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On *Figures Publiques: L'Invention de la Célébrité (1750-1850)*: Mechanisms of Celebrity and Social Esteem

Antoine Lilti & Alice Le Goff *

Abstract: »*Über ‚Figures Publiques': Mechanismen der Berühmtheit und sozialer Wertschätzung*«. In this interview, conducted in April 2016 by Alice Le Goff, Antoine Lilti presents his work on the "invention of celebrity" and discusses its contribution to the study of the logic of social esteem. Le Goff begins by outlining the core themes of his earlier work on salons as well as his latest book on celebrity, *Figures Publiques*, and in the interview poses a number of important questions going to the heart of Lilti's important and innovative contribution to the history oy celebrity. The topics include the importance of the 18th century in celebrity's history, the concept of the public sphere, the significance of Gabriel Tarde's sociology of imitation as well as Norbert Elias's analysis of court society, how 'celebrity' should be distinguished from 'glory,' the volatility and ambiguity of celebrity, the core dimensions of the mechanisms of celebrity as illustrated by case studies such as Voltaire and Rosseau, and the future types of studies for which Lilti's book lays the foundation.

Keywords: Celebrity, enlightenment, court society, Tarde, Elias, Rousseau, Voltaire, 18th century, France.

1. Introduction

In his first book, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Paris in 18th century Paris* (2015), and in *The Invention of Celebrity: 1750-1850* (2017), Antoine Lilti details his reflections on the social and cultural history of the Enlightenment, in which he takes a novel approach to the very idea of pub-

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lic opinion and thereby develops tools which allow diverse forms of "social prestige" to be identified.

The first study sought to highlight the specific nature of practices of sociability deployed in the salons of the 18th century by drawing on a range of sources: memoirs and correspondence as well as police archives that monitored the movements of foreigners. It strove to circumvent the various obstacles which had so far impeded a systematic historiography of the subject: idealisation (salons as a place for the diffusion of Enlightenment philosophy or, alternatively, the expression of a bygone aristocratic elegance as a stage for the typically French art of conversation) and being overly critical (the salon as a place of worldly frivolity and superficiality, typical of aristocratic manners, or as the site of the emergence of a literary and speculative conception of politics – depending on whether one ascribes to a revolutionary or conservative perspective). Consequently, Antoine Lilti began by moving away from the principal paradigms according to which academic history has approached the salon: the literary salon (as the province of the man of letters), the public sphere (the salon as the site of the formation of critical public opinion, informed by philosophical discussion), and also the aristocratic salon (the bastion of the traditional rules of honour and a certain moral code). Rather than approaching his subject from the already established historiographical fields (literary history, the public sphere, history of the nobility), Lilti proceeded from the conception of the salon as an interface between the court and the city, between literary experimentation and worldly diversion, and between philosophical discussion and political struggle. The notion of sociability was his starting point, as it has allowed him to pinpoint the practices of conviviality of urban elites without overstating their ideological coherence. In short, his objective was to write the history of worldliness, that is to say, a study of the mechanisms which assured the social and cultural distinction of particular groups.

Lilti has undertaken to identify, beyond the variety of practices involved, the most salient common features of the salon, namely that they are maintained over time (the regularity of meetings), that they comprise an ethic of hospitality, that they are systematically socially diverse (rather than controlled by women), and also that they have no explicit objective beyond sociability itself. This highlighted the distinct nature of the salon as compared with other sites of sociability (the café, the Masonic lodge, the Academy). The salon took a variety of forms, expressing different sensibilities in ideological terms, but in any case constituting a vehicle for the development of a "culture of worldliness," which manifested itself in playful and highly dramatized cultural practices (culinary, artistic, the art of conversation). Lilti shows how this "culture of worldliness" revolves around "politics," as he analyses the emergence of a worldly body of opinion and its impact on the fall of the *Ancien Régime*; the salon is one of the key settings in which political careers could be made or broken, where diplomatic restraints were defied. Salons appear as a strategic

stage in more ways than one and for a multitude of players: men of letters who could there find validation, politicians seeking a stepping stone to the court or even aristocrats, renegotiating their social and cultural dominance.

Lilti essentially falls into line with the analytical approach developed by Norbert Elias (2006) in relation to court society. Salons represented a decentralisation of social life which was, up to that point, centred around the court. They gave rise to the social group known as "good society" which was a particularly effective means of perpetuating aristocratic prestige. Aristocratic identities were renegotiated around concepts of honour and merit. In dealing with worldly sociability outside of the closed-off world of literary salons, Lilti shows that it sociability is at the heart of social, cultural and political mechanisms of the 18th century. He thereby opens up a host of investigations into the material conditions of sociability, the advantages gained by men of letters in frequenting salons, and the political aspect of worldliness.

A reflection on the "mechanisms of reputation" is another central thread of his analysis. The civility of salons concerns the cohesion of an elite based on the flow of esteem. While at court, the king's opinion was determinative, in salons, the dissemination of esteem derived from the opinions of other participants. Worldly sociability combines both openness and restricted access (through co-option): it drives the distribution of prestige which is, in principle, a function of merit but, in practice, reserved to a well-defined elite. Hospitality and knowledge of the codes of practice of good society are powerful sources of social esteem. And, vice versa, the pursuit of esteem, indistinguishable from the fear of ridicule, affects social discipline: notably conversation, pivotal in the formation of worldly opinion, is also the vehicle of "gossip" and thus plays a key role; like a medium of social control, it serves to fix everyone's place in society. In this sense, salons were not an egalitarian social space and were regulated less by conviviality and more by civility and prestige, with the court always in the background. This was in spite of the development of new forms of reciprocity, notably between hosts and writers, such as men of letters gaining patronage in exchange for social and cultural recognition accruing from "great men" and financial backers who supported them. In this sense, the prevailing language of sociability enshrined a struggle for social hierarchy. The urban elite was reconstructed through an alliance between aristocrats and writers around the model of the "man of the world." Unlike the ceremonial nature of the court which made social hierarchies clearly visible, worldly sociability consolidated and maintained dominance of some over others, but masking this through the discourse of friendship and conviviality.

