

# **THE ONE AND THE MANY**

*...A study in music fandom and self*



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## **Introduction**

How does the one relate to the many? – This question is addressed by Michael Jackson in the introduction to *Minima Ethnographica*, and thereby he draws attention to what he considers a central human preoccupation – namely, steering a course between on the one hand experiencing that one is the epicenter of a particular conscious world, and on the other hand knowing that one is ultimately no more significant or central than billions of other human beings on Earth (Jackson 1998:2f, 5, 18-21, 24-28). According to Jackson the balance is a matter of establishing ontological security or of being at home in the world (ibid. 16, 20), and based on field studies in three different cultural settings, he describes three different ways in which the balance is handled. Thus, the book shows that while the existential balance between being one and being one among many may be a general human paradox, or part of the human condition, the ways in which it is managed are certainly culturally informed (ibid.192, 206f).

In this thesis I will examine the way in which a similar balance is managed in a society influenced on the one hand by mass consumption and on the other by a cultural celebration of individuality and autonomy. Mass production has enabled many people to relate to the same words, images, and objects – people can meet in the global village while eating their dinner alone at home in front of the TV-set (Beck 1997:212f). But according to Beck, this combination of here and there enabled by TV, is just an example of a much more general intertwinement of standardization and individualization, characterizing new modernity. To Beck, individuals have not simply been loosened from traditional bonds (e.g. social classes or nuclear families), they have instead been subjected to other institutions over which they have little power, and this makes individual autonomy quite difficult to practice (ibid. 211).

In spite of this, the idea of the autonomous individual is a forceful model: People are seen as responsible for their lives (Giddens 1999a:75), are encouraged to reflect upon their actions and take critical stands when making choices (Beck 1997:219), seek to construct their relation to society in ways that render themselves in control of their lives (ibid.217), and are likely to judge themselves against the norm of

autonomy, even if it applies to them only poorly (Carrier 1999:32, 36). Autonomy is obviously an important ideal in present day Western society (which is the type of society described by the writers mentioned), but so is mass consumption, which plays a crucial role in the daily lives and identity formation of people in a contemporary world (Kellner 1996:147ff). Mass media and mass consumption are however often seen as superficial, flat, one-dimensional, or manipulative (ibid.146; Morley 1996:297). But as Morley observes, such concerns are always directed at the impact that e.g. TV-programs are imagined to have on *other* people, while few think of their own use of television in this way (Morley 1996:297). The observation is mentioned by Morley only en passant, but it shows nevertheless how unlikely people are to see or experience *themselves* as parts of a manipulated crowd, while they can simultaneously maintain an idea of the existence of such a horde of easily manipulated zombies.

The example can be seen as a specific cultural version the existential paradox mentioned above. The balance is by Morley's informants more or less managed by positioning the autonomous self against a crowd of anonymous and easily manipulated others. But what happens, if the balance has to be managed from a clear position *within* a crowd? This is what I will examine by analyzing how the above mentioned paradox is handled by music fans. The setting will be a society influenced by mass consumption, invoking the idea of a "crowd", and by a celebration of individuality and autonomy, and I will refer to this setting as "Western modernity"<sup>1</sup>.

My research has shown that in fandom there is often a clear clash between an emotional experience and a "common sense", and that this clash reflects the paradox mentioned above: Music fans often describe the music as evoking emotions and making them feel individually addressed and connected to the singers, while they are

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<sup>1</sup> There has been much discussion about how to label the contemporary Western world. Beck uses the term "new modernity", arguing that the transitions taking place around us are better characterized as taking place *within* modernity than as being post-modern (Beck 1997:15). Similarly Giddens prefers terms like "high modernity" or "late modernity" when addressing the present around him, arguing that the fragmentation often referred to with the term "post-modern" is contradicted by new formations of groups (Giddens 1999a:27). And Douglas Kellner writes that both the term "modern" and "postmodern" can be used to describe images of identity in popular media - the images of flexible and fluid identities presented in Miami Vice can certainly be seen as post-modern, but the series also reflects and reproduces existing fixed values and modes of life, and can therefore equally well be seen as an intensification of existing modern values and fixed ideas of possible identities (Kellner 1996:141ff,151-58,

simultaneously aware of the fact that the music is mass produced and accessible to many, why the felt bond is therefore most likely a one-way-relation. In all sorts of communication, the meaning of a specific message relies on the meta-communicative statement supplying the key to its reading (Bateson 2000: 177ff, 186-90; Sjørsløv 1998:33). Since fans are as mentioned aware of the fact that the music is directed to many or to nobody in particular, the media can be seen as a meta-communicative statement contradicting the feeling of being individually addressed. Often this awareness of a meta-message in the medium has been somewhat overlooked or ignored in scientific writings on fandom often picturing fans as living in fantasy-worlds (Cavicchi 1998:6). But not only have all the informants involved in this project been extremely aware of being one fan among many, this awareness and its contradiction of individual experience is also what makes the study of fandom relevant to an examination of the above mentioned balance. The balance is however not simply a matter of steering a course between awareness of self and awareness of others, but a matter of steering it in a culturally acknowledged way.

