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The larceny of the last second: the case for transcendence

Chris Rojek

Department of Sociology, City University London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper submits that the hegemonic order in celebrity studies is fixated upon questions of utility, yield and economic asset value. These technical considerations support a technocratic engagement with celebrity that exaggerates the importance of technology and linearity. By the same token, it devalues philosophical perspectives that address questions of Transcendence and Ultimate Meaning. The term 'Triangulation' is introduced to describe the dominant paradigm in celebrity studies. The paper develops the case that to ignore these philosophical issues impoverishes the domain of celebrity studies. The value of these questions is demonstrated by discussing the relevance of Kant's concepts of *noumena* and *noumena*, Hegel's account of *World Historical Individuals*. This material is used to advance the value of phenomenological perspectives, notably the contributions of Bergson and Husserl, in respect of time and space, in the analysis of celebrity.

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As to establishing common denominators in the flux and reflux of value in celebrity culture, insurmountable interpretative problems seemingly arise. The field is dominated by a formation of thought that equates valid knowledge with empirically accessible data and assigns utility (usually quantified in the form of economic value) as the *sine qua non* of enquiry. This paper will designate this formation as a paradigm that will be called 'Triangulation'. Its main characteristics will be recounted presently. Here it suffices to note that the legitimacy of Triangulation is corroborated by standard, supposedly 'objective', quantitative data to determine celebrity value. They consist of circulation figures, box office receipts, media profile, co-branding, endorsement returns (the returns respectively, on the celebrity brand and the commodity brand endorsed by the celebrity) and, also more technically sophisticated tools of quantification such as Nielsen, E-score and Q-score ratings (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2016). Undeniably, these are of proven merit in the management of celebrity as a Strategic Investment Vehicle (SIV) (Becker 2012, Knoll and Matthes 2017). Consecutively, it should be noted that their relationship to the meaning of data is domineered by one variable: net economic value. In a word, they are geared to explore the question of market *utility* (Popescu 2014, Knoll and Mathes 2017). The decisive value in determining utility is taken to be monetary currency. The methodological pairing of celebrity with utility expresses a utilitarian and *transactional* perspective on the meaning of celebrity. The *modus operandi* is most closely associated with determining the

CONTACT Chris Rojek  Chris.Rojek.1@city.ac.uk  Department of Sociology, City University London, Northampton, Square, London EC1V 0HB, UK

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means to acquire a measurable return, namely *price*. By examining the economic value of utility, which is price, considered, in itself, as a derivative of the relationships between property, supply and demand, celebrity net worth can be manipulated. Indeed, it is reasonable to propose that the social and economic interests behind celebrity would hardly invest their surplus income, or their energies of labour, without economic accumulation, acting as a major stimulant.

All of this sounds as if it is moving towards an explanation of celebrity value steeped in economics. On the contrary, what is actually, being signalled is the inherent defect of an account that simply makes do with economics. As the pioneering work of Leo Braudy demonstrates, celebrity is as much about a determinate set of ideas as it is about an economic balance sheet (Braudy 1997). This might be referred to as the 'history of ideas' approach to celebrity. In fairness, it is part of the landscape of Triangulation. However, because it evokes aspects of celebrity meaning that are qualitative and non-quantifiable, it is also notably marginal. The Triangulation paradigm is dominated by *empiricism*. This holds that valid knowledge is solely confined to empirically accessible data, accumulated through the human sensory apparatus. Transcendental questions, and the immaterial/infinite as a whole, are classed as purely speculative forms. As such, they are judged to have no value as objects of enquiry.

At this juncture, it should be noted that while the question of utility is outwardly solved by yield, it gives birth to problems of its own making. Most obviously, the practice operates to confine examination to the interrogation of empirically accessible data, notably with respect to issues of the external causal nexus in celebrity relations. This nexus is designated as the decisive influence upon observation and experience. The analysis of celebrity therefore is stunted. It bows to an artificial limit horizon. This is because to privilege utility is necessarily to remain mute about other pertinent issues. At every point, non-utilitarian issues of celebrity raise questions of ultimate meaning. By setting questions of transcendental consciousness and the ultimate meaning of celebrity to one side, on the grounds that they are outside the field of scientific enquiry, a distorted view of the dynamics and shape of celebrity emerges. Consecutively, the empiricist influence in the study of celebrity evaluates the imposition of an artificial limit horizon upon enquiry to be a price worth paying. Broadly speaking, it leaves non-pecuniary and non-utilitarian aspects of celebrity out of the picture. In doing so, it has the advantage of presenting a secure platform upon which to achieve asset control and consolidate margin. Normalisation involves steps taken by SIV managers to replace qualitative, diverse, multi-layered responses to celebrity with the price mechanism. Price offers a clear rationale for evaluating celebrity worth. It operates as a prerequisite for funnelling SIV decisions into celebrity financing. Given this, it is not surprising that ultimate questions of the relationship between celebrity and being are given meagre attention. Among the most pressing questions, under-examined are the following: what does the phenomenon of celebrity mean, as a thing in itself, in the full range of sensory life; how does celebrity offer a cognitive and emotional resource in the ordinary conduct of purposeful life; and why are quantitative readings of celebrity preferred over forms of enquiry that posit transcendental dispositions and universal reactions?