According to the categories established by Gabriel Tarde (1901; 1902; 1969), worldly sociability is ultimately understood as a transition between custom-imitation and fashion-imitation. If custom-imitation ascribes to a conservative trend, fashion negotiates uniformity, conformity, individuality, and innovation: Tarde connects it to a process of rationalisation. That is exactly

why, according to Lilti, salons circumvent the two alternatives of aristocratic conservatism and Enlightenment rationalism because worldly sociability derives from imitative practices but also conforms to an individualist logic outside the scope of rational criticism. People no longer imitated social powers which commanded obedience (such as the aristocracy or the court) but rather the power of a personality to be a taste-maker or trend-setter (people of the world, men of letters). Nonetheless, worldly sociability was not a complete departure from custom-imitation; it continued to self-validate by reference to tradition and proved profoundly ambiguous. All the while declaring its openness, it was highly regulated according to rules of conversation and the threat of the indelible stigma of ridicule, still largely controlled by the nobility.

Conversely, the phenomenon of celebrity represents a more definitive departure from custom-imitation. Similarly, it seems to be profoundly linked to an expansion and an extension of the networks of interdependence surrounding salons. Indeed, one of the main concerns of *The Invention of Celebrity* is to demonstrate how the rising power of mediatised public space went hand in hand with the emergence of a new form of social prestige. Beginning his historical enquiry in 1750, Lilti defies conventional genealogies to show that the first celebrity figures emerged during the Enlightenment. He deconstructs a whole host of established ideas; celebrity is not a universal phenomenon that we find in all social and historical contexts, nor is it a recent one, linked to mass culture, the society of the spectacle, and the ubiquity of audio-visual media. Celebrity is a phenomenon unique to modern societies. It is linked to an extreme expansion of circles of recognition as a result of the mechanisms of publicity. Lilti strives to distinguish it from other forms of notoriety, namely, 'glory' (essentially posthumous and commemorative, attributed to those judged extraordinary by virtue of meritorious achievements) and 'reputation' (everyone has one – positive or negative – based on the judgement of a group of people as regards an individual often by reference to functional standards: Is he a good father, a good colleague, a good citizen?). Largely detached from reputation, celebrity springs from a specific curiosity about the private lives of particular people.

It is central to the topic of celebrity which was established in the 18th century and whose anatomy gives rise to a major paradox: sought after as a key form of social prestige, celebrity is typically decried as superficial and ephemeral. Its emergence does not signal cultural decline or the rise of an increasingly plebiscitary public; rather, it is a characteristic trait of modern democratic societies, inextricably linked to the development of public opinion. The study of the mechanisms of celebrity is the unifying thread guiding a new history of publicity as an ambivalent practice, ambivalent because it comprises a means for exercising collective criticism, an instrument for market capitalism, and the basis for mass culture all at once. With regard to celebrity, the public is conceived as an effect of collective imitation, whereby individuals are influenced

at a distance by the knowledge that they are interested in the same things/people at the same moment.

Lilti thus deconstructs the novel status wrongly accorded to certain features of today's hypermediatic societies by traversing concrete examples: Voltaire at the time of his crowning moment at the *Comédie Française* in 1778; the first "stars," namely actors in the theatre (Garrick, Talma, Sarah Siddons among others); opera singers (Farinelli), at a time where a society of the spectacle was emerging; and the key figure of Rousseau, the first European celebrity and also the first to describe his experience in terms of alienation. Lilti shows that an understanding of the mechanisms of celebrity is key to interpreting that of Rousseau and some of its apparent contradictions. He ends by considering the political effects of "celebrity culture" in a discussion which progresses from Marie-Antoinette to Napoleon, taking in Washington and Mirabeau, to thematise the importance of the imperatives of popularity in modern societies. The final chapter focuses on the use of mechanisms of celebrity in the Romantic period, notably by reference to the figure of Byron.

The Invention of Celebrity is a rich and important book in many ways, but we are primarily concerned with its contribution to the study of forms of social prestige. The interview which follows addresses the various facets of this study with a view to identifying the new analytical tools it offers in relation to the mechanisms of notoriety. What specific type of social prestige does celebrity represent? To what extent and to what degree do the mechanisms of celebrity bring into play the construction of social esteem? How is celebrity culture steeped in paradoxical relationships in terms of recognition? These are some of the issues discussed in this interview.

2. Interview

Alice Le Goff: Your book is a study of the emergence of a "culture of celebrity" in Europe and the United States, before even the advent of "mass culture." Your objective is to throw into relief the way in which "the mechanisms of celebrity" developed, not only in the political domain, but also in the artistic sphere, and more generally in the social sphere, between 1750 and 1850. Could you talk about the meaning you accord to the concept of "mechanisms" of celebrity?

Antoine Lilti: My objective in evoking "mechanisms" of celebrity was to avoid a kind of approach to the history of celebrity – already very well established – that could be described as culturalist, which is, first and foremost, a history of representations; and also to avoid a dominantly semiotic approach. I wanted to reinstate the history of celebrity firmly in the analysis of the measures and practices, economic and social, which made the emergence of a celebrity culture possible. For example, the emergence of private spectacles which produced star-making effects where there were previously troupes of court players, the emergence of the periodic press, and the technical and

commercial changes linked to the status of the image in the public sphere. If there is culture, in the sense of a discourse and shared ideas, these were rendered possible by the transformations for which they seek to account, and which operate at the level of social processes.

I used the term "celebrity culture" with caution. I use it to bring together two things: on the one hand, the study of the measures and practices which produce certain forms of notoriety and, on the other hand, what I call the "topic of celebrity," that is to say, the collection of discourse and ideas which results from these practices and measures and which seeks to give them meaning. What seemed interesting to me in joining the two was to study a site of reflexivity: the way in which people at the time accounted for these changes.