In order to explore the way in which this balance is handled I will give primacy to relations. As the balance must obviously be managed by individuals but in a culturally informed way, it is necessary to be able to conceptualize the link between individuals and culture without claiming one to be determining the other. This link can be verbalized with the notion of intersubjectivity. With this term primacy is neither given to individuals nor to culture, but to *relations*, and both Jackson and Giddens have argued that subjectivity is an outcome of intersubjectivity rather than opposite (Jackson 1998:11; Giddens 1999a:51). With the intersubjective turn human inter-existence comes into center of attention, but the field of intersubjectivity does not exclusively involve relations between people, but also e.g. relations between people and cultural ideas. As Jackson points out, a relation between two people always refer to a third party, a shared idea or a common goal (Jackson 1998:9). Thus, a specific interpersonal relation must not be seen as an isolated event, but as integrated in a larger picture of cultural ideas and ways. I will however not only show, that fans relate to the same cultural ideas as most other people in Western modernity. I will also use

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174). I shall not enter a discussion about which term is more suitable to describe a present Western setting, but will use the term "Western modernity" in the rest of the thesis.

the analysis of fandom to illuminate and discuss some of the theoretical concepts, designed in order to describe these ideas. The project is therefore not merely a description of fandom as a specific phenomenon, but also an analysis of aspects of importance to the balance between the one and the many in Western modernity more generally.

## **The structure of the thesis**

Throughout the thesis I will address various types of intersubjectivity, and as will become clear they are extremely intertwined. Fans relate to artists, but they do it while being aware that they are not the only ones relating to the artists, so the relations to the artists intermingle with relations to crowds of anonymous others. Fans also expect their relations to the artists and to an anonymous crowd to be noticed and judged, according to shared cultural ideas of appropriate relations, so they also relate to these ideas while relating to artists and crowds.

The first chapter, **Finding the Field**, is a general presentation of relevant aspects in fandom, and the description is based on the informants among whom I conducted fieldwork. It will become clear that fandom involves negotiation and balance of identity.

In the second chapter I will provide more detailed arguments for my **Analytical Approach** and place this approach in a theoretical-historical context. I will introduce an important theoretical concept, "the pure relation", which is an ideal dyad supposed to be established between two unconstrained selves. As the analysis proceeds through the thesis, this concept will be discussed and expanded. All other theories will be introduced in the chapters where they will be used analytically.

The first analytical chapter is about **Fandom as Feeling**. I will argue that music can be felt as an embodied social relation, creating a pressure for action and adjustment of the relation between the experiencing person and the social world. The following chapters are based on this conclusion and present different actions taken and thoughts expressed concerning such adjustments.

The chapter about **Pure Relations and Cool Cash** concerns the relation between fans and singers. In this chapter I will show that fans seek to adjust the felt relation as individuals or in groups by repaying the music in the modality of gift-exchange. The analysis is conducted by using classical anthropological theories of spheres of exchange, and based on the analysis of gifts from fans to artists I will show that Western modernity can be characterized with two spheres of exchange, which have been constructed and are morally held apart. One sphere is considered appropriate for economical transactions between anonymous individuals, while the other is seen as appropriate for unconstrained gift-exchange symbolizing emotional involvement. By repaying the singers with gifts, the felt relation is adjusted by being placed in the right sphere.

The third analytical chapter is about **The Individual and The Crowd** but also about dyads. During this chapter it will become clear that many fans enjoy merging with crowds, but also seek to approximate the relation to the artist to the pure relation, when attempting to stand out from the crowd. I will argue that standing out as well as the pure relation imply relating to an anonymous crowd of insignificant others, without which neither standing out nor pure relations make sense.

The next analytical chapter is named **To Be or Not To Be – A Question of Autonomy**. As the title suggests, I will show that when fans seek to decide whether or not they should be or present themselves as fans, the balance has less to do with fandom, and more to do with constructing and presenting the self as autonomous. I will show that autonomy is indeed constructed intersubjectively, but also that the modern Western norm proscribing autonomy is a contradiction in terms which only makes sense if the self is seen as springing from an inner source.