All of these matters refer back to a bigger mystery in philosophy of how means and ends of sense-making and interpretation translate into consciousness and action. In the study and management of celebrity, it might be anticipated that those who work with

utility, economic asset value and yield as staples of resource allocation may respond with indignation to the criticism that they bow to an artificial, reductive limit horizon. The philosophical challenges involved in trying to capture the ultimate meaning of celebrity are daunting and perhaps insurmountable. When all is said and done, the ultimate meaning of celebrity may *never* be known with certainty. If this is granted, an approach that satisfies itself with quantifiable issues of utility and value at least has the virtue of offering visible returns of measurable yield and quantifiable asset value. To enter the waters of the artificiality of the limit horizon of perception and what celebrity ultimately means is to plunge from a transactional encounter with celebrity into a philosophical ocean. Yet, at the same time, entry offers the prize of offering greater clarity about the meaning of celebrity. In this regard, what first steps might be taken?

The Kantian challenge

Initially, if a Kantian perspective is brought to bear upon the question, it is evident that over-concentration on quantification leaves half the story untold. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that human sensory experience is, itself, conditioned by forces that are largely impervious to science (Kant 2007). He refers to these as *noumena*. They are ingrained in human action and history but are beyond full conscious capture. This does not mean that they cannot be interrogated or elucidated. Rather, it means firstly, that the quantitative methods of science are not fit for purpose. Schopenhauer's philosophy follows Kant in this respect (Schopenhauer 2014). It holds that scientific method can provide only so much information about reality. But Schopenhauer is clearer than Kant in maintaining that the reckoning of the balance is the preserve of qualitative methods of *intuition* and *imaginative speculation*. These methods are not treated with favour in the field of science because they are qualitative and, generally speaking, are not empirically verifiable.

It is peculiar that intuition, imaginative speculation and the whole the history of ideas approach has fallen upon relatively stony ground in the study of celebrity. After all, Triangulation holds that valid knowledge originates in sense perception and presupposes it. A regular claim made in research into celebrity sense perception is that it habitually hints at the existence of a mysterious third space that is beyond the boundaries of empirical data analysis. The invocation of religious and quasi-religious sentiments in celebrity relations is an example. Here, it is observed that the patterns of celebrity behaviour closely resemble sacred rituals. 'Celebrity icons are objects of worship,' declares Alexander (Alexander 2010, p. 325). A sacred, salvationist creed may be no part of the business of celebrity. Nor can an anointed priesthood be identified. Nonetheless, in the eyes of many commentators, 'the consumption of celebrity increasingly formats expectations of religious leadership and its distribution and communication' (Lofton 2011, p. 349). Celebrity experience frequently comes with a sense of indefinable logic and necessary consummation that is independent of empirical measurement scales (Gray, Sandvoss and Lee Harrington 2017, Booth 2018). Equally, a long-standing tradition identifies celebrity attraction with the sentiment of spiritual apotheosis and cultic behaviour (Frow 1998, Hollander 2010). The attention capital generated by celebrity is an experience that can be clearly and decisively felt emotionally, but is not amenable to rational accounting practice (Swan 2018). This assumption is integral to the idea of attention capital (Franck 2019). The

public attention generated by a celebrity is partly the expression of 'iconic consciousness'. In the words of Alexander,

to be iconically conscious is to understand
without knowing, or at least without 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)

