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# HEGEL *CONTRA* CELEBRITY: THE RECONCILIATION OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT

By CHRIS ROJEK

## Abstract

This paper argues that the philosophy of Hegel exposes a fundamental and damaging bias in the field of Celebrity Studies. This bias takes the shape of privileging questions of *techne* over form. The dominant paradigm in the field is here called *Triangulation*. The paper describes this paradigm and critically evaluates it in terms of adequacy. Hegel's concept of *World Historical Individual's* is discussed in order to show that the types of celebrity typically examined under the domain of Triangulation do not constitute *authentic celebrity*. The paper ends with a comparison of form and *techne* as instruments in the analysis of fame.

**Key Words:** Idealism, Celebrity, Transcendentalism, Triangulation, Form

## STRUCTURALISM / POST STRUCTURALISM

As to the relevance of Hegel's philosophy to Celebrity Studies, why should anyone working in the field give a fig? Today, in so far as his work has influence, it is via the writings of

perhaps his most ardent reader, and fateful critic, Karl Marx. Marx took from Hegel two methodological principles that he proceeded to re-engineer as cardinal for his own purposes. The first is Hegel's insistence that all social analysis must be founded upon accurate knowledge of history. For Hegel, it is no exaggeration to maintain that everything commences with history. Past, present and future refer to one another in a ceaseless dialectical arrangement. This brings us to the second principle drawn from Hegel's legacy. Hegel's philosophy is a self-declared *phenomenology* of Being and Knowing (Hegel 1976). Conventionally, phenomenology is understood to involve immediate, sensuous involvement between Subject and Object. History cannot proceed without the conscious, creative role played by mankind. However, in itself, conscious subjective agency would be inconceivable without history. To this extent, the past should never be considered as something that is finished or settled. Moreover, for Hegel this perspective cannot be satisfactorily grasped if it is simply penned into a Materialist framework. His philosophy allocates quite as much stock to Idealism. It points in the direction of the inevitable influence of universal, transcendentalist forces upon material relations and the feedback loop of dialectics. What Marx found unconscionable in Hegel, namely the equal weight assigned to Idealism and Materialism, is indispensable to the entire Hegelian standpoint. The main contention of this paper is that it is precisely Hegel's commitment to combine Idealism with Materialism that makes his philosophy so relevant and intriguing for students of celebrity culture today. Today, it offers a vital critical counterpoint to the dominant paradigm in Celebrity Studies which is overwhelmingly Materialist in nature. As such, it tends to shun Idealism. The practical consequence of this is that on *a priori* grounds the question of Transcendental forces is treated as impenetrable, and therefore, incommensurate with valid knowledge. Viewed at the level of celebrity experience, this is a problem. This is because the experience and meaning of celebrity communicates meaning that is frequently beyond rational accounting practice. In

other words, the transcendentalist mind set, that is attuned to the presence of the ineffable as an ordinary part of human relations, is integral to celebrity culture. The ineffable does not respect testable, quantifiable standards. Rather it rests upon qualitative, unquantifiable sentiments of ‘knowing’, ‘feeling’, ‘believing’ and ‘truthing’.

The paper is organized into four parts. Firstly, the parameters of what I contend is the dominant paradigm in Celebrity Studies will be examined. Secondly, the Materialist foundations of this paradigm will be elaborated in more detail, by discussing the key role that the question of technology plays in generating explanations of the utility and the value of celebrity. Thirdly, Hegel’s concept of World Historical Individual’s will be discussed in order to reveal to serious defects in the dominant paradigm. Fourthly, an explanation of how and why Hegel’s approach has been eclipsed by the rise of Celebrity Studies will be attempted.

### Triangulation: The Dominant Paradigm

I propose to call the dominant paradigm in Celebrity Studies ‘Triangulation’. It is so called because it pinions the analysis of celebrity around the interplay between three empirically accessible, quantifiable agents: Celebrities, Media (including Cultural Intermediaries) and Publics. Tacitly, it is associated with the writings of, *inter alia*, Gamson (1994); Marshall (1997); Cashmore (2006); Driessens (2013, 2014); Lilti (2017); Douglas and McDonnell (2019). It is ‘tacit’ in the sense of being a mostly, unexamined domain assumption that informs their work. These authors proceed from the starting point that the proper scope of analysis is confined to material, empirically accessible data. In the words of Cashmore, ‘celebrity’ culture’s most basic imperative is material’ (Cashmore 2006:265). This has the effect of tying the meaning and explanation of celebrity indissolubly, to questions of

technology and strategy rather than ultimate meaning. The method of enquiry that is applied to probe into this imperative is science. The virtues of this method are antithetical to intuition, intimation and other Idealist/Transcendental methods of feeling, being, knowing and truthing. Instead, valid knowledge is limited to empirically, accessible, quantifiable, testable, data accumulated through the human sensory apparatus.