In the last analytical chapter, called **Purity and Strangers**, I will return to theories of exchange and argue that cultural notions of selfhood must be considered in analysis of exchange. I will show that a rejection of a gift is in Western modernity a rejection of forming an affectionate relation with the core-self of the giver. Further I will argue that unreciprocated affection, irrespective of whether or not it has been expressed



through e.g. a gift, is considered an unattractive reference in modern Western autobiography, while exchange of affection is simultaneously what is required in order to handle the balance between the one and the many.

The five analytical chapters thus address music as embodied intersubjectivity, relations as linked to spheres of exchange, the construction of dyads on the background of many, the intersubjective construction of the self as essentially autonomous, and finally the links between exchange, emotions, and selfhood. The overall point is to show how these aspects are inseparable elements of a cultural package, which has to be seen in its totality in order to make sense, and that this cultural package influences the way in which the balance between the one and the many can be handled in Western modernity.

# Finding the Field

Deciding to study a phenomenon like fandom leads to serious considerations of whom to include in the research. Initially I decided to consider everyone a fan who considered him/herself a fan, but that solution turned out to be too simple: People can easily declare themselves huge fans in one context and deny being fans or claim to be only moderate fans in others. This will be shown in the following two sub-chapters, the first describing how fans can make music and/or a musician a core element in their lives, and the second showing how fans can distance themselves from a stereotypical fan-image in order to present themselves and their relation to the music and the musicians in an acceptable way. This balance between being or not being a fan is, as will become clear later, extremely relevant to the analysis of fandom.

The descriptions are based upon fieldwork conducted among fans of various ages, both sexes, and favoring different musicians, but with special attention given to Bruce Springsteen fans and Cliff Richard fans. The thesis is not exclusively based upon these two groups of informants, but due to their number they will be more visible than other groups of fans – both in the following descriptions and in the rest of the thesis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My fieldwork was conducted from August 1999 to February 2000. Initially most of my time was spent in front of my own computer searching various music-sites on the internet in order to find informants. Later I conducted interviews, attended fan-club meetings, video-arrangements, concerts, examined internet sites concerning various artists, read biographies, distributed two rounds of questionnaires over the internet and went with some of my informants on a trip to attend concerts in Birmingham over New Year. In the latter part of the fieldwork, I concentrated on two groups of fans – Cliff Richard fans and Bruce Springsteen fans. The internet-questionnaires were directed to fans of these two artists and were distributed through homepages and mailing lists. Most of the participant observation too was conducted in the company of these two groups. I ended up with 25 interviews with fans of various musicians. Five of the interviews were conducted with two informants at a time, the number of interviewees thus being 30. Approximately half of the interviewees were male and half were female, and their ages ranged from 13 to 63. In the first round of internet-questions I received 230 replies from Springsteen fans and 52 from Cliff fans. In this round of questions I asked what the informants thought I should have asked in order to understand fandom, and based on the suggestions I made an additional questionnaire and distributed it to the respondents, who had allowed me to contact them again. Approximately half of the respondents replied to the second questions. The internet questionnaires revealed the sex-distribution within the respondents to be 85% women and 15% men among the Cliff Richard respondents, and 25% women and 75% men among the Bruce Springsteen respondents. The methods of data-construction reflect the ways in which fans communicate with each other. Some fans meet frequently and in person, some communicate with each other by e-mail, and even others are silent subscribers to mailing lists or visit relevant sites on the internet without their "presence" being known to other internet-users. All these types of communication and ways of acquiring information are reflected in my methods of data-construction. Some informants I have met several times and in person, others I have

## **Once a fan - always a fan**

A few of the informants had been fans for approximately 40 years, others had only recently discovered their idols, and most had been fans for a period of time somewhere in-between. Irrespective of the longevity of fandom, and irrespective of possible changes in the amount of time and energy spent on the interest, everyone seemed to insist that once you were a fan it was unthinkable to stop being a fan. Even those who did no longer attend as many concerts as they used to, had stopped purchasing as many records as earlier in their lives, had not had time to pursue their interest due to e.g. starting families, or had even sold parts of their collections, claimed that their fandom had not decreased but had just changed form. The amount of time, money, and energy spent on fandom seemed to be adjusted according to other important elements in the lives of the informants without affecting the informants' understanding of themselves as fans.