Alice Le Goff: You immediately distance yourself from two particular approaches to celebrity: one which reduces it to a constant throughout human history and so which tends to dilute the significance of the phenomenon of celebrity, and another which views it only as a very recent phenomenon, linked to mass culture, the society of the spectacle, and the ubiquity of audio-visual media. To you, these two approaches form part of a conservative discourse which presents celebrity as a "degeneration of glory." In complete contrast to such an idea, you maintain that celebrity's roots can be traced to the forms of public recognition which emerged during the century of the Enlightenment and are constitutive of modernity. You therefore seek to show the link between the emergence of celebrity and the transformation of the public sphere. Could you talk about the way your analysis of these shifts draws on a critical reading of the Habermasian theory of the public sphere?

Antoine Lilti: The move away from the Habermasian theory of the public sphere[1] is very much a key part of the explicit framing of the book. The public sphere was particularly important for historians of the 18th century in the 1990s. For my part, what I have tried to do is to acknowledge and identify a major transformation linked to the emergence of one or more publics, but while critically interrogating the definition of the public sphere which many historians borrowed from Habermas. It seemed to me too rationalist, too normative, too heavily founded on the idea of the public sphere as a space of critical discussion and a site for the exchange of viewpoints of increasing generality. It seems to me that you must also consider the public sphere as a space where emotions are shared, capable of encompassing literature, the arts, but also spectacle, entertainment, mediatic flux. This emotional dimension has been underestimated in the context of the normative approach like that of Habermas who, on an historical level, suggests the public sphere in the 18th century, this highly idealised Enlightenment context, declined in order to pave the way for a more plebiscitary space, of media and mass communication. The strictly sociological point I am making is that, ultimately, these two spaces, critical and mediatic, are inextricably linked insofar as they engage the mechanisms of publicity. We find, in both cases, the same types of measures and distributions of stakeholders and social groups.

[1] [tr.] Habermas 1989.

Alice Le Goff: The sociology of Gabriel Tarde[2] is an important reference at the heart of your work. How and to what extent can your own reading of the transformation of public space be considered as a dialogue between Tarde's sociology and Habermasian theory? How, as a historian, have you appropriated these sociological resources?

Antoine Lilti: What interests me about Gabriel Tarde's sociology is his concern for the mediatic definition of publics. According to him, a public does not equate to a particular degree of generality in the exchange of viewpoints but rather to a process by which the flow of media information serves to establish communities by provoking common affects among scattered individuals.[3] His theory of the effects of imitation at a distance explains how a public is formed, in this it privileges the "sensation of being connected to current events." Tarde gives the example of people who read the same paper at the same time. It isn't just the fact that they are reading the same paper at the same time which establishes them as a public; it is, above all, the fact that they know they are reading the same paper at the same time. That, to me, is a very powerful insight when it comes to the formation of communities, both from the point of view of mechanisms (in the sense that the press has a story, a materiality, social access conditions) and through the prism of reflexivity – this term referring to awareness, to the issue of the temporal coordination of publics.

For a historian, there are two ways to read Tarde. On the theoretical level, he offers an excellent way of thinking about the role of the media in the formation of publics, along with the economics of notoriety. But on the historical level, we can't forget that he wrote *L'opinion et la foule* (Opinion and the Crowd) at a time (Tarde 1901)[4] when the power of the mass media was rising. For that reason, its importance is twofold: it is an important sociological reference text, but I can also place it on a continuum with the writings of the 18th-century authors I'm examining, and who are talking about shifts in celebrity and the role of the press, such as Mercier, Voltaire, and Chamfort. One can perceive the continuity between the social sciences and other older forms of reflection on social and cultural change. Therefore, the theory must be historicised.

Alice Le Goff: Your intervention also engages in a dialogue with the historical sociology of Norbert Elias. Could you discuss this point and where you place your own intervention as a historian with regard to Eliasian sociology?

Antoine Lilti: In *The Invention of Celebrity*, I use Elias to show how "celebrity culture" represents a departure from the logic of etiquette such as it is analysed in *The Court Society* (Elias 2006). But Elias was primarily present in my earlier work on salons where I was interested in reputational forms, modes of construction of social esteem in places of mutual recognition. Thus, I contrasted Elias with Habermas to show that these spaces of sociability, which salons of the 18th century were, led to the rise of "good society" and functioned as institutions of social control, producing hierarchies within these confined

[2] [tr] Tarde 1902, vol 1, 70-71.
[3] [tr] See Tarde 1969
[4] Partial translation in Tarde 1969, 277-94.

spaces of mutual recognition. Essentially, we could reformulate the question of celebrity in Eliasian terms as follows: what happens when the links of interdependence, through which social esteem is established, expand beyond circles of acquaintance? It is not a question which Elias asks because he doesn't deal explicitly, directly, with the question of the media: he doesn't characterise it as a concern specific to contemporary societies whereas he problematizes the question of the construction of social esteem in small groups, not only in *The Court Society*, but also in *The Established and Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson 2008). The concern was, in this book about celebrity, in a sense to see what is "off camera" in Eliasian sociology, to expand what is at issue.

Alice Le Goff: In a similar way, you mention the figure of Mozart in chapter seven of the book. It is tempting to compare the way you approach the figure of Rousseau and Elias's work in relation to Mozart. Indeed, you show how Rousseau seeks an impossible type of recognition: he seeks "traditional" social recognition by the elites of his time but also to be recognised as unique, to define the terms of his recognition. There seems to be a parallel with Mozart's trajectory such as it is understood and analysed in *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius* (Elias 1993).