Iconic consciousness and celebrity attention capital are only mysteries if it is insisted that quantifiable sensory experience is the exclusive fount of valid knowledge. Kant regards sensory observation and experience to be insufficient because he believes that transcendental *a priori* categories (noumena) precede sensory impression. The import of this, *against* Triangulation, is that part of the public attraction to persons of note, *precede* empirical, sensory encounters with celebrities. To put it more colloquially, from Kant's perspective there is a sense in which we are conversant with important features of celebrity existence *before* we encounter them. What it means to be a complete human being, or a figure that commands necessary admiration, may be culturally conditioned, but the sentiments do not wholly originate in culture. They have their place in the sensory range of potentials of existence. Some historians of the classical world certainly thought so. For example, Mommsen presents Caesar to his readers as a celebrity in which 'the great contrasts of existence meet and balance each other' (Mommsen 2012, p. 545). In the character of Caesar, Mommsen contends, creativity, energy, wisdom, fearlessness, realism and compassion are combined to an historically unusual degree. The character and deeds of Caesar represent the higher development of universal qualities. The recognition of these qualities is the key to Caesar's fame. 'Caesar,' concludes Mommsen, 'was the entire and perfect man' (Mommsen 2012, p. 546). The criteria of 'entirety' and 'perfection' can of course, be measured in the present tense. Of a Finals 'paper, an examiner might say that it is more 'entire' and 'perfect' than others in the cohort. However, Mommsen was an historian. For him, the criteria of 'entirety' and 'perfection' are likely to only have sufficient meaning when they are compared with historically accumulated knowledge about admired and illustrious figures from the past. Mommsen is saying that Caesar is not simply more entire and perfect when compared with his temporal peers, he is contending that Caesar is higher than admired and illustrious forebears in the history of the species.

One useful way to approach celebrity today that follows from this is to deal with it partly as a form of being that partly reflects universal attributes that are anterior to consciousness, condition experience and are semi-accessible through intuition and imagination. Once again, this runs counter to orthodox practice under Triangulation. The conventional standpoint in this paradigm is to investigate celebrity as the articulation of a quantifiable, linear causal chain. Even in the earliest academic studies of celebrity this was evident. For example, Leo Lowenthal's path-breaking analysis of celebrity biographies in mid-20th-century popular periodicals explains the attention given to sports stars, film stars and radio personalities as the product of corporate power and the new technologies of wireless broadcasting, mass circulation printing and the motion picture (Lowenthal 1944). Lowenthal's account has no place for universal 'inner experience' or 'transcendental consciousness'. Instead, the emphasis is upon tangible, quantifiable data. Conversely, a consistent Kantian approach holds that the experience of celebrity is not solely a matter

of an external causal nexus, but consecutively, involves reaching back into inner experience. From top to bottom, this is alien to the mindset of the dominant paradigm in celebrity studies, i.e. Triangulation. The latter term has been used on several occasions now, to describe the hegemonic paradigm in celebrity studies. An appropriate point has been reached where it is necessary to examine what it means in greater detail.

Triangulation

Triangulation is so-called for one reason. It assumes that the only source of valid knowledge about celebrity derives from a focus on the visible, verifiable interrelationships between three empirically accessible agents: celebrities, the media and publics. The rough template for this was evident in the earliest academic contributions to the field. For example, in Daniel Boorstin's pioneering work, the concept of 'pseudo-events', together with his famous definition of the celebrity as 'a person who is well known for his well-knownness', explicitly identifies the Media in the construction and communication of the public face of celebrity (Boorstin 1961, p. 57). Likewise, Richard Dyer's work on the star system examines celebrity as the expression of the intersection between, the empirically accessible image of the Star (the Public); the representations and communication on the public face of the star (the) Media; and the individual occupying celebrity status (the Star) (Dyer 1979, 1986). This carries over into contemporary studies. For example, in the work of Marshall, the axis of celebrity study is located in the observable 'area of negotiation among the public, the Media and the celebrity' (Marshall 1997, p. 12).

However, perhaps the fullest, most cogent articulation of the paradigm of Triangulation today is to be found in the work of Sharon Marcus (2018). 'Celebrity culture,' she writes, 'is a drama involving three equally powerful groups: media producers, members of the public, and celebrities themselves' (Marcus 2019, p. 3). Immediately, it might be objected that this proposition is faulty. By no stretch of the imagination does it make sense to regard the three agents as 'equally powerful'. The entire Frankfurt tradition on celebrity, assigns governing power to the state-corporate axis in the production, distribution and exchange of celebrity (Lowenthal 1944, Adorno 1991). Richard Dyer, who operates in a different idiom, nevertheless assigns to Hollywood central power in the production and consumption of celebrity (Dyer 1979, 1986). Leaving aside the question of the distribution of power, there is absolutely no doubt that Marcus regards the drama of celebrity culture to fundamentally consist of 'a triangular structure (that) has proved durable' (Marcus 2018, p. 217).