The most cogent articulation of what is called here ‘Triangulation’, is formulated by Sharon Marcus (2019). In her words, ‘celebrity culture is a drama involving three equally powerful groups: Media, members of the Public and Celebrities themselves’ (Marcus 2019: 3). These are understood simultaneously, to be interconnected semiotic systems and concrete, material power networks. From this standpoint, *Celebrities* are newsworthy figures whose social and economic impact is materially constituted, empirically accessible and quantifiable. *Publics* are the collectivities, aggregated around celebrities. *Media* (and I would add ‘Cultural Intermediaries’/Social Media) are the networks that relate Publics to Celebrities. In this respect, it goes without saying that they are never neutral. Media/Cultural Intermediaries are always and already power brokers in the management of fame on behalf of social, political and economic interests.

The defining characteristics of Triangulation are as follows:

- The equation of valid knowledge with testable, empirically accessible data
- The nomination of the human sensory apparatus and cognitive process as the only valid source of data and knowledge.
- Faith in the Cartesian methodological principle that the Object of Research is absolutely separate, and visibly external, to the Subject that conducts Research.
- Concentration upon a material causal nexus in analysis with a corresponding suspicion of explanatory worth of immaterial forces.

- The designation of quantitative utility as the ultimate value of research.
- The proposition that inner experience is not valid knowledge because it cannot be quantitatively expressed, and objectively measured.

One might argue the toss over whether the three agents that Marcus portrays as pivotal are ‘equally powerful’ (Marcus 2019). What is not in doubt is that the focus on empirically accessible data is analytically decisive. Triangulation does not peer over the edge of the Materialist framework. It confines itself to the ramparts.

Regarding the social consequences of the interplay between Celebrities, Media and Publics in Triangulation today, the main consequence is seen as functional. Celebrity culture provides *social integration* (Driessens 2014, p. 112). The material imperative identified so bluntly by Cashmore, achieves decisive articulation in *consumption*. Consumption practice is understood to be one vital element in the glue that holds society together. This leads in short order to the definition of celebrity as ‘a cultural commodity’ (Collins 2007, p. 191). The practice of studying celebrity as a commodity is commonplace. It involves technical procedures of ‘atomization’, ‘valuation’ and ‘dehumanization’ (Lofton 2011, p. 348). As Lofton elaborates, in a case study of Britney Spears:

Celebrity is then confined and perpetuated through  
the parsing (of) the performer’s incomparable  
talent or her uncanny timing, or both – into more  
translatable bits of possibility. A star is born,  
but then to sustain her celebrity, her gifts (such  
as they might be) will be chopped and repackaged

into capitalizing cover shoots, singular accessories ... What began as a person becomes a story line (Lofton 2011,p. 348).

Lofton refers to commodification as fundamentally a process of ‘anatomization’ (Lofton 2011, p.348). That is, the transplantation of elements in the celebrity public image into the service of economic accumulation.

By way of an example, it is no accident that so much content in the study of celebrity focuses on the issue of celebrity endorsement. As an academic topic of study, endorsement has many dimensions. Among the most direct and obvious is the measurable function played by celebrity association in adding utility to a product. This is redolent of a bias in favour of cloning concrete, visible aspects of the celebrity image with elements of the material commodity. There is simply no reflexive engagement, to speak of, with inner experience. More particularly, the proposition that part of the public attraction for celebrities is that they are identified with the *consummation* of form is under-examined. Instead, elements of the public image are repurposed as a technical resource to add value to a specific product or a product line. All contributions in *Triangulation* accentuate the material dimension in analysis. When it comes to the question of celebrity endorsement, the visible, quantifiable, external influence of the celebrity industry is massively privileged. What derives from this is a *plastic* view of celebrity i.e. a perspective that treats fame as the fabrication of external, material agents of persuasion. This is at the heart of the commonplace criticism that celebrity culture is superficial and based in values of pseudo identification between a celebrity and the public (Boorstin 1961; Gabler 1998). Under *Triangulation*, no genuine credence is given to the Idealist/Transcendentalist principle that subjective action is *generative*. On this reckoning, a plastic view of celebrity is insufficient. The ineffable quality that is often such a captivating feature of celebrity relations is an expression of immanent necessity (1). That is,



it reflects a resonance with qualities of inner experience that cannot be reduced to rational accounting practice. It is plausible to regard this as the cornerstone of Hegel's philosophy. The ramifications of this point for the study of celebrity will be taken up and examined in greater detail later in the paper.