Antoine Lilti: Yes, one could analyse Rousseau using the tools forged by Elias in his study of Mozart. That would allow one to identify his link to worldly sociability, his opposition to the civility of salons, to "good society." As for Mozart at court, it was a question of negotiating creative freedom on the one hand, and the constraints of a traditional society and patronage on the other. Nevertheless, when it comes to Rousseau, it is not only the question of creative freedom at stake, it is also, and perhaps primarily, the tension between social recognition and moral authenticity. On this point, we get to something specific to Rousseau which we don't find in the same manner, it seems to me, in Elias's analysis of Mozart.

Even more than social recognition – in a way, the classic social climber syndrome – and literary recognition, Rousseau sought emotional and moral recognition, and in this he is not looking to the aristocracy or to "good society," but to the public, and the model of effusive immediacy (Carnevali 2012). In this, Rousseau is emblematic of the celebrity effect, in that the relationship he had with his readers and his admirers introduced a powerful emotional connection at the heart of the public domain.

What link should we draw between Rousseau's promotion of the ideal of authenticity and his experience of celebrity as a burden? Is it because he has such a need for emotional and moral recognition, a recognition of his authenticity, that he finds celebrity so painful to endure, while Voltaire and Franklin seem better adapted to it? Or is it that the affirmation of the moral significance of authenticity is a reaction to the increasing level of mediation in public space to which the famous person is subjected? This last hypothesis is less obvious but opens up a more interesting line of enquiry, in my view. Rousseau must constantly reaffirm his authenticity to escape the public persona he has become: we see it in his later texts, there is an ever more extreme emphasis on authenticity in the face of the threat of reification. Beyond Rousseau, the adoption of this hypothesis has more widespread consequences as it implies

that the ideal of the romantic self can be perceived as a reaction to the emergence of modern mediatic societies. It is not simply a reaction which occurs – as is most often said – in relation to economic and political modernity, but in relation to the multiplication of mediations.

This, *inter alia*, motivates the book's move away from a pathological reading of Rousseau. Because, if you adopt the perspective I advocate, we "de-singularise" Rousseau's trajectory, we repatriate it to a broader social dynamic. With Rousseau, he is of course a singular personality; it is pointless to deny this singularity which sometimes takes on a rather "delirious" dimension, at least ostensibly. But perhaps it is precisely this singular temperament which allows Rousseau to be alive to a profound collective shift and to describe it so vividly and strikingly, that many others would subsequently carry it on.

Alice Le Goff: A structural axis of your work is to establish a distinctive typology of celebrity and other forms of notoriety, like 'glory' and 'reputation.' Notably, you reject the idea that celebrity sits on a continuum which ranges from (necessarily local) reputation to (universal) glory. You demonstrate the problems attendant upon conceiving of celebrity as "extended reputation," by underlining the inherent differences between glory, reputation, and celebrity. Do you agree with the idea that these differences tend to be expressed, in part, because social esteem is at the core of the mechanisms of glory and reputation, whereas celebrity springs fundamentally less from esteem and more from curiosity?

Antoine Lilti: I do agree with that formulation. Celebrity does not come inherently from social esteem; it can, in fact, exist in contradiction with it. One might recall here Chamfort who affirmed, ironically, that celebrity connotes dishonour and disgrace: "it doesn't yet have such negative effects as the stocks, they say, but that will come" (Chamfort 1969, 121). The image of the stocks is an interesting one as it recalls public exposure, humiliating punishment in public. This reinforces the fundamental ambivalence of the type of public exposure implied by celebrity: both prestige but also the risk of disgrace.

I distinguish celebrity from glory which seems to be a stabilised form of esteem, implying temporal detachment. Celebrity can also be distinguished from reputation which derives from the judgement of a community of an individual and falls largely within localised mechanisms of social judgement, *fama*, and honour. From this point of view, it seems appropriate to distinguish esteem as a judgment of quality at the heart of the logic of reputation and glory on the one hand, and, on the other, the logic of celebrity which is based upon curiosity, provided that curiosity is at a truly passionate level. Indeed, it seems to me that we must think about curiosity in its most straightforward contemporary sense of mild interest for something diverting – what we could call a minor level of curiosity – and its more intense form of strong emotional investment. This form of investment – I would certainly not call it empathy, too strongly redolent of morality, in my view – seems nonetheless to relate to attachment, to the desire for "intimacy at a distance," to use an expression sometimes used by psychologists or sociologists studying the media (notably Thompson 1995), a form of emotional participation.

One of the difficulties that arises when studying celebrity derives from the fact that it engages a range of phenomena, public responses, which range from ephemeral or ironic interest to passionate attachment, these different facets being present, from the 18th century, for example, in the response to a figure like Rousseau. One of the concerns of the book is to argue that these are all examples of the same phenomenon, producing responses from simple curiosity (for the life of theatrical celebrities or the latest scandal of Jean-Jacques Rousseau) to passion (which led some to regard Rousseau as a master thinker, a model of morality, to write him letters). What leads me to go in this direction, is, among other things, this expression so frequently found in 18th-century texts, this idea of "avid curiosity." Curiosity can be regarded as a desire, susceptible to varying degrees of emotional investment. However, regardless of the degree of intensity, it is always distinct from esteem, which implies a judgement based on shared moral norms. In a minor form, curiosity for a celebrity can be completely compatible with a form of ridicule, and, in a more serious form, a more emotional, intense attachment that can extend to loving the celebrity's faults, their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

Alice Le Goff: Across numerous examples, you bring out the link between celebrity and scandal. The majority of the figures you cite in the book saw their celebrity grow as a function of the scandals which peppered their lives. Scandal is thus presented as an amplifier of celebrity and you underline the fact that they tend to have a sexual aspect. The role of scandal, does it not buttress the idea of the independence of celebrity as regards what we might call, taking inspiration from Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit (2004), the economy of esteem?[5]

Antoine Lilti: Yes, absolutely: I did a lot of work on salons, on "good society" and, in this sphere, just like in small local communities, scandal can destroy reputations as well as, conversely, enhance the fame of those celebrities who seem relatively indifferent to moral judgement and also highly dependent on a certain amount of buzz around them, "*éclat*"[6] to use the 18th-century expression. Most celebrities know this and are acutely aware of the need to maintain a certain air of scandal. In cultural careers, the positive or negative effects of scandal are difficult to measure because scandal results in notoriety, in the sense of celebrity, but, at the same time, weakens reputation – so social esteem – among peer groups. Even in the absence of particularly strident moral judgements, esteem or recognition in spaces of strong normative autonomy – for example scientific spaces – is readily influenced by celebrity as a form of transgression: it is a well-known fact that the academic who appears on television may see his credibility rather rapidly reduced among his peers.