The music and the artists were considered steady and reliable sources to turn to whenever needed, and being a fan was a crucial element in the informants' self-identities. Giddens defines self-identity, as the self as understood by the person in terms of his/her biography (1999a:53), and with this in mind it is clear that the idols played one of the leading roles in the narrated biographies of the fans and could not simply be forgotten or disposed of, as this would require a total re-authoring of important chapters of the informant's life-stories. In fact this importance ascribed to a certain body of music and to a certain person behind it in the authoring of a coherent and structured self-identity is probably the closest one can get to a definition of fandom. Possibly not all self-declared fans would agree that their self-identities are bound up with the musical career of a given singer. But quite often the informants involved in this study directly linked events in their own lives to simultaneous events in the careers of the musicians. Many actually used the career of the artist as some sort of structuring grid or time scale according to which events in their own lives could be placed correctly time-wise. This certainly suggests that artists can play an important part in fans' construction of self-identities, and it does in no way limit the use of the word fan to describing people who have been interested in a given music

and/or artist for a long period of time. Often "becoming a fan stories" consisted of a narration constructed around a clear turning-point leading to an altered state after becoming a fan. Something happened and life became different. As both Jerome Bruner and Kenneth Gergen suggest, turning points often constitute crucial elements in people's narrations of themselves (Bruner 1999a:112, 1999b:223; Gergen 2000:69-71).

When fans told stories about transformations connected to becoming a fan it is of course partly due to the fact that all informants knew they were being interviewed about fandom. Yet, verbalized reflections on how life would have been, had the informant not discovered e.g. Springsteen and his music, or regrets of not having discovered it earlier, suggest that the life-transforming capacities ascribed to the music and the musicians were not entirely made up in order to provide me with something interesting to write about. But the point of drawing attention to these narrated self-identities is simply to provide the reader with an understanding of how important fandom can be in people's lives without claiming that the career of a given artist is the only aspect in life that matters to fans. Fans do of course engage in numerous social relations other than to music and musicians, but to many of the people on whom this study is based, a certain body of mass mediated music constitutes an important element in life, and they engaged in many activities and social relations organized around this interest.

Of course, an important activity among music fans is listening to music. Most of the informants listened to music of the artist in question on a daily basis. Some songs were good for thinking, some were energizing, some were good to listen to while cleaning or driving, and some could pick the informants up whenever they felt down. Some songs were valued for their sound, some for the lyrics, and some for reminding the informants of a certain event or a certain period in their lives. In short, different songs could be valued for different reasons, and several songs were given different interpretations and were said to evoke different moods by different informants. However, in practically all cases, the whole body of music was highly treasured, and most informants listened to a few songs by the artist in question every day.

Among other activities centered around the interest can be mentioned collecting records, books, fanzines, and other items, making scrapbooks, travelling to attend concerts or visiting sites, which somehow referred to the music or the musician, acquiring knowledge, attending fan-club meetings, exchanging music, items, and rumors, arranging video-nights, celebrating the birthdays of the artists, subscribing to relevant mailing lists on the internet, chatting and discussing with other fans through home-pages, and making networks and research of use in order to get tickets, information, and items.

I will not describe these activities in detail, since all that matters to the analysis is that most of the informants had made the music and the musician one of the core elements in their lives, and practically all spent a lot of time and money engaging in activities that were somehow linked to the music and the musician behind it. Most informants described becoming a fan as something really positive that had happened to them, something providing them with a steady element in life, and something they could not imagine ever abandoning.

### **The stereotype**

Yet, the same informants who did at one point explain how fandom was a fundamental part of their lives, could at other times insist that being a fan was just a hobby and no big deal. Furthermore a number of people, whom I had contacted due to their home-pages dedicated to various artists, refused to participate in a project about fandom, and told me that I would probably be able to find better informants elsewhere, as they themselves were not the typical hysterical kind<sup>3</sup> (some of these could be persuaded to give interviews when I honestly told them that I was not particularly looking for hysterical characters). In other words, it was quite clear from the very beginning that the word fan often induced uneasiness, and that many informants expected to be met with prejudice. This was not surprising, as several social scientists have addressed this prejudice in their writings on fandom (e.g. Jenson 1992; Fiske 1992; Lewis 1992; Cline 1992; Ihlemann 1997; Doss 1999).

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<sup>3</sup> I tried to find jazz fans or classical-music fans but none of the people contacted would volunteer for the label "fan".

Most of the informants were quite aware of the existence of a negative stereotypical image of fans, and were of course not very interested in being seen as matching it too well. In my initial naiveté I did however expect to meet at least a few self-proclaimed fans who would try to convince me that the prejudices towards fans *in general* were ungrounded and ought to be changed. That was not the case. The negative stereotype is not just used by non-fans about fans - it is often referred to by self-declared fans, who practically always have examples of such people ready in order to emphasize how they themselves are not.

