also gain the attention of social science. By that, I do not mean the abundance of hagiographies of Great Men, but rather analyses of fame and illustriousness itself. A line of development, many times pointed out in this research, is the increasing divergence of fame or heroism from divinity. While the illustrious heroes of the past were Great Men, associated with superhuman, divine qualities, celebrities of today have become more ordinary. Ancient fame was primarily the property of princes and warlords, and the roads to such a prominence were few. While this dominance broke up, fame increasingly became connected with social mobility. Particularly, renown was conveyed to characters who managed to rise from lower positions and stand out from the multitude. Today, the channels of fame are numerous, which is a consequence of both the explosive development of media and the increasing plurality of values. The American literary historian Leo Braudy (1986) has called this process "the democratization of fame."

Observations of the declining nobility of heroes and celebrities recur in the work of other scholars. For instance, at the beginning of the 1960s, the American sociologist Orrin Klapp (1972/1962) wrote about "the deterioration of the hero." In accordance with Emile Durkheim, Klapp believed in the importance of the consensus of values and thus worried about the contemporary tendency to identify with disparate heroes, frequently of low exemplariness. The film scholar Richard Dyer (1979:24–26) discusses an analogous development, although from a much shorter perspective, concerning the movie stars of Hollywood. Whereas the theatrical heroes of silent film were regarded as gods, sound-film demystified the actors and made them seem more ordinary by depriving them of the silence. In the same spirit, the sociologist and author Judith Williamson (1988:75–89) describes how the British royal family is increasingly "brought down" to the level of common people. The American media researcher Joshua Meyrowitz (1985:268–304)

has also analyzed how the propensity of television to expose information that in other media contexts was kept locked up backstage, has “lowered” presidents and other political heroes to the same ordinary level.

It therefore seems as if the Great Men, in some respects, belong to the past. Yesterday we obediently promoted characters to heroes, but nowadays we seem to reflect ourselves in them. Some may be concerned and regard this as a devaluation of virtue, but it should rather be considered as a transformation of established hierarchies of value. The antiquation of classical expressions of heroism is intimately connected to the evaluation of its opposite – the ordinary. When heroes are made common, this ordinariness or unaffectedness is exalted. Thereby, the heroic charisma is transformed. Whereas the ancient hero was closely associated with the divine, the modern counterpart functions as an object of identification.

Charisma is one of the central concepts in the classical sociology of Max Weber.<sup>1</sup> In his universe, charisma is analyzed as one of three forms of authority: a traditional, a legal or rational, and finally a charismatic form. Whereas the traditional authority is based on the reverence of established customs, the legal one is founded on inviolable, impersonal laws and appears in, for example, the modern bureaucracy. Charisma, for its part, is an extraordinary form of dominance, beyond the routines of everyday life. It signifies an inherent quality in the personality, which makes its carrier seem endowed with a gift of grace, a supernatural or superhuman talent to guide and command. It gives him the “right” to be in charge and imposes a “duty” to obey on the subordinates. Charisma, however, is primarily a concept of relations. It implies an acknowledgment from the group, since it regards the charismatic person as the “natural” leader.

Religious prophets are typical examples of charismatic characters, whose endowments consist in close connections to divinity. Ancient heroes can also be seen as charismatic, although they tend to be less religious. In the secularized world, successful politicians and various kinds of “geniuses” can be regarded as possessors of charisma. These persons have no

relations to the superhuman, the divine, or the eternal, but rather contain their abilities in their own characters. The public gaze is directed against the personalities of charismatic persons, not against the circumstances which make their dominance possible. The ideal type of charisma emphasizes qualities and capacities not available to people in general and therefore by definition implies unusualness. At the same time, however, it seems obvious that heroes, celebrities and renowned characters of today have become increasingly ordinary. The borderline between the heroic life and everyday life has weakened (cf. Featherstone 1992). Concurrently, charisma tends to undergo transformation. It no longer becomes exclusively reliant on exceptional gifts, but to a larger extent on the possessor’s ability to seem natural and authentic. Today, such impressions are hardly created by distinguished behavior. On the contrary, politicians often gain popularity by “showing their feelings” and behaving like “ordinary people,” thereby creating impressions of authenticity. Simultaneously, some heroes play a double game. On one hand, they play roles of brilliance and accomplish great exploits on stages, movie screens, and sports arenas, while on the other hand, they sometimes dress up in the costume of usualness and act like “everybody else.”