[5] The notion of the economy of esteem refers to the idea of a mechanism of regulating behaviour through civility and social esteem. Brennan and Petit (2004) associate it with the idea of an "intangible hand" which is distinct from the "invisible hand" of the market economy and the "iron hand" of the state. Social esteem is central to the mechanisms regulating and controlling behaviour which constitute situational pressure and are consistent, in that regard, with a particular form of virtue.

[6] Translator's note: Effectively 'razzle-dazzle.' This term, widely used in the 18th century, connotes brilliance and sparkle.

Alice Le Goff: Your analysis (particularly but not only in relation to the numerous celebrity criminals) seems to shine a spotlight on how complex and ambivalent the relationship between celebrity, respectability and social and moral norms is. Indeed, insofar as it engages curiosity and intense attachment, does it not imply that people seek some ordinary qualities, a degree of normality, in the "extraordinary" person to which they can relate?

Antoine Lilti: The link between celebrity and norms is difficult to analyse. If one adopts what is almost an instrumental perspective of celebrity, you could say that the transgression of norms, scandal, fuels celebrity. If one adopts a more functionalist approach, one tends to see celebrity as a key indicator of the prevailing norms and values of the public.

There is some truth to be found in each of these approaches. The celebrities in my study transgressed a number of norms, but, nonetheless, conformed to new emerging norms. Rousseau is a very good example of this. He totally transgressed the norms of "good society," but he was so popular because new norms were emerging to which he did conform. These were already there in the public sphere, but he helped to crystallise them or, in other words, to make them more obvious, visible, and acceptable as well – namely, the values of authenticity, genuineness, individuality over respectability.

To be overly transgressive is to risk rejection. For there to be talk, buzz, around a celebrity, that celebrity must respond to a need, play a role that was waiting to be filled. I don't ascribe at all to the view that it is ever a question of simple construction or fabrication.

Alice Le Goff: In that regard, would you agree with the idea that one of the differences between glory and celebrity stems from the fact that the former privileges distance (notably in the sense of exemplary admirableness) over any kind of proximity, while celebrity has a close and unstable connection with both proximity and distance?

Antoine Lilti: Yes, to be precise, one can think here of the examples of the great writers. At the beginning of the book, I refer to and discuss Jean Huber's portrait of Voltaire, which shows him waking up and getting dressed. This etching was so successful because it depicted a great writer, but also showed that he was just an ordinary person. Essentially, one could say that celebrity works to humanise great people, to play on proximity-distance, whereas glory, conversely, accentuates distance. One can invoke here the idea, which was new to the 18th century, of the cult of genius: this idea that a genius produces inequality among equals whereas celebrity, by contrast, produces the relatable in the extraordinary (McMahon 2013).

Celebrity brings into play a two-fold proximity. Firstly, anyone can become a celebrity. Secondly, the culture of celebrity is based upon the idea that the famous person is essentially just like us. Hence, the interest in their private life, and more generally, in everything other than the reason for which they became famous in the first place. Of course, one must not forget here that celebrity does not refer to a particular category of individuals, but rather to a particular type of relationship between an individual and the public. One person can be received by different publics under the aegis of either reputation, glory or celebrity. Let us return again to Rousseau. He has multiple reputations in a range

of contexts (Genevan bourgeois society, Parisian writers) but he was also very quickly perceived as a great writer, a genius, which led his admirers to emphasise all the ways in which he was distinguished from other men: the creative capacity he had which others didn't. Conversely, this "famous man" was also regarded as, in fact, close to ordinary people. He was exemplary, not in the sense of being unique but actually familiar, relatable, such that people felt comfortable writing to him, visiting him, calling him by his first name even though they had never met him, assuming a friendly intimacy with him.

Alice Le Goff: At the beginning of your book, you insist that modernity is linked to temporality. Temporality seems crucial to understanding the distinction between celebrity, glory, and reputation. In particular, the issue of instability and variability is a recurring theme in your analysis. Is it not possible to understand the distinction between celebrity, reputation and glory as not a question of inherent difference but rather of differing rates of crystallisation?

Antoine Lilti: In this regard, I note there is an opposition between reputation and celebrity on the one side and glory on the other. In principle, glory is stable, it is founded on unanimity (or at least, on quasi-unanimity), it is generally posthumous and mandates temporal distance. It is essentially commemorative. A community invests one of its own, from a certain temporal distance, with all of its foundational values: it is the model of the hero, the saint, the figure of the great man in the modern era. Conversely, reputation and celebrity seem, at first blush, to be characterised by contemporaneousness, instability, contradiction, competing discourses. By way of example, worldly reputation seems particularly fragile and volatile: it only takes one gaffe, one faux pas, or, similarly, one witty remark to make or break such a reputation. The question of temporality seems to group celebrity together with reputation.

For all that, I am wary of the commonly advanced notion that celebrity is fleeting. This goes along with the well-known and no doubt caricatural idea of the "fifteen minutes of fame."[7] In media cultures, there is a relatively easily identifiable stock or corpus of famous people who remain famous for a long time. Hence, we often see public interest in older celebrities, the desire to know 'where are they now?' In the book, notably, I include a case study of Sarah Siddons and her return to the stage which illustrates this trend, this public curiosity around older celebrities. In essence, her reputation as an actress had weakened, but she had retained her celebrity status. For many actors and actresses, we can eventually make this distinction because their celebrity status can become rather more stable than their reputation; they may make bad films then good ones, and their reputation may fluctuate, but their celebrity status remains. One must therefore, in my opinion, avoid overstating or being too insistent about the link between celebrity and instability. From a certain perspective, celebrity does engender a certain type of stability as it performs the function of synchronising publics, as already mentioned.