The negative stereotype can both be described with a “who” and with a “how”. It is usually a sexually obsessed female and often (but not always) a very young one. Lisbeth Ihlemann focuses on the “who-version” and argues that part of the prejudices directed at young teen-age girls and their musical tastes can be explained by a Western tradition for ranking young girls very low (1992:9,25). But consider e.g. the following quotation from an interview with a 20 year-old female Bryan Adams fan:

*The fans of Bryan Adams are very, very different. There are 12-13 year-old girls. There are men aged 60 who like playing the guitar, and everything in between. And that is precisely nice - that it is not just a bunch of girls standing at concerts yelling and screaming and fainting and what not. It's exactly everybody [...] I think that shows that it must be some really good music, since everybody likes it – it is not only one type. [...] It is not only one sex-group who is interested in that man. So that shows exactly that it is not because he is a sex symbol or what ever. It is because he has some sort of charisma, which fascinates people. I think that's nice, so you're not mistaken for one of these girls, who go totally wild at concerts. (Interview, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999).*

Like in the above quotation the unpopular stereotype was often both sexed and aged. But as can be seen, the informant has other purposes than a conspiracy against a particular sex and age group. She is not nervous about being mistaken for a young girl – she *is* a young girl – she is nervous about being mistaken for a *sexually obsessed* young girl. She uses the reference to the stereotype to distance herself from a “how” not a “who”. She refers to the negative stereotype in order to emphasize that she is not sexually attracted to Bryan Adams, but fascinated, or attracted to his music.

Practically all informants did (with or without references to teenage girls) at some point during the interviews state that they were not in love with their idols – I never

asked them if they were, but they must have found it urgently important to tell me that they were not. Most of the informants found an equation between fandom and being in love a personal insult, but were used to being seen as in love with the artists in question. Also male fans of male artists were “accused” of being in love with their idols (several male Cliff fans explained how annoying it was to be mistaken for a homosexual due to fandom). The only informants who did claim to be in love with their idols were a few of exactly the young female boy-band-fans, which is probably why they were referred to so often. But these boy-band fans did definitely not seem insulted by questions of musical tastes and favorite songs even though declaring that their admiration was actually a matter of being in love. Obviously a sexual attraction was considered less worthy than a musical admiration. But the informants were not only against being seen as in love – they were generally against being seen as relating to *the personalities* of the singers. A clipping from a discussion between two male Springsteen fans, aged 25 and 30 illustrates this:

*Simon: I stress very much that it is not a personality cult. It's the music and the lyrics and such things.*

*Tom: But you are very aware of it. I feel that inside me there are tendencies of personality cult, but I say no! It must not become that - it must not slide into that sort of thing.*

*Simon: Yes, tendencies. You are very aware of that. Of course there are tendencies, when you are standing there waiting for him [Bruce] and such [...] But that is because it is he, who personifies that music, and that is his curse...he will have to stop writing such good music! But he is the personification of the great music that I appreciate so much, and therefore I just must meet him and tell him that I appreciate it. (Interview, October 21, 1999)*

While especially one of the informants seems quite worried about a tendency towards a personality cult, the other finds it quite natural to relate the music to the sender of it. Both views were common among the informants. But in general many of them stressed that fandom was about loving music, not about adoring persons, and certainly not about being sexually attracted.

In other words, while the informants could at some points describe the fundamental importance of a certain body of music, or a certain artist in their lives, they were far from unconcerned with how their fandom was seen by others. Obviously they were expecting the way in which they were seen as persons to be bound up with the way

in which the relation between themselves and the artists were seen. In their presentations of themselves and their fandom, they attempted to "rinse" their fandom for the personalities of the singers, and to emphasize instead the musical and spiritual aspects. They must, in short, have known that if they presented their fandom as an *interpersonal relation*, they would break some moral rules and place themselves in a disgraceful light.



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# Analytical Approach

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the aims of this thesis is to explore the way in which a balance between being one and being one of many is managed in a modern Western setting, influenced by the existence of mass produced commodities and mass media, and this will be done through an analysis of fandom. It is however not a new phenomenon for social scientists to concern themselves with the impact of mass consumption. I will line up some of the influential views that have pervaded the writings on mass production and mass consumption, as well as theories dealing specifically with fandom. Based on these writings I will explain my own approach and introduce a few theoretical concepts which I need in my analysis. All other theory will be presented as it becomes relevant through the thesis.

## Writings on mass consumption

Theories about the impact of mass production were developing quickly in the beginning of last century in a time where mass production was on the increase, and the new film media was emerging. In Frankfurt a group of Marxist inspired writers<sup>4</sup> developed the so-called critical theory, referring roughly to the attempts to reveal hidden repressive interests behind seemingly neutral formulations and cultural phenomena. They usually directed their attention to the cultural products themselves (e.g. novels, poetry, and films) and by analyzing these materials, they revealed various hidden agendas. In general The Frankfurt School criticized fascism, capitalism, materialism, and mass media basing their arguments on different notions of false consciousness, hegemony, and subordination of the masses, easily established and maintained by the commercialized culture industry. However they differed in their opinions about how to handle this danger.