This heroic mix of extraordinary skill and average personality can frequently be seen in the case of sports heroes. Sport is a producer of charisma, since it reproduces and institutionalizes circumstances generating charisma. Charisma, in this context, should be regarded as a source of acknowledgment, reputation, and status, rather than mere authority. The champion is the carrier of the gift of grace *par excellence* and every new competition is a charismatic settlement. In these encounters, redistributions of charisma occur to the struggling adversaries, continuously changing the charismatic balance. New “divinely gifted” masters enter the stage, others disappear behind the curtain. New kings are crowned, old ones are forced to abdicate. Therefore, the sports hero appears as a decidedly extraordinary person on the field, while he, nevertheless, is often depicted as an average person by the media.

This is not least common in the Swedish

context, where the stars, particularly within team sports, are recurrently portrayed as “ordinary guys,” who are “just like everybody else” and “great pals.” These heroes reject all needs of distinction. They are just like “us” – like you and me – and this certainly facilitates identification. To be sure, it is hard to compare favorably with the gods. Thus, the hidden manual prescribes emulation, rather than reverence. This exemplary, unaffected ordinariness is ideally suited for team sports, where it gains cooperation and feelings of solidarity. It is therefore also perceived as the central ingredient in the concept of *team spirit* or *team morale*, signifying closeness, friendship, solidarity, and fighting spirit, allegedly Swedish qualities and frequently used as explanations of achievements by Swedish national teams in World Cup tournaments by coaches, players, and the media.

Foreign teams are generally regarded as more dependent on individual stars, distinguished by a lesser degree of solidarity and sometimes by prima donna behavior, while Swedish teams are depicted as close families without internal distinctions. This unaffected closeness, dependent on the “ordinary guys” and the “great pals,” stands out as a particularly Swedish weapon against the strategies of the adversaries. Hence, the Swedish sports hero benefits from his ordinariness while achieving his exploits. This brings us to a phenomenon which I call *heroic unaffectedness*. This heroic unaffectedness is not an ordinariness separated from the heroic element, but rather a precondition of it. This quality blurs the borders between the stars’ roles as hero and average person, due to the fact that heroic unaffectedness emerges when the ordinary becomes a constitutive element in the charisma.

The heroic unaffectedness, however, is not only a common form of charisma within Swedish sport. It can typically be noticed in several other contexts as well. Popular and folksy characters, as the All-American Guy, modern politicians, and television stars, are also significant examples of the nobility of unaffected heroism, since they become exceptional persons as a result of their ability to seem unexceptional. This faculty to appear ordinary makes their rivals seem distinguished and artificial. Hence,

they reduce the distance between the audience and the hero, making the former mirror itself in the latter. Because of his propensity to present the spectator with images of ordinariness, that is, of the spectator himself, the unaffected hero seems authentic. Therefore, heroic unaffectedness could never emerge in a premodern context. On the contrary, it can only exist in a modern or a postmodern world, where the search for identity is an institutionalized feature. Only then can heroes be brought down from their pedestals to reinforce our selves.

## Medializing Interiors

The medialization of society has led to the exposure of formerly hidden roles and spheres of celebrities. Whereas the partitions between public and private spheres of famous people used to be distinct, the mass-media panopticism has displaced and blurred these boundaries. Women’s magazines and the tabloid press continuously report on actual or alleged incidents in the private lives of celebrities. Thus, divorces, addiction problems, two-timing, and other private matters tend to become public knowledge. Besides, reports from the homes of stars, where they can be seen in their domestic environments as family men or women, have gained a wide popularity.

The primary cause of the separation of different spheres in former times is, as Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) has demonstrated, the fact that information was more of a place-bound phenomenon. To be able to observe in a world with hardly any media, it was necessary to be at the same place as the observed object. Mass audiences were only possible if the stage was localized in public squares or other open places. Information and knowledge therefore tended to be compartmentalized within social groups and strata. Printing implied a break with this tendency, even if the printed word still entailed greater possibilities to separate backstage environments from the public gaze. Public performances in print withhold the reader from glimpses of the settings where the messages are produced.