Not all interpretive offshoots of Triangulation have equivalence. For example, Lilti argues that celebrity emerges in the mid-eighteenth century with visible, documented challenges by the rising bourgeois property class to the traditional order founded upon immemorial sign systems promoting the 'pomp', 'magnificence' and anointed privilege of Court Society (Lilti 2017, pp. 102-104). For Lilti, the rise of celebrity culture involves the sublimation of symbols and rituals from the declining material power base of the Court into growingly assertive, bourgeois society. Similarly, in their history of celebrity, Douglas and McDonnell concentrate upon the technical-material effects of urbanization, industrialization, mass communications, bureaucracy and the decline of religion (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, pp. 21-64). 'Celebrity production,' they maintain, 'is an industry – in fact quite an elaborated one that can often look like mass production – that has relied increasingly on a growing cadre of workers, managers, talent agents, press agents, publicists, personal stylists, trainers and the like (Douglas and McDonnell 2019, p. 35). While they do not discount the parts played by charisma and talent, their account reserves the lion's share of influence in the manufacture of celebrity to visible, quantifiable technical-material forces.

Despite the influence of these historical contributions they do not constitute the dominant approach in the study of celebrity under Triangulation. Hegel would perhaps have expected historically informed theory and research to be at the forefront of celebrity studies. It is not so (Morgan 2010; Wesolowski 2020). Textual analysis occupies this position. (Turner 2010). The form it takes are first, to treat celebrity as a network and play of denotative and connotative association in its own right; and second, to relate celebrity, as a media text, to

wider cultural formations, economic interests and political concerns (Turner 2010,p. 13). The precise details of how these consecutive levels of analysis intersect is not clear cut. Indeed, one of Turner's concerns is to demonstrate that there are often puzzling slippages between the celebrity as text, and the political economy of celebrity. As a result, under Textual Analysis, the topic of what analysis exactly seeks to propose for the concrete dynamics of celebrity production, distribution and exchange, is often elusive (Turner 2010). In the end, when all is said and done, it is hard not to conclude that the relationship between charisma and the effect of technical-material forces operates through a process of condensation, rather than coherent analysis. In contrast, with regard to the method of decoding celebrity, there is no doubt. Textual analysis fully takes over the semiotic precedent of examining celebrity as a sign consisting of a determinate *signifier* and a quantified *signified* (Redmond 2019). Thus, it faithfully reproduces the weight that Triangulation assigns to the quantifiable, testable scientific analysis of material data over intuition, intimation, and the whole realm of Transcendentalism.

With hindsight, hints of Triangulation are evident in the pioneering studies of celebrity. For example, Dyer's post-structuralist work on 'Stars', examines celebrity in terms of the intersection between 1) the star's empirical meaning; 2) the presentation of the star (Hollywood); and 3) the audience (Dyer 1979; 1986). Palpably, the trinity of Celebrity, Media and Publics, is anticipated here. Furthermore, his analysis is already relaxed with the practice of treating stars as commodities. That is, manufactured artefacts of strategy, design and technical management designed to generate accumulation. He also identifies 'Hollywood' as the decisive agent in constructing the popular meaning of stars. Similarly, more recently, Marshall, works in a different tradition that is chiefly indebted to the thought of Weber and Foucault, but also makes use of semiotics, to reproduce the motif that the analysis of celebrity must be framed in the exchange between three agents (Marshall

1997). Celebrity, he proposes is an ‘area of negotiation among the public, the media and the celebrity’ (Marshall 1997, p. 12). It is a formulation that gives space to the textual approach in the form of a ‘negotiation’ between representation (signs) and power (material force). The salient critical issue raised by all of this is not that Triangulation is wrong. On the contrary, it is incontrovertible that Science and Materialism are indispensable to the proper study of celebrity. Rather, the critical question is what is left out when Science and Materialism are permitted to operate as the ‘natural’, ubiquitous basis for positing valid knowledge? Braudy’s stress on the importance of the history of ideas for understanding the meaning of celebrity material culture today provides some clues on what form this might take (Braudy 1997). In Braudy’s study, art, oratory, poetry and literature are taken as fertile seed ground to explore how ideas, feelings and sentiments condition the public response to the meaning of celebrity (Braudy 1997, pp. 29-349). This suggests that, in his view, Idealism/Transcendence are live issues in understanding celebrity. For its part, Triangulation treats all of this as *terra incognita*. The problem with this is that it thereby excludes issues that are directly relevant to the popular experience and meaning of celebrity. The condition inescapable brings to mind the precept that a paradigm should not be allowed to have the last word, merely because it happens to be dominant.