Marcuse concentrated on making explicit how glorifying notions of culture or nature could through e.g. literature create false consciousness and illusionary escapes from

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<sup>4</sup> The group included among others Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal (and to some extent Walter Benjamin, who was however never officially a member of the group).

the misery of real life (Marcuse 1968:114). Benjamin suggested politicizing artistic production and saw in mass mediation a possibility of addressing the masses with clear messages although at the same time sacrificing the aura of the unique work of art (Benjamin 1982: 239-44). Adorno on the other hand would hear nothing of political messages in artistic production. He insisted that only the unengaged work of art would precisely because of its lack of political agendas paradoxically contribute with important social criticism (Adorno 1996:105, 113-19). The commercialized culture industry distributing dubious phenomena like pop-music, cinema, magazines, jitterbug, and jazz did, according to Adorno, reduce people to objects of the industry and appealed only to blind subjection and discipline (Adorno 1996:30, 35; Ehrenreich et al 1992:88; Huyssen 1986:155; Storey 1996:95). Especially Benjamin and Adorno had divergent opinions about what ought to be done<sup>5</sup>. But they, as well as the other members of the group, agreed in their opinion about the masses, who had according to them been turned into hordes of passive or at least absentminded audiences, who were easily manipulated and exploited (Benjamin 1982:243; Adorno 1996:37-39; Marcuse 1968:21-25; Lowenthal 1957: 203, 218).

It was primarily against these views on the masses that representatives from Cultural Studies turned their criticism. Stuart Hall, who was the director of Birmingham Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies, counter argued the tendency of focusing exclusively on textual analysis, rejecting the assumption that people would automatically react in certain ways when exposed to certain materials. He argued that before a cultural product could have any influence on its recipients, it would have to be decoded, and in this process it was quite possible, that the messages extracted were different from the ones intended, as people were in general actively involved in creating meaning (Morley 1996:300). This view was backed up and taken further by writers like Dick Hebdige and John Fiske who also insisted on seeing a diverse fabric of subcultures, consisting of clusters of active bricoleurs, in stead of homogeneous masses of sleepwalking puppets.

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<sup>5</sup> The disagreements between Benjamin and Adorno can e.g. be seen in their opinions about Brecht. While Adorno detested Brecht political art and accused him of aestheticizing horrible subjects by addressing them artistically, Benjamin was inspired by Brecht's political involvement (as well as by the 1920's Russian propaganda

Hebdige argued that when sub-cultural fractions like punkers did not exactly change power relations in the surrounding society, it was not because they were not active, inventive, and disturbing (for example they easily redefined a simple safety pin to a provocative statement - a development very unlikely to have been inherent in the product or planned in advance by the producers of sewing articles), it was rather due to a Gramscian hegemony of a dominating culture, leaving open only a certain amount of harmless safety-valves for symbolically expressed discontent (Hebdige:1983:88, 96). While safety pins can hardly be said to have contained an intended message, the example is illustrative for the focus on active symbol production and social criticism that occurred in social science following the emergence of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies specialized in showing how various repressed cultural fractions like working classes, youth, women, or ethnical minorities were really actively engaged in constructing meaning, and often it was concluded that seemingly passive consumption of popular culture could actually be empowering.

By the end of the 1980s the studies of popular culture were so optimistically celebrating democratic polysemy and the capacities of active audiences in choosing, transforming, and creating alternative meanings, that obvious differences in distributive possibilities between producers and audiences were somewhat overlooked (Morley 1996:310-13). Morley therefore warns social scientists against cheerfully equating "active" with "powerful", reminding that Hall had actually in his encoding/decoding theory incorporated notions of "preferred readings" and "structured polysemy", meaning that not all readings or interpretations were equally present in the message nor equally likely to gain influence (Morley 1996: 301,310-13; Miller 1996:28-30, 37).