Methodologically, her position is based in the principle that the *object* of research is external to the *subject* who conducts research. The immediate advantage of proceeding, thus, is undeniable. The division gets rid of any fuzzy shading between the personal values of the researcher and the topic of scrutiny. It allows the researcher to treat the object of enquiry as a source of impartial knowledge since the internal values of the researcher are held to be subject to the discipline of scientific method. Marcus applies two lengthy case studies of nineteenth-century celebrity, namely Sarah Bernhardt and Oscar Wilde, to form the spine of her historical analysis (Marcus 2018, pp. 144–47; 152–56; 163–68). She treats these objects as elicited by a wider causal nexus of empirically documented historical, socio-economic influences. Foremost among these are processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, democratisation, commercialisation and, above all, mass

communications (Marcus 2018, pp. 122–23; 139–44; 163–68). Marcus is not alone in stating the influence of this nexus upon the formation of celebrity. Her position is common among the majority of historians working in the Triangulation paradigm (Inglis 2010, pp. 9–12, Lilti 2017, Douglas and McDonnell 2019). In this tradition, a search for phenomenological treatments of transcendental consciousness and questions of inner reality is a search in vain. To be sure, Marcus makes reference to academic thought on ‘interiority effects’ and ‘public intimacy’ in relation to the meaning of celebrity (Marcus 2018, p. 58, Schickel 1985, Gledhill 1991, Nussbaum 2010). But because she treats these states of being as dependent variables of the external causal nexus of technological, urban-industrial transformation, her engagement is fleeting.

From a Kantian perspective, it is therefore even more relevant to note here that over-concentration upon quantitatively formulated, empirically accessible data inevitably results in distorted, unbalanced analysis (Kant 2007). Kant regards scientific, empirical analysis *and* transcendental enquiry to be equal and corresponding in the acquisition of valid knowledge (Rose 1981). To wrap utility, yield and asset value in a purely material and technical package alienates these properties from the very transcendental forces that give them resonance in the first place. Unlike Williamson, who maintains that ‘celebrity is a form of fame that corresponds to the growth of capitalist relations of production’ (Williamson 2016, p. 155), Marcus does not offer a neo-Marxist theory of celebrity. All the same, both operate with a historical-materialist perspective that discounts idealism and transcendentalism as an *impasse*. The force of this position derives from technical innovations in the rise of capitalism that sacrifices a consideration of the value of anterior, universal categories. ‘Any invention,’ writes Marcus, ‘that increases how far and how fast communications can travel will amplify celebrity culture’ (Marcus 2018, p. 217). The importance of technology in these accounts can hardly be underestimated. Visibility and quantification are privileged because they are associated with hard data. The human sensory apparatus is defended as the direct and original means of observation and experience. It is respected as the exclusive source of empirically valid knowledge.

To date, nearly all studies of celebrity that are deemed worthy of their salt confine themselves to enquiry into the empirically accessible relationships between Celebrities, the Media (including cultural intermediaries) and Publics as the general causal nexus of historical-materialism. There is little doubt that the legitimacy of Triangulation is heavily reinforced by its relationship to quantifiable utility, yield, asset value and SIV planning (Gunter 2014). The demonstrable, measurable effects of fame have instant value in the management and control of celebrity. At the same time, two serious detrimental results follow. Firstly, Triangulation nurtures a bias in enquiry towards cultural relativism. For example, this is confirmed by the recent advocacy of Bourdieu’s ‘field theory’ as a resource to ‘rethink’ celebrity (Driessens 2013). Field theory treats society and culture as permeated by differentiation. It examines celebrity as ‘a plurality of specialized, semi-autonomous social fields, whose boundaries are not sharply drawn because these are objects of continuous struggle’ (Driessens 2013, p. 550). Marcus fully endorses the idea that celebrity relations involve field differentiation and struggle. However, she also warns that this should not push researchers to conclude that struggle ‘magically transforms a three way drama into a monologue’ (Marcus 2018, p. 217). Triangulation has no stomach for transcendentalism or universalism.

Secondly, Transcendentalism has a related bias to explain celebrity primarily as the effect of technology. The weight attached to the importance of material technology is evident in historical accounts that relate the multiplication of fame to the revolutions in mass communications, transport and urbanisation (Marcus 2018, Douglas and McDonnell 2019). However, the logistics of the cultural accumulation of celebrity is not only a matter of material, technological devices such as the printing press, radio, television and the internet. The *technocracy* of celebrity planners and managers is also a major factor (Marwick 2013, Gunter 2014). Technology and technostucture are interrelated. They combine to act as the decisive influences in the management and regulation of attention capital. The effect of technology again is to magnify the importance of material influence in the construction of celebrity. Thereby, questions of transcendentalism and universalism are again left fallow.