### *Techné*-Bias: The Priority of Techno-Materialism

A repeated critical procedure in Triangulation is the reduction of ‘fame’ to technological-strategic determinants. The appeal of celebrities is portrayed as the effect of, *inter alia*, Marketing, Public Relations, mass media and other branches of social impression management. In a word, this way of explaining celebrity, mobilizes, seizes upon, and applies, the role of *Techné*. By the term *techné*, is meant the aggregate of external, technical

knowledge and strategic procedures, founded in the accumulation of empirically grounded data and procedures of induction, to pursue material, cognitive, instrumental purposes. The primary examples of instrumental purpose are self-preservation and the mastery of nature. As an aside, at this stage, it is worth noting, how very incongruous it is for Celebrity Studies to be so complicit with a strong bias to technological-strategic explanations of fame. For it is widely observed that the reason why celebrity experience is culturally appealing is that it frequently conveys sentiments of purity, necessity and liberation that transcend standard, instrumental, accounting of human affairs altogether (Alexander 2010; Gil-Egul, Kern-Stone and Forman 2017). Going back to Hegel for a moment, his philosophy presents all approaches to knowledge based exclusively in the analysis of materialist, empirically observable data as a bad wager. It does not seek to deny the importance of empirically accessible, verifiable, external influences altogether. However, to the extent that *techne* removes the questions of immanent necessity and *inner experience* it is untenable. Presently, it will be demonstrated that Hegel's position is profoundly *contra*, to the institutional bias of the dominant paradigm in Cultural Sociology and Celebrity Studies.

Triangulation leans naturally, and invariably, to a strategic-technical explanation of celebrity over Idealism/Transcendentalism. For example, Marcus returns repeatedly to an historical account of the indispensable importance of *techne* in building general receptivity to the celebrity persona's of Sarah Bernhardt and Oscar Wilde (Marcus 2019: 25-37, 82-87, 152, 164-5). The decisive point regarding the centrality of *techne* is well expressed by Evans: 'celebrity as a category is absolutely dependent on the media to create and disseminate a persona to an audience' (Evans 2005: 19). There can be no celebrity without the technology of modern mass communications. Cashmore fulsomely supports this emphasis on the fundamental technical importance of the media. Indeed, he characterizes the decisive quality of contemporary celebrity as 'a shift from achievement-based fame to media-driven fame'

(Cashmore 2006, p. 7). This, in so many words, proposes that the technical element has expanded to over-shadow issues of individual talent, skill and accomplishment. Elsewhere, the media is understood to be a strategic and technical force in the twentieth century that operates at the service of the culture industry to sculpt public wants and desires (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979). The notion of the privileged relationship between media technology and the construction of celebrity carries over into the work of Driessens (Driessens 2014). *Inter alia*, it is presented as applying techniques of impression management, opinion formation, product packaging and other devices of persuasion to materially and symbolically, position celebrity in an audience. The consequence of this is the reinforcement of *mediatization* i.e. the convergence of everyday life with the precedents and practice of the media. In a word, celebrity is primarily interpreted, as the effect of *techne*. Once again, it is most accurate to classify this, not as a departure from twentieth century convention, but a continuation of it. Deservedly, Lowenthal's ground-breaking study of celebrity in the mid twentieth century is honoured as a revolutionary contribution (Lowenthal 1944). Empirically, it takes the form of content analysis of celebrity material in two popular U.S. Magazines, *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post* between 1940 and 1941 (Lowenthal 1944). From the standpoint of the present day, the work already bears the buds of what is now called here, *Triangulation*. Thus, it restricts valid knowledge to empirically accessible data; it gives no analytical quarter to immaterial forces; it frames the emergence of celebrity as an appendage of the culture industry; and it presents the experience of celebrity as irreversibly bound-up with *techne*, rather than inner experience and immanent necessity. Lowenthal identifies technology as the key to the consciousness of celebrity under capitalism. He wrote, of course, as an exiled member of the Frankfurt School (2). As such, he was heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin's signal work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 2008). This is an early, and still vital contribution to the role of *techne* in culture. Lowenthal certainly

recognized it as such. His argument differentiates two phases in the development of modern celebrity culture. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the meaning of celebrity is tied to relations of *production*. Creators of visible external objects, such as inventors, industrialists, business tycoons, politicians, authors, composers etc, are admired as producers of utility and economic value. With the rise of cost-effective printing technologies, and especially the invention of radio and television, celebrity culture moves into a new phase. From the 1920's, the new celebrities are film stars, sports idols, musical icons, radio stars, etc. Under this regime, utility and economic value are reinforced as prominent features of celebrity culture.