## **Writings on fandom**

Much of the research on fandom and audiences has been heavily influenced by Cultural Studies, often being centered on creative processes through which seemingly passive consumers become active producers of meaning, narrations, and

products. In a few cases it is argued that fandom can actually contribute to fundamental changes in a society. An example of this is the article on *Beatlemania*, written by Ehrenreich et al. who argue that teenage idols like Elvis and The Beatles were important elements in young American women's sexual liberation (1992:90-97). In a time where female sexuality was seen as something to be saved for marriage, dreaming of Elvis or one of The Beatles could be quite appealing. Not only were these guys unobtainable, which meant that there was no danger of an actual marriage putting an end to public life as it did for most girls in USA at that time, the singers were also revolutionary and powerful, inspiring young women to want liberty for themselves (ibid.100-103). But in general many of the studies on fandom conclude, that fans are usually not credited outside their local fan communities – even though they are often both creative, productive, and if not directly in critical opposition to different systems of power, then at least they are independent of these.

Erica Doss concentrates in her book on *Elvis Culture* on the collections and artistic productions among Elvis fans, arguing that fans create their own versions of Elvis' image, versions in direct opposition to the one promoted by Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc. But people in general and Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc. in particular seem to find the fans' tastes kitschy and unappealing, and therefore neither they nor their products are taken seriously (Doss 1999: 16, 31, 214-28). John Fiske too concentrates on different aspects of production among groups of fans (Fiske 1992:30). These productions take place outside and often in opposition to the official culture and can function as empowering for individuals or as specific types of cultural capital within fan communities (ibid.35-37). But usually there are not even attempts to circulate e.g. fan knowledge outside fan communities, as this type of knowledge is not treasured by the educational systems, and therefore these specific forms of cultural capital are not convertible to career opportunities and earning power (ibid.39 and 45). Lisbeth Ihlemann notes that the cultural degradation of normal, active, and creative boy band fans has to do with two things: First, these fans are young women, and this group has during the 20<sup>th</sup> century been seen as unimportant and of low social status. Second, rock-critics have after the 1960s tended to favor revolutionary and unadjusted music leaving mainstream pop to be associated with low rank (Ihlemann

1997:9). And Joli Jenson writes that fans are often seen as pathological, abnormal and deranged, which helps the rest of the population to feel normal, safe, and superior (Jenson 1992:24).

The authors mentioned above, all describe fandom as something that really isn't so bad. Fans are active, creative people who seek and obtain pleasure, social relations, knowledge, experiences, and other worthy things, but for some reason they are not acknowledged accordingly outside their specific fields. Either the educational system does not accept their knowledge (Fiske), their taste does not match the legitimate taste (Doss and Ihlemann), they are deranged because of their sex and age (Ihlemann), or they are simply considered pathological by a normality craving society (Jenson). But several scholars have found other types of empowerment in fandom. If fandom does not give access to attractive positions, income, or respect, it can be used as a tool on a more personal and emotional level. Laurence Grossberg argues that fandom can be a source of optimism, identity, and pleasure necessary for establishing a certain amount of control over ones own emotional life in a world dominated by feelings of frustration, alienation, and boredom (Grossberg 1992:65). And that view is supported by a number of other social scientists.

John Fiske suggests that teenage girl fans of Madonna use their idol to built a higher self esteem and take control over the meanings of their own sexuality (Fiske 1992:35). Daniel Cavicchi writes that Springsteen fans use the music as well as their collections in shaping and anchoring their own selves - to him it seems that Bruce fandom enhances rather that diminishes the sense of being a unique individual (Cavicchi 1998:156-57). Stephen Hinerman argues that Elvis has for many young girls represented the resolution to a frustrating adolescent sexuality, promising total fulfillment away from the prohibiting patriarchal law, and that Elvis can later in life function as some sort of imagined "savior" in other types of crisis (Hinerman 1992:123-24). As such fantasizing can help stitching ones identity together after a traumatic widening of the gap between desire and ego (ibid.131). He notes that fantasizing doesn't alter the conditions that created the disrupted identity in the first place, but that it can be the only tool at hand in managing ones own personal life under the given circumstances (ibid.132).

The tendency to concentrate on empowerment on a personal level is another step away from the ideas of the Frankfurt School. And probably Adorno and Marcuse would have been abhorred by the whole idea. The descriptions of the uses of fandom in the persuasion of pleasure and sense of control over one's own affectionate life fit Marcuse's notion of affirmative culture extremely well. Marcuse, however, had a less positive opinion about the issue, than do the above writers. To Marcuse affirmative culture could deceive people with illusions, make them feel happy although they really had no reason to, and prevent that something was done about the sad condition of reality (Marcuse 1968:118-22). There are however serious problems with the writings of Marcuse and the rest of the Frankfurt school, besides the degrading view on masses. E.g. the frequent references to illusions and false consciousness leaves open the question of who is to determine when and on what grounds the condition of reality should be considered sufficiently positive for people to seek and obtain pleasure and happiness without being deceived. Besides, it would be quite unrealistic to assume that people would stop seeking happiness and fulfillment within the conditions presented to them. But on the other hand, studies of popular culture showing that the use of e.g. music or idols can be empowering or pleasurable on a personal level are not good enough either. The fact that people creatively use tools at hand in seeking happiness, constructing identities, shaping selves and so forth can hardly continue being a surprising secret worth spending time to reveal again and again. I have no reason whatsoever to doubt that it is so – actually my own research shows much the same. But the interesting part would be exactly the integration of these personal strategies in a larger picture.