Television, however, abolishes this borderline. Meyrowitz (1985) emphasizes that where-

as written and printed media provide coded versions of incidents, electronic media rather supply imprints of them. On the TV screen we get a direct view of the environments where the messages are produced. Thus, the viewer also has the possibility to read the unintentional, expressive informations about emotions and moods that performing persons emit. Looks, vocal pitches, tears, and facial expressions appear more distinctly in these media presentations. While printed media have a *front region bias*, electronic media have a *back region bias*. Meyrowitz also argues that television has obtained an advantage over other media in defining reality in the sense that radio reports and newspaper journalism increasingly are depicting events as they would have appeared in television. Hence, the public stage in all media tends to expand across the boundaries that used to separate the private sphere.

In the world of electronic media, the intimate sphere and the forms of behavior traditionally associated with it come into public view. The domain of sport is a significant example of this. In Swedish sport journalism, for example, members of national teams are commonly depicted as members of the team family. The delineations of celebrated sports heroes are also distinguished by a noticeable interest in intimate and private aspects of their characters. Personal feelings belong to this kind of backstage-biased information that has been focused on by the media and which is thus prioritized also in presentations of sport. Tennis players, soccer heroes, and the like are constantly asked questions like "How does it feel?" after victories or defeats, and the champion radiantly explains that "It's unbelievable!" or that "This is the greatest day of my life!," while the disappointment of the defeated is manifest.

Emotional expressions on the field are also in close-up focus. After a finished attack, the camera catches the facial expressions of the striker who just failed to utilize a close opportunity. Feelings of annoyance often show clearly; perhaps he throws his arms about in despair in an attempt to propitiate the gods, perhaps he "hides" his face in his hands, perhaps one can read a curse on his lips. Agitated protests against the referee's decision provide another example

of the emotional drama of mediated sport. Thus, we get visible proofs of the pain of the allegedly innocent combatant, who has given a penalty kick to the opponents or is about to be sent off. Maybe the emotional expressions are most apparent when goals are scored and the hero and his team-mates embrace each other, beaming with joy, in "a love pantomime in honour of the camera" (Zerlang 1989:338). Hence, questions like "How does it feel?" are not only asked during the following press conference, but are also continuously answered by the television coverage. In other words, not only matches and victories are focused on by the media and the audience. The emotional lives of players and coaches are considered newsworthy as well.

This seems to be due to the tendency to regard emotions as an interior phenomenon. According to this view, the individual is like a container of feelings "which can explode when we get furious, simmer when in love, or get totally drained in case of insensitiveness" (Andersson 1992:7). Thus, emotions tend to be seen as separated from their social surroundings, as something natural, unsocialized, and authentic. Sometimes, emotional life has appeared irrational and chaotic, in need of submission to reason. In our times, however, there seems to be an increasing belief in the value of free emotions, of "showing one's feelings" (cf. Gerholm 1987). This concurs with an augmented reliance on what Camille Paglia (1992/1990:14) has called "the ultimate benevolence of human emotion." We have a propensity to reject exterior as illusions in favor of the "genuine" interiors. Since the authenticity of the individual is located "inside" his personality, emotionality is ascribed a certain significance. To "show one's feelings" spontaneously is to give off information about who one "really" is, "deep inside." This individualization and interiorization of the emotions is characteristic of the modern world. According to the British sociologist Colin Campbell (1987:72-73), premodern cultures rather regarded emotions as inherent aspects of reality, existing outside of man, from whence they exerted their influence over him. In the spirit of Weber, Campbell argues that this notion changed as a consequence of the process of "disenchantment," that is, the collapse of the

general assumption that independent agents or "spirits" were operative in nature. The emotions were then moved from the external world and relocated "within" the individual.