In the original Frankfurt perspective, what already holds the high ground is the sheer daunting scale of the role of *techne* in the domination of the capitalist mode. Nowhere is the misplaced wholeness of celebrity as a perceived object and role model in mass culture expressed more cogently than in the words of Adorno:

At bottom, the problem is that the concept  
of life itself, as a unity that makes sense  
and unfolds out of itself, possesses no more  
reality whatsoever – just as little as the  
concept of the individual – and that the  
ideological function of biographies is to  
demonstrate to people through some kind of  
models that something like a life, possessed  
of all the emphatic categories of life, still  
exists (Adorno in Lowenthal 1989, pp. 141-2).

The burden of this extract is incontestable. The glamour of celebrity has no authentic relation to immanent necessity or inner experience. *Techne* has partitioned life to operate in the service of the culture industry and capital accumulation. The technical models of gratification developed by capitalism reduce the Subject of inner experience and the glamour of the external Object of celebrity to what Adorno later discounted, as *pseudo-individualism* (Adorno 2005) (3). The autonomy of reason therefore loses its meaning. Humans are shaped by the strategic-technical instruments that they themselves, have created. Marcuse, who was deeply influenced by his reading of Hegel, explicitly equates social compliance and co-ordination in late capitalism with the advance of technology (Marcuse 1964). In his words, technology is ‘the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the machine age and is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behaviour patterns, an instrument for control and domination’ (Marcuse 1998: 4). *Techne* is here equated with the production, distribution and consumption of what he takes to be false needs. However, it leads to an interpretive challenge concerning the relationship between *techne* and culture that the Frankfurt School never resolved. Marcuse’s demand at the end of *One Dimensional Man*, for a ‘great refusal’ reads like a *non sequitor* (Marcuse 1964). If refusal means rejecting the instruments of capital domination as much as the capitalist class itself, it is by no means evident how this can possibly be achieved. The manipulative and distorting effects of *techne* are not disabled merely because they are taken over by new hands. *Techne* has, so to speak, escaped Pandora’s Box.

For example, in the study of celebrity a long standing argument is that the manipulative effects of the celebrity industry would be moderated by expanding cultural debate to meaningfully include the greater co-operation of the fan base (Dyer 1986). The work on the effect of social media and celebrity certainly lends some force to support to the idea that

greater participation erodes cultural domination by established interests. Consecutively, it reveals the significance of new technologically based celebrity echo-chambers that solidify distortion and new Social Media Influencer's that bend public consciousness to predetermined economic, political and cultural goals (Marwick 2013; Ingelton and York 2019). The effect of this critical exchange is to reinforce the centrality of *techne* in the accurate analysis of celebrity.

Hegel and 'World Historical Individual's' (*WHI's*)

The Materialist contribution of *techne* in organizing celebrity is perfectly consistent with Hegel's philosophy. His framework of dialectical analysis encompasses the formulation and application of strategies and technologies to master Nature and Human Impressions. After all, his method of dialectics is based in the notion that external barriers will, eventually, be overcome. According to this way of thinking, it is only consistent to present the initial indifference to a celebrity as a technical barrier to be overcome by *techne*. By the same token, Hegel's concept of *World Historical Individual's* (*WHI's*) outlines the basics of the premise with which to dismantle constructs of *techne* based forms of fame. The concept pays due importance to immanent necessity and inner experience.

To fully understand this it is necessary to briefly refer to Hegel's philosophy of history. For Hegel, human history is ultimately the development and fulfilment of *Geist* (Hegel 1976). The immediate difficulty posed in undertaking this task is that the term does not have a clear definition in English (Bykova 2016; Zuckert and Kreines 2017; McClymond 2018). It is often translated as 'World Spirit'. Unfortunately, this summons forth the idea of an external force that determines the deeds of humans. It therefore misses the role of inner, reflexive, self-consciousness, that Hegel saw as integral to the meaning of *Geist* (Pinkard 1994, pp. 8-



9). For Hegel, world history is not an open process that is the accumulation of the countless deeds of men and women over time. Rather, it possesses an immanent, necessary drive that runs through every particle of human life and experience.

Comprehension will perhaps be facilitated if we turn briefly, to a direct example of *Geist*, as it were, *in action*, from Hegel's own work. In 1806, when French troops occupied the city of Jena, forcing Hegel to take steps to flee, he encountered, by chance, in the flesh, Napoleon Bonaparte. He later recalled in a letter:

I saw the Emperor – the world soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance.