To summarise what has been said up to now, a profound casualty of equating the reality of celebrity mostly, or solely, with empirically accessible and quantifiable data is that ultimate questions of being and meaning that are not primarily attached to utility, yield and asset value are esteemed to be either incommensurate with the dominant framework or insoluble within their own terms. To repeat, there is no quibble that the selection of empirically accessible data relative to the field of utility as the substance of enquiry undoubtedly establishes immediate and outwardly robust principles of management and control. The problem is that it reduces what can be known and managed to the field of empirically accessible data. In other words, triangulation has a profound *confirmation bias*. What is taken to be valid knowledge is only justified in terms of the conceptual and methodological mindset and instruments of investigation used to gather empirically accessible data. Deriving economic value from fame is presented as maximised by various management technologies that answer to the discipline of utility and instrumentality. They treat celebrity as a resource that can be managed to elicit tangible social impact which translates into economic value. Lately, this has been captured most fully, in a conceptual sense, by the interesting theoretical work on *attention capital*. This refers to the social impact that a person, conveyed primarily to others as a noteworthy *public image*, exerts over public impressions and sentiments (van Krieken 2012, Franck 2019). Attention capital is understood to convert directly into economic value. This is not to say that this line of enquiry is incompatible with problems of meaning that go beyond topics of asset value, utility and yield. Nevertheless, by pairing *attention* first and foremost with *capital*, issues of utility, economic yield and asset value of celebrity are surely inflated as staples of enquiry. This may not be the intention of those who propagate the concept, but it seems to be undeniable that it is a probable consequence.

Adjoining the fruitful work around attention capital, the development of what has become known as Persona Studies is of comparable interest. This sub-field is concerned with the production, distribution and exchange of the public image of celebrity (Marshall *et al.* 2020). Since this field of research presupposes the basic requirement to measure the social impact of celebrity objectively, it lends itself to the application and refinement of quantitative methodologies. As with the attention capital approach, it is a grave error to presuppose that Persona Studies is narrowly tied to problems of utility, economic yield and asset value. Because persona is held, by definition, to be integral to celebrity, enquiries into the ultimate meaning of celebrity are not necessarily prohibited. Contrarily, since persona is also, by definition, transactional, it is easy to see why social

and economic interests concerned with utility, economic yield and asset value are strongly drawn to adopt changing details of persona as a preoccupation of SIV options. After all, to understand how the construction of persona works optimally to channel public sentiments and sympathies is the key to unlock the puzzles of seizing fame as an object of wealth creation. Contrarily, this invites the risk of reducing celebrity culture to a mere spoke in the wheel of capitalist commodity culture (Williamson 2016). It is to forget that some earlier philosophies of the relationship between the *a priori* origins and consequences of fame make bolder transcendental claims about the meaning and consciousness of celebrity to history and social order, as a whole.

Hegel and world historical individual's

A case in point is Hegel's discussion of 'World Historical Individuals' (WHIs) (Hegel 1956, pp. 23–34). The motivation for alighting upon Hegel's philosophy at this stage of the enquiry should not be misunderstood. The aim is not to present a model for students of celebrity to follow Hegel's method. He is referred to strictly for illustrative purposes. The object is to provide a glimpse of the benefits of a vastly neglected approach in the field that treats questions of transcendentalism and universalism seriously.

The first thing to note is that Hegel is sparing in his analysis of what is now called 'celebrity'. He restricts himself to exploring the sensuous manifestation of fame in the embodiment of what he calls 'World Historical Individuals' (WHIs). For Hegel, these individuals are historically distinct by reason of a mathematical equation that involves 'the union of Universal Abstract Existence generally with the Individual – the Subjective' (Hegel 1956, p. 25). He lists only three historical examples, namely Alexander the Great, Caesar and Napoleon (Hegel 1956, pp. 29–34). The small number is instructive. Undeniably, Hegel is working with an exalted view of fame. This, in itself, provides a valuable counterpoint to Triangulation. For it implies that the technically induced meaning of celebrity is specious. Hegel's application of WHIs considers real fame to reside in the incarnation of 'Universal Abstract Existence'. What does this term mean? Most commonly in his writings, Hegel employs the term *Geist* as a substitute for 'Universal Abstract Existence'. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent in English (McClymond 2018). 'World spirit' is the usual English rendition. It is a problematic translation. This is because it tilts the meaning in favour of conceiving *Geist* as an external force that acts upon individuals. This is contrary to Hegel's view. According to him, *Geist* is incarnate in individuals. It is therefore an error to regard it as external because, for Hegel, there is no space between the individual and the forces leading to 'Universal Abstract Existence'. In the words of Hegel:

those manifestations of vitality on the part of individuals and peoples, in which they seek and satisfy their own purposes, are, at the same time, the means and instruments of a higher and broader purpose of which they know nothing ... In relation to this independently universal and substantial existence – all else is subordinate, subservient to it (Hegel 1956, p. 25).