The interiorization and individualization of emotional life has also affected social interplay. Authentic behavior is often seen as made up of exposing one's "inner essences," thereby establishing a line of continuity between interior and exterior. To the extent that emotions are regarded as expressions of individuality, they also function as keys to individual identity. One is what one feels. In particular, the shedding of tears of joy or sorrow in public is apprehended as authentic behavior. Thus, the medialization of weeping has become common in presentations of celebrities. In Swedish tabloids, for example, questions like "When was the last time you wept?" are frequent in the interviews. Medialized crying, however, is not only an apparent feature in journalism concentrated on the jet set, but even in reports of unknown people. War correspondents, or other journalists reporting on catastrophes or accidents, often desperately search for victims or relatives who "show their feelings." The universe of sport provides numerous occasions to cry in front of the eyes of the world. Thus, the sports enthusiast remembers the "unforgettable moments" when tears of disappointment flooded the cheeks of Diego Maradona after the defeat by West Germany in the World Cup final in 1990, or how the British midfielder Paul Gascoigne, after he had received his second yellow card in the semifinal of the same tournament and thereby should have been suspended from a potential final, went on fighting red-faced and crying, or how the Italian sweeper Franco Baresi shed tears of sorrow after the defeat by Brazil in the World Cup in 1994, after he had contributed to the outcome by failing in the deciding penalty shootout.

The quest for authenticity of heroes and celebrities, however, does not only imply a great interest in their "inner" emotionality. The ways to bridge the gap between private and public also include close attention to family life. Televised sport often focuses on wives, girl friends, brothers, sisters, and parents during breaks in the game, which induces the commentator to

explain the hero's relations to his loved ones. This is not least apparent in tennis, where close-ups of relatives are shown as parts of the drama as well as slow-motion sequences of their more or less involuntary emotional expressions during decisive rallies.

As a consequence of the all-consuming interest in the private life of celebrities, family members are incorporated in the news coverage. For example, during the World Cup in soccer in 1994, Swedish media opened the doors to the innermost recesses of the Swedish players, thereby covering both the deeds of the national team in the wide world and the state of its realm of intimacy. A television team was located at the home of coach Tommy Svensson's father during the game against Russia, newspapers depicted how the children of defender Roland Nilsson supported daddy from the stand, reporters visited the parents of striker Kennet Andersson and the wife of goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli, and an unknown brother of their team-mate Martin Dahlin was tracked down and presented to the public. A friend of mine, who saw one of the United States matches on American television, also told me that a reporter had been sent out on the stand to watch the game with the father of goalkeeper Tony Meola. During captivating moments, the reporter kept asking questions like "How does he feel after a save like that?" Finally, the wearied Mr. Meola replied "How the hell should I know?"

In the vast media attention paid to family life, the "feelings" and personalities of relatives are also included in the event, as it is defined in public. Among the main issues of these reports are the stories of how the stars "really are" backstage. Family members are the real experts in this field and thereby serve as channels to the secret worlds of the stars. As insiders, the relatives can provide invaluable information about their real selves, about their relations to sisters or children, and how they already in childhood had the talent and ambition to succeed as famous soccer heroes. This inquisitive interest seems to rely on the idea of the private sphere as a realm of authenticity. Since it is often apprehended as a backstage environment, where one can "relax" and "be oneself," it thereby functions as a place where true identity is

exposed. It is also associated with being, rather than doing. In public one *acts*, while in private one *is*. The charisma of sports heroes is primarily dependent on their actions onstage, but when the charismatic relationship is established, the interest in what they are is enhanced.

Thus, media, in general, hold the same perspective as is commonly ascribed to women's magazines, whose sport coverage is primarily focused on the privacy of celebrities. A major media task is therefore to transgress the borderline between public and private and expose the interiors of the intimate sphere. Under these circumstances, celebrities and superstars perform backstage as well as onstage. This development could be interpreted as privacy made public. When the intimate realm becomes a stage for public performances, it loses its private quality. The popularity of this "public privacy," however, also means that the boundary between public and private still remains. The public nature of the backstage environment relies on the fact that it is not viewed as a public stage, but rather as distinguished by private qualities. This form of medialization can hardly survive unless people feel that they are standing behind the curtain, spying and eavesdropping. Otherwise, there would be no reason to retreat from the heroic deeds and exploits in the quest for truth and authenticity.

## The Modern Sex Appeal of Secrets

The eager attention we pay to the hidden, to that which is "deep inside," "under the surface," or "behind the scenes," indicates that we live in the age of curiosity. Secret affairs ought to be discovered, fishy stories should be revealed. The truth is never apparent, it is stashed away and thus has to be dug out. The visible is regarded as a surface that covers up a deeper reality. The closets are crowded with skeletons, the facts are swept under the rug. Thus, we have to tear away the fig-leaves and uncover the truth. Accordingly, our metaphors depict the act of telling the truth as a matter of making visible. The "naked" truth can be "discovered," "disclosed," "exposed," "unmasked," "made evident," "seen through," or "brought to light."