It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it

(Letter to Niethammer, October 13, 1806 (in) Hegel 1984, pp. 114)

The clue to what Hegel means by *Geist* is sewn into the phrases 'the world soul' and 'concentrated at a single point'. He describes his fleeting glimpse of Napoleon as 'a wonderful sensation'. Interestingly, with respect to the phenomenology of fame, Hegel's reaction to Napoleon is what would today be called, *instant recognition*. In a word Hegel finds the sight of Napoleon simply, awesome. What actually is being *instantly recognized* when Hegel sets eyes upon Napoleon in 1806? It is the wonder of immanent necessity made visible and tangible. At one and the same time Hegel witnesses both a material, physically co-present famous individual and a necessary chain of purposive, transcendent associations and sentiments that exist, so to speak, behind the back of history. For Hegel, Napoleon is simultaneously, a man of great deeds and the material articulation of the unconquerable Spirit of World Progress. Napoleon's deeds are of course, the product of his own volition. At the same time, hidden within his freely chosen actions is 'the universal principle ... implicit in

them, and is realizing itself through them' i.e. *Geist* (Hegel 1956, p. 26). In this sense, Napoleon is not just a man of renown, but he is also recognized as the consummation of form. In and through him, the universal principle is visibly and tangibly carried forward. Hegel instantly acknowledges his chance encounter constitutes the incarnation between Subject and Object. He admires Napoleon as the inheritor of all that is best in the French Revolution. He respects the values of the Revolution as belonging to a transcendentalist form that is universally progressive. Since the purpose of the development of World Spirit is to make men and women free, it is but a short step to designate the French Revolution as the expression of *Geist*. Stripped to bare essentials, Hegel regards *WHI*'s as beings whose deeds actualize *Geist* by effecting transitions in world history. In a word, the *WHI* is an *actualizer*, a concrete, concentrated articulation of the universal principle of *Geist*, whose deeds change the rules of the game (Berry 1981: 159-160). The only other examples of *WHI*'s (world souls) listed by Hegel are Alexander the Great and Caesar (Hegel 1956, pp, 29-34; Berry 1981).

It is worth highlighting the audacity and singularity of Hegel's position. Later theories of fame seek to explain celebrity by circumstantial, technical, particularities. In general, they focus on the means of *techne* to realize the subjective interest of acquiring fame, such as avarice and ambition (Berry 1981: 159). Hegel certainly gives due credit to *techne* in the construction of celebrity. For example, for Hegel, Napoleon only possesses a version of what is today called 'instant recognition', because of the automated printing press that makes representations cheap, and therefore widely accessible. However, this is not in itself enough to produce the level of celebrity that Hegel attributes to *WHI*'s. For this to be qualified, the celebrity must be witnessed and confirmed to be the physical incarnation of *Geist*. In Hegel's own words, the *WHI* is 'the Union of Universal Abstract Existence generally with the Individual – the Subjective' (Hegel 1956, p. 25). Intimations of this union are carried within

all humans as an immanent characteristic of the species. Hence, Napoleon is not only seen as an external influence upon affairs. He is also recognized as the consummation of what is ‘sensed’, ‘felt’ and ‘known’ in inner experience. Hegel’s iron premise is that ‘the History of the World begins with the general aim – the realization of the idea of Spirit ... the whole process of History, is directed to rendering the unconscious impulse, a conscious one’ (Hegel 1956, p.25). This impulse is carried forward by abstract ideas, such as Liberation, Equality and Fraternity. But Hegel agrees with Thomas Hobbes that they lack real substance without personification in the form of an embodied articular (Hobbes 2016). For Hegel, Napoleon is a sort of *Leviathan*. For the purposes of this paper, what needs to be taken from this is that Hegel is proposing that effective history requires the *personalization* of abstract forces in the form of a leader or a figure of renown. Without this ‘the people is a formless mass’ (Hegel 1991, p. 279). A critical corollary of Hegel’s perspective is that all views of celebrity that are exclusively based in *techne* must be limited. They fail to grasp that the articulation of the whole is ‘necessarily and immediately associated’ with a recognized agent of renown that is the incarnation of *Geist* (Hegel 1991, p. 279).

This directly bears upon contemporary debates in celebrity culture. A familiar canard made of present day celebrity is that it often turns out to be a culture of empty renown (Boorstin 1961; Gabler 2000). The rationale for this is that public appeal rests on a sort of technical seduction that lures audiences to invest sentiments of faith and devotion into fabricated figures of public note whose real object is accumulation (Boorstin 1961; Gabler 2000).