Today, Hegel's philosophy is rightly criticised for being teleological (Taylor 1975). That is, as a principle of necessity, it portrays human history as the inevitable unfolding of *Geist* (which he sometimes refers to as 'Absolute Mind'). This negates individual freedom and is therefore justifiably deplored. It is less straightforward to dismiss the relevance of his method of dialectics to the study of celebrity. As the foregoing recounts, Triangulation divides subject and object as the precondition for objective knowledge. Conversely, Hegel posits their *coalescence* as the true end of absolute knowledge. He celebrates WHIs as preludes to this end. They constitute the generative coalescence of *a priori*, universal, but opaque, qualities of world spirit that, in itself, is a source of popular attention and identification with visible, verifiable human deeds. WHIs are instrumental in representing coalescence because 'the people is a formless mass' (Hegel 1991, p. 279). They are a prelude or the bearers of 'a concealed front' (Hegel 1956, p. 30). As Hegel puts it at greater length:

All great historical men – whose own particular aims involve those large issues ... are the will of World Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purpose 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).

The coalescence between subject and object is, of course, the core of Hegel's method of dialectics. It is part of a process of historical inevitability that, he holds, culminates in absolute knowledge. To be clear, this recognition of coalescence between subject and object is held by Hegel to be a matter of immanent necessity rather than technical accomplishment. For Hegel, some types of fame are truly fateful. Because he sees 'abstract existence' as bound to the destiny of the absolute mind, he regards the capacity to celebrate these embodied manifestations of historical necessity as universal. His philosophy maintains that some types of meaning are generative, global and integral to human life, rather than effects of mere transaction, power and technology.

Net worth, memory and recognition

The main purpose of this study has been to break rank with the dominant paradigm of Triangulation in the study of celebrity. Undeniably, it is perfectly proper for questions of utility, economic yield and asset value to be high on the agenda of research. Conversely, to the extent that they inflate the significance of transactional and relativistic issues they exert a damaging effect.

Contrarily, the 'history of ideas' approach positions fame as indispensably linked to narratives of what an individual is and might be. The observation and experience of fame is not understood primarily, in technical or transactional terms, but in organic, sensual terms, i.e. the modalities of existence. In a word, the recognition of fame is elucidated as, in part, the *consummation* of the human species. Fame is thus not only examined as a function of the external, material causal nexus, or the intervention of technical factors. It is also acknowledged to be the expression of generative factors in the species and in nature. These sentiments attain their fullest outward form in literature, poetry, art, philosophy and music (Braudy 1997). The consequence of these articulations is to *interrupt* immediate, finite, material order. That is, they expose the limitations of the predictable, regimented divisions that impose order upon everyday life. In doing so, they provide intimations of a concealed front of infinite, transcendental meaning.

By definition, the full meaning of the infinite and the immaterial is beyond human capture. In the study of celebrity, the perspective that comes closest to embracing this tradition is the history of ideas approach (Braudy 1997). However, today, they are perhaps most completely realised in the philosophy of phenomenology. For this reason, in what follows, references to phenomenological ways of dealing with being and meaning will be enlisted to shed light on celebrity. Procedurally, the tradition of 'Transcendentalism Idealism and Phenomenology are saddled with a major impediment. They operate with intuitions and imaginative constructs that, at an empirical level, are not fully accessible. Therefore, they cannot be tested. This means that their main worth in the study of celebrity is as a contribution of *criticism*. That is, they possess the capacity to expose the methodological conceits and conceptual overreach of Triangulation. This is by no means a negligible assist. Three examples may be alluded to here to illustrate how it contributes to the goal of consolidating a more balanced view of celebrity: Net Worth; Instant Recognition and Memory.

(1) Net Worth

Arguably, nothing in Triangulation is more definitive, nothing more soundly buttressed by the technical means of independent, objective measurement, than Net Worth. It refers to the balance of economic asset value when stripped of liabilities. The concept is a standard indicator of celebrity value (Gunter 2014). It is a prime component in attention capital. As such, it operates as a ready metric of global comparison. It is respected by analysts of celebrity power as a measure of hard data that overrides cultural distinction (Knittel and Stango 2013, Leban *et al.* 2021). The market utility of celebrities reflects net worth. It is empirically accessible, quantifiable and sanctioned by the dominant paradigm in the field. The relationship between net worth and stock value is demonstrable in celebrity endorsement SIV portfolio management (Elberse and Verleun 2012, Popescu 2014).