Alice Le Goff: I understand that the contrast between the mechanisms of reputation and the mechanisms of celebrity is one of the common threads of your analysis. You already mentioned that the mechanisms of reputation rely upon

7 [tr] Andy Warhol's statement in 1968: Warhol and Colacello 1979, 48.

the judgement of a group with regard to an individual, notably, how he performs certain tasks, a given role (is he a good husband, a good citizen, a competent doctor, a good lawyer?) or demonstrates certain qualities. Reputation stems from the socialisation of opinions through conversation. In this sense, it seems to be partly based on "profane," ordinary judgements which concern everyone, even though it can also be more elitist as your work on salons shows. Nonetheless, in all cases, reputation seems to define itself with regard to a "community of reference," by reference to the equivalent of a peer group. Celebrity, can it, *a contrario*, be defined as something which crosses, nay disrupts, the boundaries of social groups?

Antoine Lilti: Yes. I specifically argue that celebrity implies the existence of a public, that is to say, a community, neither a peer group, nor a "community of reference" or what I would sooner call a "community of mutual recognition." Most of the time, even though there are of course exceptions due to the empowerment of mediatic spaces, notoriety is, from the outset, linked to a reputation, a skill set. However, celebrity occurs at the point at which that notoriety becomes independent of the reasons which originally gave rise to it. A writer is a celebrity from the moment when he becomes known to people who do not really read books. If we are looking for totally contemporary example, a footballer is a celebrity as soon as people who have never watched a football match know his name and face. Celebrity essentially transcends "communities of reference" as it exists with reference to a public. A good doctor is a good doctor in the eyes of his colleagues and patients, but not in the eyes of the public, in the sense of the newspaper-reading, television-watching public.

Alice Le Goff: One might also point out that reputation serves to create hierarchies, that it is linked to a particular social status or achievement in a role (so equally to a performative principle). The mechanisms of reputation seem to be linked to elitism, whereas you tend to highlight the way in which the mechanisms of celebrity in part detach themselves from this logic. Could you speak about the link between celebrity and elitism, the link between celebrity and stratification? Is celebrity a driver of stratification? Or does it necessarily disturb established forms of stratification?

Antoine Lilti: Certainly, celebrity is a modern form of social prestige, and so it could be seen as demarcating an elite group. However, it also serves to equalise the status of personalities from very different spheres of activity. For my part, I do not use the language of social stratification and it is one of the issues I steer clear of, such as, for example, in the work of Nathalie Heinich (2012) which develops the concept of visibility capital and conceives of celebrities as a new type of elite. Such a perspective does of course have its place insofar as celebrity does grant access to a certain number of advantages, tangible and intangible benefits. However, one cannot overlook the fundamental ambivalence of celebrity: it is at once a valuable commodity but also a potential source of social disqualification. Herein lies the difference between celebrity and esteem. Celebrity can, again, be ironic, frivolous. We should not ignore the accounts of celebrities who present celebrity as a burden, a fundamentally difficult experience; of course they are successful (which can, of itself, entail certain hardships) but they are also subject to intense scrutiny, the focus of the public gaze.

Alice Le Goff: In furtherance of my previous question, how do you see the relationship between celebrity and status, celebrity and social position?

Antoine Lilti: The reason I try to avoid, as far as possible, defining celebrity in terms of status is because this idea seems to draw too much on a Weberian sociology of stratification. In that regard, the concept of social condition and public face seem more appropriate. My concern was to place emphasis on a social relationship. It does not seem to be to be at all evident that celebrity equates to one particular social position, quite the contrary.

Alice Le Goff: Your analysis sometimes highlights the fact that celebrity crosses social classes, calls into question the boundaries between them but nonetheless powerfully reaffirms gender norms.

Antoine Lilti: Gender relations are related to the division between public and private space. The restrictions applicable to public performance are notoriously stricter in relation to women than men. However, I would be tempted to mention a snag: transgression of gender norms, which are defined and related to ongoing social evolution, tends to enhance celebrity and is, in turn, favoured by celebrity. It is perhaps most obvious in relation to contemporary celebrities, who happily play with gender norms, somewhere between being provocative and anticipating moral shifts.

In this book, I sought above all to emphasise the generic constraints affecting female authors. How could they become public figures without transgressing social norms? How to reconcile being a public figure with the values of modesty and domestic devotion? Whereas the famous man (Chateaubriand, Byron) can maintain a seductive relationship with his feminine public, public exposure renders the famous woman legitimate and decried; the case of George Sand mentioned in the book is a classic example. As regards writers, the dominant norms of the literary space privilege a certain modesty, a division between the public and the private. And becoming a celebrity can have consequent effects on a writer's reputation as regards their writer "peers."

Alice Le Goff: One of the recurring themes in contemporary theories of well-knownness is the plurality of frameworks and forms of recognition in contemporary societies. However, this pluralism seems, at least in part, to encompass strict boundaries between distinct spheres of social activity, criticism of the dominance of some over others. The illegitimacy of celebrity as a form of public recognition, does this not stem from the fact that it is based on a relative erasure of boundaries, not only between social groups, but also between social spheres or worlds?

Antoine Lilti: This criticism of celebrity as an "equalising" force, which erases distinctions between spheres of activity, is not new to contemporary theories of well-knownness. It is already evident in the 18th century where it coincides with the emergence of celebrity. Thus Louis-Sébastien Mercier laments that Voltaire is famous as an actor, putting him on the same plane as Janot, a comic actor from the minor theatres. The criticism is moral: public success, rather than being a sign of esteem, evidences a problematic equivalence drawn between Voltaire and a lowly actor, a brigand. But it is also political: Mercier sees here a potential form of depoliticisation, a way of disempowering the public voice of the writer, the philosopher.

