Constitutive Processes of Heroic Figures

BY TOBIAS SCHLECHTRIEMEN
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1. How heroes come into being

Heroic figures and their qualities are produced by constitutive processes. The starting point of the approach presented here is therefore the study of these heroization processes.[1] The approach differs from other representations which assume that heroines and heroes exist and that the analytic task is to describe their inimitable uniqueness. Such essentializing approaches must be critically questioned in two respects. Firstly, because they claim to provide a universally valid, anthropological, and abstract definition: Who is a hero and what characterizes him or her? Secondly, because they merely provide descriptions of individual heroic examples. In this way, nothing is explained about the historical-social location of heroic figures or about how they came into being.

Instead of focusing on the heroized individual figure, the analytical gaze should be directed towards the processes that produce the hero or heroine in the first place. Understood in this way, the heroized figure is an effect of constitutive cultural processes. Accordingly, it is not about the figure and their characteristics, but about the processes that are involved in the creation of these characteristics. How this shifts the perspective of investigation can be shown by looking at the qualities that distinguish heroes and heroines: *Extraordinariness*, *ethical and affective charge*, *autonomy and transgressiveness*, a *high degree of human agency*, and *agonality*.[2] In many representations, these qualities are attached to the heroic figure itself, i. e. attributed to it directly. As heuristic characteristics in the sense of a typological approach, they serve to identify heroic figures and to distinguish them from other figures.[3] However, what is typologically understood as the characteristics of a figure (in the left column of Table 1) can be seen from our perspective as being the result of different constitutive processes (in the right column of Table 1).

Thus, the approach is based on an understanding which can be summed up in four points: Firstly, it assumes non-essentialist constitutive processes. Heroic figures are only produced through social communications. Their stories must be told or they must be portrayed in other media. Additionally, an audience is needed which recognises or admires them as heroes. Nevertheless, it makes a difference whether a hero story is framed as 'real' or as 'fictional'. But in both cases, narrative, discursive, and media analyses are revealing with regard to how the hero comes into existence. Secondly, the object of study is always *processes*. Heroic figures emerge in certain historical-social constellations, but they can also lose their radiance again and become deheroized. Thirdly, such figures only exist if they are created through different *social* and *media* practices – in the sense of a performativity of the heroic. Finally, heroic figures do not exist on their own, but stand relationally in specific figurative constellations to other figures and social actors. Dynamics and processes, social and media practices as well as interfigurative references are examined accordingly.

Typological characteristics of heroic figures	Constitutive processes of heroic figures
Extraordinariness	Figurative constellations
Ethical and affective charge	Collective attribution and projection
Agonality	Polarization and collective identification
Transgressiveness	Transgression and tipping point
High degree of agency	Concentration of agency, anthropomorphization

Tab. 1: Constitutive processes and typological characteristics of heroic figures.

2. References

1   This article is based on Schechtriemen, Tobias: "The Hero as an Effect: Boundary Work in Processes of Heroization". In: Falkenhayner, Nicole / Meurer, Sebastian / Schlechtriemen, Tobias (Eds.): Analyzing Processes of Heroization. Theories, Methods, Histories (= helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu den Kulturen des Heroischen. Special Issue 5 [2019]), 17-26. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2019/APH/03. For the original publication in German see Schechtriemen, Tobias: "Der 'Held' als Effekt. *Boundary work* in Heroisierungsprozessen". In: Berliner Debatte Initial 29.1 (2018), 106-119.

2   This catalogue of characteristics was compiled within the framework of SFB 948 and further developed in the sociological sub-project by Ulrich Bröckling and myself. It was compiled as a set of heuristics based on the material of the first funding phase, which was largely limited to European sources. Source corpora of a different nature require a corresponding adjustment.

3   On the advantages and disadvantages of typifications using the example of a typology of antiheroes, see also Bröckling, Ulrich: "Negations of the Heroic – A Typological Essay". In: Falkenhayner, Nicole / Meurer, Sebastian / Schlechtriemen, Tobias (Eds.): Analyzing Processes of Heroization. Theories, Methods, Histories (= helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu den Kulturen des Heroischen. Special Issue 5 [2019]), 39-43. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2019/APH/05. For the original publication in German see Bröckling, Ulrich: "Negationen des Heroischen – ein

typologischer Versuch". In: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen, 3.1 (2015), 9-13. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/01/02.

3. Selected literature

Bröckling, Ulrich: "Negations of the Heroic – A Typological Essay". In: Falkenhayner, Nicole / Meurer, Sebastian / Schlechtriemen, Tobias (Eds.): Analyzing Processes of Heroization. Theories, Methods, Histories (= helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu den Kulturen des Heroischen. Special Issue 5 [2019]), 39-43. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2019/APH/05.

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