However, this represents merely one dimension of attention capital. Celebrity is multi-dimensional and syncretic. Following Hegel, the cultural worth of a celebrity is connected to sentiments of breaking cultural boundaries and embodying necessities of life that are felt and known, but which do not lend themselves to being conveyed via economic

metrics. As proponents of the concept make abundantly clear, ‘attention capital’ is not confined to economics, but must be extended to questions of data collection, the mass media and society (Franck 2019, van Krieken 2019, p. 5). The burden of this line of argument is that net worth is an objectionable metric because it is unacceptably reductive. Among the harmful consequences that derive from it is the expansion of celebrity as a culture of empty renown (Boorstin 1961). For by making the economic dimension the prime indicator of worth, the value of pseudo-events is correspondingly multiplied.

(2) Memory

If one takes the subject of experience, the application of net worth under Triangulation privileges a specific view of time in the meaning of celebrity. Net worth makes *the present tense* decisive in determining the meaning of celebrity. Once tangible experience is registered, it is measured and folded into memory and treated as part of the past. Against this, the work of the phenomenologist Henri Bergson regards the past as never *over*, but in constant *elucidation* (Bergson 2003). For Bergson, experience of the present is misleading unless it is credited to carry the past with it.

To make this case, he argues first that memory should be considered as independent of perception. If this is granted, it follows that memory cannot be folded into perception, rather it has its own life. Triangulation commits analysis to a perspective founded in the perception of tangible data. The disclosed logic of experience here is linear. As new events are perceived by the human sensory apparatus, valid knowledge grows. Bergson’s distinction between perception and memory does not discount the persuasiveness of what might be called the linear view of experience. However, contrapuntally, it insists that experience also unfolds internally and in subconscious and unconscious ways. That is, experience is not just a matter of visible interaction between and with external objects, it has an inner life. It is therefore not fully visible, or empirically accessible. Not only this but it also involves multiple backtracking and lateral motion. This points to a quite different way of approaching and reading celebrity experience than is found in Triangulation. It is one that places much greater emphasis upon intuition, imagination and qualitative analysis. The general point can be usefully extended.

Concerns with utility, economic yield and asset value divide time into seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, etc. Commentators have repeatedly identified this orientation to time with the rise and consolidation of capitalism (Mumford 1934, Thompson 1967, Crary 1999). The practice of suborning consciousness and memory to the external metric of time might be termed as *the larceny of the last second*. These divisions of time are instrumental in the consolidation of capitalist domination, i.e. they possess utility. Yet from the standpoint of how memory actually works they are patently artificial. The experience of celebrity cannot be captured or compartmentalised by the metric of time because memory constantly elucidates meaning. The hands of the clock or the divisions of the calendar are divisible and external impositions upon consciousness and memory. By extension, they dictate how celebrity Triangulation operates. They have value in exploiting utility in human affairs. They do not correspond with absolute meaning. This is one of the main lessons of Bergson’s philosophy of phenomenology (Bergson 1913, 2003)

(3) Instant Recognition

The utilitarian division of experience and memory into the metric of time, of which Triangulation is a solid example, finds its parallel in the division of space into territories and boundaries. Nations have borders, houses have walls, gardens have hedges or fences, property, as a whole, is thought of, and ordinarily experienced, as delineated and private. None of this reflects the real state of nature. Naturally, space is an entirety that is universal unto itself. It is not partitioned into this or that segment. Consciousness of space bears the imprint of this natural state but is also, in conflict with what Husserl calls 'the natural attitude', i.e. the 'common sense view of ordinary life' (Husserl 1931, 1990). It relates to spatial division as a whole as an alien imposition. Does a wall genuinely keep the external world at bay? Or is the wall really nothing but the appearance of an artificial perimeter dividing private space from the external, public world? Anything that overturns this type of artificial imposition is likely to be valued as a source of attraction and, by these means, to generate attention. Just as celebrity restores to ordinary impression the primordial meaning of the anterior as unfolding in its own way, independently of perception, so it has it in it to unwrap the alien, imposed boundaries that segregate one territorialized space from another.

This is most graphically illustrated in celebrity culture by the phenomenon of *instant recognition*. The term refers to a type of fame that frees consciousness from the artificial boundaries of time and space (Husserl 1931, 1990). Needless to say, it is proper to speak of a *scale* of recognition. A local celebrity may possess instant recognition in one's hometown, whereas global celebrity refers to universal recognition. What is *not* variable is the act of consciousness in instant recognition which identifies external objects automatically as 'known' entities. The puzzle involved in this act of consciousness lies in the fact that the perception of knowledge *about* the external object has no sufficient relationship of physical contact *with* the external object.