Correspondingly, the abominable lie appears as a coverage or a blackout. People who refuse to open up for scrutiny can be assumed to be wearing a disguise. Although "integrity" is a moral category, used to legitimize a certain degree of hush-hush around one's own person, the boundaries often cause controversies. Hence, celebrities frequently accuse reporters of violations of integrity, while the world of media defends itself in terms of the "public interest."

The hidden character of truth requires a critical, scrutinizing gaze, looking for outward signs as manifestations of what is going on under the surface. Richard Sennett (1976:168f), like others after him, has drawn parallels between the urban scene of the streets in the nineteenth century and the contemporary success of the detective novel. Detectives, or interpreters of the signs of hidden reality, were exactly what men and women had to be to make sense of life in the street. In modern society, the curiosity and penetrative gaze of the detective has become everyone's property. This role has been adopted, not least, by the mass media, whose panoptic functions provide insights into what used to be inaccessible. Thus, today we all carry on espionage.

The growth of curiosity goes hand in hand with the rise of secretiveness. By that, I do not mean that people during the age of curiosity have begun to hide more and more aspects of their lives. It is, of course, possible that modern society, with its expanded public sphere, has increased the need for concealing oneself from other people's scrutiny. The connection between curiosity and mystery-making, however, is basically of a different kind. If the entire world were as clear as glass, there wouldn't be anything to reveal and consequently nothing to be curious about. Thus, defining truth as something hidden also draws attention to the obscure. It involves the production of secrets, enigmas, conundrums, mysteries, and taboos. Voyeurism can flourish only if the seductive is not fully visible. Curiosity is aroused only if something threatens to elude it. We concern ourselves about the authenticity of heroes only if it is not already apparent to us. Hence, inquisitiveness is deemed to exist in an enigmatic world.



The social psychology of curiosity and secretiveness raises questions about what circumstances actually generate spying and secrets. Even though a historical universality of private spheres has been asserted (cf. e.g. Duby 1987/1985), there is no reason to assume a universal inquisitiveness throughout history. Whereas privacy in some contexts might have implied the possibility to appear unarmed, private spheres today seem to become invested with truth value. These realms are ruled by informality and thus imply opportunities to “be oneself,” that is, unmasked and sincere. Factors like mobility and anonymity vary historically and, I believe, in some ways condition secretiveness. To fulfil this argument, however, it is necessary to increase the understanding of the changes that deported premodern society to history and made way for modernity.

It has often been claimed that society via the process of modernization has become increasingly transparent. For example, Michel Foucault (1979/1975), in his influential study of the prison system as a metaphor of modernity and its disciplinary techniques, has indicated the importance of visibility in modern society. Arguments informed by his ideas generally tend to underline the capacity of power to inscribe itself in the subject by making it the object of knowledge and observation. However, modern society can also be said to undergo panopticism from the opposite direction. Through the vast mass-medialization of society, webs of information and communication have been created with many ramifications. These have made larger and larger areas of the public as well as the private spheres visible, which has not least resulted in a focus on the state and other centers of the exercise of power (cf. e.g. Meyrowitz 1985). Scott Lash and John Urry have even argued that these webs are replacing social structures and thereby provide a precondition for the reflexive individualization that is a main theme in depictions of postmodernity (Lash 1994; Lash and Urry 1994:110).

There is probably nothing to object to the idea that society via these processes has become increasingly transparent. It involves, however, the risk of concealing the new forms of invisibility that have been generated along with the rise

of modern society. This lack of transparency is of at least two different kinds. First, political instances and other centers of the design of society disappear from the individual's range of vision. Modernity implies the development of global relations, connecting remote localities. Thus, local events become more and more dependent on actions performed at distance, and these webs tend to compress the world (cf. Giddens 1990:55–78; Robertson 1992). Even though mass media endeavor to monitor parliaments, bureaucracies and industry, invisible spaces develop under such circumstances, in which many of the decisions affecting peoples lives are made. The majority of the people concerned play an acclamatory role as “public opinion,” without participating in the debate (cf. Habermas 1991/1962; 1991/1973).