What does this type of discourse show? It seems to me to be linked to the fact that the media sphere as such, as a sphere of activity, has had little critical attention. People often talk about celebrities who are 'famous for being famous,' as opposed to celebrities who "deserve" their fame. It's a catchy phrase but it overlooks the fact that it is not easy to be a celebrity. Many people want to be famous. Yet public attention is very limited. To become a celebrity, one needs to have a particular talent, namely for arousing and maintaining the interest of the public. This is a highly competitive field. The media sphere in this regard represents a distinct sphere of social activity with its own logic.

Alice Le Goff: When considering the mechanisms of reputation, the issue of control arises again and again, be that control of one's public image or control of behaviour through *fama*. Is celebrity not also distinguishable from reputation on the basis that celebrity in part thwarts the logic of control, both in the sense that celebrity has an ambiguous relationship with social convention and as it is even less able to be controlled than reputation?

Antoine Lilti: If we accept an autonomous mediatic sphere, celebrity suggests a certain skill, a talent, for example, for controversy, for creating a public image. Beyond the period studied in the book, in the eighteenth century, you do see the emergence of image management professionals (agents and *impressarios* for example). However, if one sees matters in terms of specialised and ostensibly "traditional" spheres of activity, celebrity connotes, by comparison, a constant risk of loss of control insofar as the arena in which it is consumed is more diffuse and therefore uncontrollable. This raises the question of the defining feature of media communication, in comparison with more defined and focussed forms of communication in particular social spaces. Think of the quarrel between Hume and Rousseau in 1766. This quarrel arose because, after Hume had tried to help Rousseau find asylum in England, Rousseau turned against him, refused the royal pension which Hume had procured for him, and wrote him an excoriating letter, ending their friendship.

In this case, one can see very easily how Hume's friends in the salons of Paris would think at once in terms of reputation. For them, it would be unthinkable to publish correspondence, even if it tended to show Hume was in the right, because reputation can only be controlled insofar as one can control the circulation of information. As soon as it "hits the papers", as we would say today, where the newspapers report it and readers start writing to the newspapers about it, the response to the story is literally out of your hands. It is no longer a case of letters circulating within a defined space, but rather texts, articles, discourse circulating in an indefinite space, open to all comers. In short, Hume and his French friends (Holbach, d'Alembert) tried to play the "reputation game" with Rousseau, directly connected with principles of worldliness and reputational control, reckoning on the judgment of cultured and enlightened persons. However, this strategy was defeated once the extracts of the letters came out and the newspapers got wind of the quarrel, by Rousseau's celebrity which is supported by a large anonymous public.

Awareness of the inherent distinction between circulation within spaces of sociability on the one hand, and the printed word on the other, must have been clear. It represents what John B. Thompson (1995) calls "mediatised communication." Whenever the public is vested with the ability to make judgements

in matters in the cultural or political sphere, the tension between the opinion of peers and the opinion of the public, between reputation and celebrity, will come to the fore.

Alice Le Goff: The face is a unifying thread throughout the book, from the title itself and through the various case studies discussed.[8] You underline the link between celebrity culture and the emergence of a visual culture which notably manifests itself in the multiplication and mass circulation of portraits which no longer depicted stereotypes but rather specific individuals. Would you agree in this regard with the proposition that celebrity culture is defined by an insurmountable tension between two processes, a process of singularisation and reification?

Antoine Lilti: Celebrity brings out the paradox of mass culture: it is consumed on a mass scale, but is based on the singularisation of the relationship produced by this cultural consumption. The classic example here is that of the best-seller. Everyone reads the same thing, but everyone is convinced they have a unique relationship with the particular cultural product they all read. With celebrities, it is the same thing. The celebrity is highly singularised by their fans. But, from the point of view of the celebrity, the experience is often based on reification, or in any case described in those terms. I think we must be wary of seeing mass consumption only in terms of standardised communication, communication of weak aesthetic or emotional intensity, because, in fact, rare and unique productions would necessarily be consumed at a very high level of intensity. In fact, the two go together, they are really inseparable.

Alice Le Goff: To what extent does celebrity culture, in breaking away from the quest for exemplary figures which is at the heart of the "cult of the hero," circumvent stereotypes? You show yourself that there are recurring patterns such as the figures of the writer, the artist, the criminal, and the politico. Is celebrity not in part structured by "clichés," by recurring patterns?

Antoine Lilti: Yes, there is a relatively limited repertoire of stories, figures, characters. This raises the notion of cultural repertoire in a way. Certain stereotypes are quite deliberately assumed, rehashed. I am thinking in particular of *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, in which Chateaubriand (2018) has a dialogue with Rousseau and Byron, and which reaffirms this stereotype of the famous writer as a seducer in spite of himself. Later it was "fictionalised" to the point of creating a whole imaginary literary world. There is a cultural memory, at once narrative and visual, among intermediaries (journalists and, in recent times, press agents) who recycle, redeploy this catalogue which is itself familiar to the public.

Alice Le Goff: When reading the book, one is struck by the lack of significance accorded to the idea of charisma, even when you deal with the relationship between glory and celebrity. Why such a low importance placed upon the notion of charisma? Is it, for you, an unhelpful concept which poses an obstacle to the analysis of not only celebrity but other forms of notoriety?

[8] Translator's footnote: The original French title of the book begins with "*Figures Publiques*" ("Public Figures"). *Figure* in French can mean "figure" and also "face."

Antoine Lilti: This was a deliberate move. Charisma seemed to me, as a concept, to pose an obstacle to the analysis of celebrity as well as other forms of notoriety. Charisma inextricably links notoriety to the capacity to command. Either you adopt a very strict interpretation, such as a form of authority, or a more flexible one, such as prestige, but the risk is always that you bring in exogenous concerns. The objective of the book was to show that celebrity can be an operative category which produces something very specific which we all recognise but describe inadequately. This led me to abandon categories which were already too evocative, too loaded.