As might be expected, Triangulation does not acknowledge this to be a puzzle at all. Under Triangulation, orthodox practice of enquiry treats celebrity as the product of mediatization (Couldry *et al.* 2009, Marshall 2010, Wheeler 2014). Upon this basis, instant recognition is merely the articulation of globalisation, and particularly, the technological means of communicating celebrity. But this method of enquiry creates problems of its own construction. For one thing, it relies upon a Cartesian model of the act of consciousness (Williams 1978). That is, what is taken to be instant recognition refers to the conscious perception and rational judgement of the isolated individual. The difficulty with this is that the human species has never included an individual who is not composed of subconscious and unconscious influence as well as conscious, rational judgement. It may suit the paradigm requirements of Triangulation to submit that instant recognition is simply the consequence of mediatization and globalisation. However, in and of itself, this does not neutralise the proposition, shared by transcendentalism, idealism and the history of ideas approach, that the human reaction to celebrity is partly determined by the concealed front of ineffable species characteristics. By definition, it is not possible to give a precise delineation of these characteristics. But in terms of instant recognition in relations of celebrity, it is what Mommsen conveys when he proposes that Caesar is more

‘entire’ and ‘perfect’ than other historical or contemporaneous members of the species (Mommensen 2012). That is, it is a ‘known’, ‘felt’ response. It is no less relevant in explaining the meaning of celebrity, despite not conforming to quantitative measurement.

Conclusion: Celebrity the conqueror?

The pole position of this paper is that the study of celebrity is dominated by the paradigm of Triangulation. Triangulation operates as the quartermaster of relevant research and valid knowledge. With respect to the task of investigating celebrity, this paradigm excludes and marginalises quite as much as it reveals and clarifies. Triangulation over-eggs the influence of technology in the meaning of celebrity and under-estimates sensory impression and iconic consciousness. Thus, a repeated observation in the study of popular reactions to celebrity is that attention capital is associated with the experience of escapism and transcendence (Deller 2016). In Triangulation, this experience is bracketed with technology and field.

In this vein, Driessens defines ‘celebrity capital’ ‘as accumulated media visibility that results from recurrent media representations’ (Driessens 2013, p. 552). In terms of the three institutional components of the structure of Triangulation analysis, he elevates the Media to the key role. The inference that the experience of modern celebrity is conditioned by globalisation and mediatisation follows in short order. The pre-eminence assigned to cultural relativism and field is expressed in resistance against accepting any transcendent or universal aspects of modern celebrity. For example, the globalisation of celebrity via the Media invariably carries with it the caveat that cultural conditions differentiate and repurpose many effects of global representation (Gray *et al.* 2017). There is certainly good reason to insist that local cultural conditions inflect the meaning of celebrity. To this end, there have been valuable studies of how celebrity is conditioned by local, regional and national material and geo-political circumstances (Condry 2006, Xu and Yang 2021). Whether this justifies developing and maintaining a state of *immunity* to the hypothesis that celebrity forms also draw upon transcendent consciousness and universal reactions is altogether a different matter.

The studies that propagate cultural relativism and field agree that the experience of celebrity involves a departure from the natural attitude. However, this departure is generally explained in terms of temporal and spatial variation. Celebrity offers a break from ordinary life. What has not been sufficiently examined is the possibility raised by phenomenology that this violation involves a type of *restoration*. That is, the sensual attraction of celebrity experience is not merely that it offers a contrast with ordinary life, but exposes the subconsciousness that conscious perception is truncated by the imposed categories of time and space. If one follows the train of reasoning, in Husserl and Bergson, might not celebrity be considered at the sensory level to be partly a matter of the conquest of time and space (Husserl 1931, 1990, Bergson 1913, 2003)? To put it differently, the ordinary divisions of time and space in urban industrial settings interrupt perception and consciousness by subjecting them to ‘work time’, ‘work space’, ‘private time’, ‘public space’, etc. (Thompson 1967). If this is granted, might it not be that a fruitful way of thinking about some aspects of celebrity is that they permit and encourage *uninterrupted consciousness*? That is, celebrity experience is one modality of existence that reveals ‘the concealed front’ that Hegel speaks of, and the ‘entire’, ‘perfect’ form of the species that Mommensen finds in Caesar? This does not point to the end of Triangulation. Rather, it suggests that a more balanced, revisionist mindset and research programme is merited.

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Notes on contributor

Chris Rojek is Professor of Sociology and Head of Department, City University of London. He is the author of many books including, *Celebrity* (2001) and *Fame Attack* (2012).

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