Second, and most important, invisibility is also generated in human relations. Whereas the former lack of permeability emerges when some face-to-face relations, for example, between patriarch and subordinate, are replaced by distant bonds, the latter implies an increased degree of invisibility in the remaining face-to-face relations. This lack of transparency consists in the fact that people in modern and postmodern society have a propensity to create new zones of inaccessibility to each other. In the premodern world people tended to lead their lives in a highly compressed space. Even if great migrations have of course occurred throughout history, agricultural life generally meant a place-bound and stationary life. To the extent that the individual played different social roles in that kind of environment, these were to a great degree performed in front of the same audience. The fact that work, home, and consumption were located in the same limited space also meant that the various tribulations of life were enacted in the same social context, within the frames of the very same social constellation. The comparatively low mobility furthermore integrated the social constitution. As Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) and other media theorists have shown, information in this world was a more or less place-bound phenomenon. To be able to observe, it was necessary to be at the same place as the observed object, and to the extent that information was mediated, it could

under no circumstances travel faster than the messenger himself (cf. McLuhan 1964). However, this does not only mean that knowledge and information tended to become compartmentalized within limited circles. While the view *outwards* was blocked, the view *inwards* tended to become unlimited since people more or less always were at the same spot. It would seem redundant to tell "the history of one's life" in this kind of environment, as the only possible audience for that kind of narrative had already witnessed it as it happened. While you couldn't see anything outside of your own region, everything tended to be visible inside it.

The modern and postmodern individual, however, divides his or her life between various social subsystems. Hence, modern and postmodern life becomes spatially fragmented. The different roles we play in everyday life are relocated socially as well as geographically. We tend to act as professionals, parents, or members of associations in different places, in front of different audiences. We thereby commute, not only between various roles, but also between the various stages where these are performed. The more often we change workplace, housing estate, home town, or spouse, the more social contexts we pass by in the course of our lives. At every single station only a part of the full repertoire is accessible to the surrounding audience. Hence, modernization does not simply imply increased visibility. We always have a lack of information about the people with whom we share different sections of our lives. There is no one constantly at our side from the cradle to the grave, acquainted with all our affairs. The secret zones people generate under these conditions set barriers, but at the same time offer the seductive temptation to break through the partition walls by gossip, confession, or spying (cf. Simmel 1906:446). Under these circumstances, we therefore often experience a need to tell our life histories to each other.

In the contemporary world everybody harbors numerous stashes, to which importance and truth can be ascribed and which thereby can be transformed into desirable secrets. I might know my boss as a professional, but what is he actually like as a lover or a womanizer? If we had shared all our hardships and localities

of life I would have had the opportunity to gather the necessary information to form an opinion in this matter. Now, since that is not the case, the uncertainty provides a potential object to be curious about. Accordingly, modern and postmodern society fulfills a basic trait to make people seem enigmatic to each other. However, the unseen or unknown does not unconditionally become an object of voyeurism. Only if we define sexuality, backstage environments, private life, or the intimate sphere as areas of personal truth, is information about these matters indispensable to stipulate identities. In that case, these are the areas where people are thought to embody their true essences, that is, where they "are themselves" or what they "feel inside." To be able to establish what individuals "really are like," these private or secret zones become relevant objects of observation. This curious desire is especially directed against those individuals who are partly known, for example, colleagues, neighbors, or celebrities, that is, people we know from some *fora* but not from others. Secrets of anonymous persons are not as mesmerizing as those of, say, Madonna, Hugh Grant, or the neighbor's wife.

In a society where people lead lives that are relocated to different and separate environments, into which we cannot gain full insight, behavior may become subjected to problems of coherency. Biographies are not only created around one's own person. Other people are also to a great degree conceived of in biographical terms. This form of biographical conception aims at creating unity and meaning of the individual as an indivisible atom. The issue of consistency and continuity between behavior, opinions, and emotions, in different contexts as well as with regard to "external" gestures and "inner" experiences, becomes a central problem. Unexposed corners or recesses then serve as correctives to illuminated arenas. Thus, the issue contains criteria for true and false behavior. These principles form what I call a "phenomenology of authenticity," a term that refers to the ways in which impressions of authenticity are created in a society where heroes and celebrities are performing backstage as well as onstage.