Research into the phenomenon of Reality TV stars returns repeatedly to this theme (Turner 2006; Murray and Ouellette 2009; Deller 2016). The disdain for *techne* based celebrity that is shown here is already anticipated by Hegel. Moreover, Hegel offers a consecutive and in some ways opposing explanation of renown that cites immanent necessity (*Geist*) and inner experience as decisive. As Hegel puts it:

All great historical men – whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of World Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order: but *from a concealed front - one which has not attained to phenomenal, present existence* – from that Inner Spirit, still hidden beneath the surface (Hegel 1956, p. 30, emphasis added).

To be clear, a Hegelian approach to celebrity would certainly not claim that all forms of contemporary celebrity involve the reconciliation between Subject and Object. On the contrary, it would take empty renown to be a real and paramount part of celebrity culture. The result is to distort immanent necessity and inner experience by redefining them as mere effects of *techne*. Hegel's perspective evokes the responsibility of the discernment of celebrity. Fame is not all of a piece. Some forms of renown are closer to the pure technical fabrication of *techne* than others. This does not mean that all forms of fame have been subsumed under technology. For Hegel, universal forms of perception that afford conscious, recognition of immanent necessity are a species characteristic. This type of fame is of a different quality and meaning than technologically based forms. Hegel's perspective holds out the critical line of challenging the part played by *techne* in distorting immanent necessity and the significance of inner experience. It does so by presenting the transformation of immanent necessity and inner experience as tokens of utility. In doing so, Hegel's thought leads to the Marxian position on the commodification of culture. Crucially however, Hegel's Idealism/Transcendentalism resists framing the question of utility entirely in the boundaries of historical materialism. In Marx, this framing takes ultimate form in the thesis of class

control. Against this, Hegel offers something different: a concealed front, that the study of celebrity would do well to profit from.

#### Conclusion: The ‘Concealed Front’

There is a reason in the sociology of knowledge why Hegel’s perspective is marginal in Celebrity Studies. It is because the Kantian revolution in the status of what constitutes valid knowledge under the paradigm of Triangulation has been truncated (Kant 1998). This issue needs to be addressed because it is the key to the skewed character of Triangulation i.e. the emphasis on empirically accessible, quantifiable data as the only source of valid knowledge. Briefly, Kant’s revolution championed the free examination of the intelligible world by scientific method. For Kant, the intelligible world has two faces. On one side it consists of empirically accessible data that can be quantitatively identified by the human sensory apparatus and experience. Gillian Rose labels this as ‘the neo-Kantian tradition’ (Rose 1981). It equates valid knowledge with the scientific study of finite, material, empirically accessible data. This data belongs to a level of reality that Kant calls *phenomena* i.e. the realm of what can be directly observed and experienced. However, Kant insists that this is not the end to the intelligible world. *The Critique of Pure Reason* submits that there are *a priori* categories in the world. These are part of what Hegel calls ‘the concealed front’. They belong to an immanent level of reality. Kant calls this *noumena* (Kant 1998). *Noumena* refer to transcendent, innate ‘things in themselves’ that precede recorded history and permeate the human sensory apparatus and cognition. They are accessible to consciousness through intuition and intimation. They are therefore only partly intelligible. They cannot be fully disclosed because they are greater than the sum of human consciousness. Among the Noumenal categories are, *Unity, Totality and Plurality; Reality, negation and Limitational*

*Inherence, Subsistence, Causality and Dependence; Existence and Non Existence, Necessity and Contingency* (Kant 1998). This level of reality goes well beyond the neo-Kantian theatre of interest. For Rose, the proper procedure of knowledge accumulation that derives from Kant's writings combines science with metaphysics. This combination is the meat and drink of Hegel's philosophy and method. She calls this 'the Kantian tradition' (Rose 1981) (4). It means that speculative enquiry into *a priori* categories, is seen as quite as crucial to proper enquiry as the scientific investigation of the empirically accessible world. The investigation into the first is conducted via metaphysical procedures of intuition and intimation, while the interrogation of the phenomenal world is the preserve of investigative science.

Triangulation emerged from, and remains steeped, in the orthodoxy of the neo-Kantian tradition. It treats celebrity as 'a defining characteristic of our mediatized societies' (Driessens 2012, p. 641). The key concepts used to examine celebrity are The Celebrity industry, Media and Publics (Marcus 2019). The decisive explanatory link between these three intersecting agents is the technology of commodification. All of this is perfectly proper. Media visibility is indeed, a prerequisite for the accumulation of attention capital (Frank 2019) (5). However, it is also the case that the articulation of sentiments and sympathies in celebrity experience is often beyond the full capture of Reason or language. Some types of consciousness strongly suggest that *immanent necessity* is also a prerequisite. That is, celebrity recognition is not simply a matter of *techne* (mediatization) it also entails a sense of the consummation of forms that are immanent, *a priori*, and integral to inner experience. Indeed, the point can be taken further. It is very likely precisely because celebrity relations offer intimations and intuitions of immanent necessity that are beyond technical literacy and rational accounting practice that they are objects of cultural fascination. Alexander's concept of 'iconic consciousness' touches upon this:

To be iconically conscious is to understand without knowing, or at least knowing that one knows. It is to understand by feeling, by contact, by the ‘evidence of the senses’ rather than the mind (Alexander 2008, p. 782).