I did not attempt to answer the question: Why is this person a celebrity whereas this one is not? This meant a departure from framing my analysis with regard to charisma and also from a more functionalist analysis (celebrity as the embodiment of society's values). What I did try to do was to consider the specific nature of the emergence of mediatic forms of communication as well as the way in which they transformed the mechanisms of social reputation and why this made celebrity an ambivalent type of prestige, a matter of differing opinions, even if apparently uniquely modern.

Alice Le Goff: A large part of chapter 6 of your book is devoted to the concept of popularity. How does this concept translate, in your view, to the introduction of mechanisms of celebrity into the political sphere without simply being celebrity?

Antoine Lilti: Popularity comprises celebrity's effects on the political sphere and, further, is characterised by very similar ambivalences. What struck me is that popularity has been a very important idea since the Revolution and it has nonetheless not been the subject of much political sociology study, for example compared with the significant critical consideration devoted to charisma. The concept of popularity is very complex because it brings into play at once ambivalences relative to the judgement of a large number and adherence to one person. For all that, adherence does not necessarily equate here to a mechanism of social esteem.

Popularity is political but does not necessarily refer back to authority. It also transcends the political field, it is at the interface of the political and the social; popularity connotes the idea of an imaginary fusion between the public and an individual, not along the lines of the charismatic model of the adoring crowd moved by someone but according to a relationship of personal attachment, which is readily understood in terms of political delegation, without considered loyalty to a particular political platform.

Alice Le Goff: You engage in some particularly rich analysis regarding the figures of Marie-Antoinette, Washington, and Napoleon, figures in relation to which it is possible to perceive the shift of politics into a mediatic era. You notably highlight that Washington finds himself at an intersection between a culture of fame, honour, and celebrity culture. However, how does a figure like Napoleon express the heterogeneous, nay contradictory, logics of glory, honour, and celebrity?

Antoine Lilti: There is an enormous amount of writing in relation to Napoleon and the theme of glory. What I was interested in, in the book, was to show that behind this classical idea of the recreation of traditional glory, of the mili-

tary hero, what made Napoleon as a political figure so modern is that he functions also as a celebrity, at once one the plane of pure notoriety, that Bonaparte, before his arrival to power, knew perfectly well how to maintain, and on the plane of emotional attachment, that belated Bonapartism encouraged very effectively. Thus, the personal prestige of Bonaparte represents a combination of the principle of glory, of traditional sovereignty, and the democratic principle of the attachment of a large number of people to an individual personality. It is not a question of showing that Napoleon is just another celebrity, but to show how he as a public figure negotiated multiple forms of notoriety – which is most often the case for modern people in positions of power.

Alice Le Goff: Reading your book, one gets the impression that "celebrity culture" is characteristic of societies which are democratic or undergoing a process of democratisation. What is your stance on that theory?

Antoine Lilti: It is one of the issues at the heart of the book: Why is celebrity not regarded as a key hallmark of democratic societies, why is it the object of so much criticism? It has all the right elements, just as glory was so valued in aristocratic societies. Anyone can become a celebrity, it is not the privilege of birth, wealth, or even talent. Celebrity is based on the judgement of the majority, it seems to accord with a central value in modern democratic society, where there is little distinction between the populace and media publics. Nonetheless, it remains extremely fragile, rarely the object of positive theoretical attention. How do you explain that? It could be indicative of the persistence of localised "aristocratic" logic in a whole series of specialist spheres. It could also be a tenet of modernity: the difficulty of stabilising defined social prestige.

Alice Le Goff: The theme of propaganda is not discussed very much in the book, and for good reason, because your study concludes in 1850, at the dawn of mass culture. Could you nonetheless extend your analysis by giving an indication of how you see the relationship between propaganda and celebrity?

Antoine Lilti: This has been pointed out to me: political propaganda, notably in dictatorships and totalitarian regimes of the 20th century which instigated a cult of personality around the leader; does this not change the stakes of celebrity? We know that authoritarian regimes did not hesitate to stage manage the leader's private life to further their popularity. Similarly, one could take a cynical, hegemonic view of the marketing industry as a form of commercial propaganda, serving the celebrity of its stars. It seems to me that this understanding of propaganda mandates an overly vertical, unilateral understanding of communication; it is about producing belief, loyalty, actions (voting, following, consuming) by manipulating the emotions of the public. My work on celebrity is oriented more in another direction: towards a certain degree of autonomy on the part of the public and the ambivalence which gives rise to celebrities. Consequently, whether in the political domain or the cultural sphere, I think an interrogation of the dynamics of celebrity avoids the rather simplistic critique of "propaganda" which assumes that the public is a passive victim of this process.

Alice Le Goff: What are the next steps in the study of the mechanisms of celebrity? Which lines of enquiry and areas of research has this study opened up?

Antoine Lilti: I think there are two. The first relates to the concept of "curiosity" which appears throughout the book as the source of celebrity, but which I have not explored adequately. There is work to do there as curiosity is at the heart of the moral ambivalences of modernity. It could be regarded as an eminently positive desire, something which obliges opening oneself to society and other people, which in turn made modern knowledge possible; but it is often seen as parasitic, superficial, even harmful. At the intersection between an intellectual history of social practices and current studies on the economy of attention, there is a case to be reopened.

The second line is broader: theories of the public sphere. What became more and more clear to me was the importance of the emotions and shared aesthetics around which the mediatic public space is arranged. We must therefore talk about a sensitive public sphere to understand the way publics are formed both by the flow of information and discourse as well as by stories and spectacles. I see too little dialogue between work around the public sphere as the site for political mobilisation and studies of publics (cinema, music, television, literature), the former belongs to the field of political science and the latter to the sociology of culture. It is obviously a large field but I would like to undertake a historical, localised, study following on from my work on the 18th century and the Revolution.

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