First, there is a tendency to associate au-

thenticity with being ordinary. As depicted above, celebrities and heroes who seem like ordinary people are often regarded as “authentic,” “natural,” or “unaffected,” while distinguished people run the risk of being considered “affected” or “unnatural.” Unaffected heroes, like the All-American Guy or the “ordinary guys” in Swedish sports media, are to a great degree constructed with the back region as a means and a resource, and sports heroes certainly appear most ordinary backstage, where the deeds and exploits are not accomplished. The medialization of the back region is therefore an important step in the “authenticization” of renowned characters.

Second, authenticity is created through a continuity between the interior and exterior of the individual. This principle relies on the modern interiorization of emotional life. To behave authentically in this sense is to expose the interior through the exterior, that is, to “show one’s feelings.” Latent realities have to be manifested in order to justify the behavior and make the identity true. The impression of authenticity therefore requires continuity between exterior and interior. Insincerity and hypocrisy are terms signifying the “fraud” caused by the lack of such a coherency. To present a façade that is not directly connected to one’s interior is regarded as passing oneself off as “someone else,” not what one actually is “inside.”

Third, impressions of authenticity are also produced by an apparently consistent behavior in both public and private spheres. Available information about backstage behavior functions as a key to compare the public performance with. The authentic norm requires some degree of unambiguous essence. Even if people can be said to play different roles in different contexts, these roles have to be united by a common denominator to generate authenticity. To appear unaffected, you always and everywhere have to show an unaffected attitude. A single failure in this respect can sometimes be excused by phrases like “I wasn’t myself at the actual moment,” but recurrent misdemeanors in the long run undermine all claims to authenticity. If the normative violation is regarded as too serious to be excused, the celebrity might end up in an awkward situation. Accordingly,

when a secret mistress or a blowjob on Sunset Boulevard is revealed, careers are affected or sometimes even destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

This phenomenology of authenticity is of major importance to the reception of fame, heroes, and their public performances in advanced media society, with its extended capacities of public recognition. This is so not only because heroes are objects of identification, but also because authenticity today goes hand in hand with personal legitimacy.

## Walls and Borders

In the world of sport, the sex appeal of heroes, and thus also their authenticity, varies substantially due to the constant changes of the public enthusiasm about certain events. Usually it is routinely assumed that some, especially men, are interested in sport, while others, especially women, are not. However, this idea is deceptive. Of course there are some real sports fans, who watch more or less every sport event on television, while a group of detractors probably never experience any excitement at all. But between these two parties, there is a multitude of potential enthusiasts in state of alert. When the odds are in favor and victories are anticipated in the Olympic Games or the World Cup, the living-room sofas are packed with viewers. In case of misfortune, they simply switch channels and thereby expel the feelings of disappointment. Great national (or local) expectations always attract these “opportunistic” fans.

The 1994 World Cup in soccer was such an occasion in Sweden. During this event, some common tendencies were intensified. The backstage spheres of sports heroes are always under public scrutiny, but the exceptional enthusiasm multiplied this recognition. The quantitative increase, however, implied qualitative effects. The intense focus on soccer heroes formed part of the emotionalization of the nation. The vast media coverage created an inner space of national inclusion, based on emotional identification. The relatives of Swedish athletes are of no relevance to foreigners. During a successful World Cup, that is, when the national emotionality reaches a peak, however, they may tempo-

rarily erase internal social barriers and attract Swedes as displays of the "inner" truths of heroes. Since they were parts of "our" team, they were also frequently exposed in the public sphere even before the event. Thereby the public desire for their secrets, for their "true identities," was stimulated. To transgress the borderline between public and private and expose the interiors of the intimate realms of the heroes was also an opening of the door to this inner space of national participation, which, perhaps more than anything else, separates insiders from outsiders. This inner community is demarcated by an ambiguous dividing line. Whereas for the insider, this line is a border which can be crossed, the outsider hardly experiences transgression as feasible. Thus, the various national dimensions are defined by different frames. Territorially, nations are demarcated by borders, while, emotionally, the borders are replaced by walls. Therefore, it is possible to visit any nation without entering its nationality.

## Notes

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1. The discussion of the concept of charisma is based on *Economy and Society*, cf. Weber 1968a; 1968b.
2. The latter is especially the case when it comes to politicians, whose ability to seem authentic is of major importance if they are to gain credibility. Consider, for example, the case of former American president candidate Gary Hart, who had to withdraw from the elections in 1988, after his secret mistress had been revealed to the public.

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