The notion of immanent necessity is a key, shared connection between Kant and Hegel. It is already anticipated in Plato’s theory of forms (2007). Briefly, Plato holds that the world should be divided between *Appearance* and *Higher Reality*. The former is what the senses disclose, the latter is a realm in which the best, most perfect, articulations of appearance and possibility are indwelling in things. These are ‘The Forms’ i.e. *a priori*, external, immaterial, semi-accessible real things that condition the contours of conscious thought and deliberative action (Williams 1998, pp. 30-37). As we have seen, in Hegel’s philosophy this urge is characterized by the reconciliation between Subject and Object (Hegel 1956, 1976, 1991). Hegel treats the fame of Napoleon as immediate and universal because he takes it to be the material embodiment of *Geist*. Hegel holds out the enquiry into celebrity as the consummation of immanent form as a task of equivalent relevance and importance to deconstructing the process of commodification.

When all is said and done, in order to examine the links between immanent necessity, iconic consciousness and celebrity culture today, there is no need to accept every aspect of Hegel’s philosophy. Periodically, attempts to maintain that the culmination of World Spirit is the end of human history continue to be made (Fukuyama 1993). They are rightly seen as eccentric, wishful thinking (Perkin 1994). Even as a metaphor, ‘the end of history’ is a delusion. Similarly, today, hardly anyone would agree with Hegel that the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian state represents the concrete ‘unity of will’ between history and *Geist* because, in his words, it is ‘rational in and for itself’ (Hegel 1991, p. 258).

All of this can be accepted, without throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Hegel's philosophy is a practical, detailed attempt to combine science with metaphysics. It respects ways of knowing, feeling and being based in 'the evidence of the senses'. Moreover, it treats them as germane to valid knowledge as understanding attained by means of science and rational cognition. Through this, it opens up 'the concealed front' in celebrity studies. In general, Triangulation has dealt with 'the evidence of the senses' as invalid sources of knowledge because they rely upon intuition and intimation. They cannot therefore, be tested. Hence, they have no quantifiable, utility. In combatting this, it is not so much the individual details of Hegel's philosophy that are valuable. Rather, it is the challenge that it constitutes to this entire mind-set. The Triangulation paradigm needs to take questions of Idealism/Transcendentalism more seriously because so much in the texture of celebrity experience reaches out and points beyond rational accounting practice. Hegel's philosophy provides an instrument for exposing the defects of an approach to celebrity that focuses solely upon empirically accessible, material, finite data. For this reason alone, Hegel should be recognized as a hitherto, unacknowledged resource of great value in the genealogy of Celebrity Studies.

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References



1. The term ‘immanent necessity’ is used here to refer to species characteristics that condition the human sensory apparatus and cognitive process.
  
2. Mischievously, Adorno opines that Lowenthal was driven to make recourse to content analysis by fear of ‘some kind of censorship mechanism in Lazarsfeld’s office (Adorno, in Lowenthal 1989: 141). Paul Lazarsfeld was a quantitative sociologist who was head of the *Radio Research Project* that moved to Columbia University in 1937. Later, this became the *Bureau of Social Research*. Lowenthal worked as a junior partner with Lazarsfeld in Columbia. In his analysis of celebrity he was doubtless conscious of the requirement to satisfy Lazarsfeld by concentrating upon empirically accessible, quantifiable data.
  
3. Pseudo individualism refers to the standardized terms of identity, taste and meaning cultivated by the culture industry (Adorno 2005).
  
4. ‘Attention capital’ is a concept that exerts growing influence in the study of celebrity (van Krieken 2019). It refers to the social and economic impact of celebrity. It is quantifiable in the form of circulation figures, audience ratings, sales figures, hits, likes, views, downloads, followers, etc (Krieken 2019: 5).
  
5. The title of this paper adapts the precedent of Rose’s ‘Hegel *Contra* Sociology’ (Rose 1981). Rose was concerned to use Hegel as a critical counterpoint against the twin tendencies of empiricism/positivism and negative dialectics in the sociology of her day. The present paper follows in her footsteps in regarding

these tendencies to exert a somewhat over-bearing influence on research and pedagogy on what is thought, practised and authorized today.

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