I do therefore not want to view personal strategies, emotional impact, and identity formation in subcultural groups as taking place in spite of or in opposition to a more or less ill-defined dominating culture with its own coherent systems of legitimate tastes, accepted forms of cultural capital, or hegemonically established safety valves. And I do not intend to elaborate on clashes between specific actions taken by a specific group of individuals and an abstract system of values existing among members of a society that includes everybody except the specific group in question.

In stead I intend to view the informants chosen for my research as being parts of the exact same system, which their actions can be interpreted as being in opposition to.

Admittedly, the mere selection of informants for the research can be seen as another misleading excavation of a group of people from a larger context. But as this can not be avoided, given the necessity of empirical research, the least one can do is to avoid carrying this artificially established border into the theoretical analysis and making it the line over which a struggle between specific individuals and an abstract system takes place. After all, fans, the values they appreciate, the strategies they choose, the lives they live (both as fans and as family members, colleagues, consumers, citizens, and other) did not develop in isolation from but as part of a larger social community. Therefore *the study of fandom can both teach us something about a specific phenomenon and something about the society in which it occurs.*

### **Contextualizing fandom**

As argued by several of the writers, referred to above, fandom is often met with prejudice, and most of the informants included in my research were fully aware of that. Most of them had difficulties explaining what exactly fandom was, but they did seem to agree on one subject – when meeting a stranger, the smartest introduction was not to present oneself as a fan. My project is however not to show *that* fans are often met with prejudice, but to *use* their expectations of meeting prejudice in the analytical approach and choice of theory.

The informants, being members of a modern Western society are, as has been argued, not an isolated group of people for whom modern Western ideas of appropriateness are foreign. They know precisely which aspects of fandom cause negative comments and exactly which actions strangers and acquaintances will deem inappropriate or immoral – they actually often agree. Some of the informants told that they deliberately limited their fandom due to “the gaze of others”, some that limitations were necessary due to their own self-respect, and some that “the gaze of others” was always with them in the back of their heads, which was probably why they were “not worse than they were”. Self-directed, other-directed, both, or

something in-between, fans have, just like other people, quite strict ideas of appropriateness, and they attempt to live up to cultural ideals just like everyone else. This in itself suggests that a study of fans can provide insight in Western modernity more generally. But there is also another reason for arguing that the study of fans can illuminate anthropological understandings of Western modernity, and that reason is linked to the prejudices with which fans are often met.

As explained in the sub-chapter about the stereotype, the informants expected to be met with prejudice and often sought to pre-empt insulting interpretations of themselves in advance - while they were simultaneously prejudiced about *other* "stereotypical" fans. They addressed all by themselves aspects of fandom, which they expected "gazing others" or "internalized others" to find morally dubious. When fans in the middle of conversations about other subjects suddenly stated that they were not in love with the artists and not members of a personality-cult, they were "removing" the singers *as persons* from their presentation of their own fandom. Whether or not some fans are in love with artists or fascinated by their personalities, does not really matter to the analysis. What matters is, that the informants must have found it very important to avoid being seen as adoring the singers as persons. They must, in other words, have found fandom, when seen as an interpersonal relation, at odds with generally approved ideas of appropriateness. Precisely because the informants found it personally insulting when fandom was seen as an interpersonal relation, it is necessary to address and conceptualize the moral standards, against which they were measuring themselves - or expecting others to measure them against. The informants were seeking to influence my interpretation of themselves and their fandom, and in this negotiation they related to both the negative stereotype and to cultural ideas of appropriate interpersonal relations. The prejudice primarily concerned fandom as an interpersonal relation, and I will therefore need a theoretical concept enabling me to refer to normative ideals for interpersonal relations. Of course, the analysis of fandom will include other aspects than prejudices and ideals for interpersonal relations - e.g. I will analyze music-listening, concerts, and exchange. But as theoretical concepts of normative ideals for interpersonal relations will be needed throughout the thesis, such concepts will be introduced below, whereas all other theory will be presented, as it becomes relevant in the analysis



## **Modern selves and pure relations**

Both Anthony Giddens and James Carrier have introduced theoretical concepts referring to Western ideals for interpersonal relations and people in them. Through different types of analysis and without referring to each other Giddens and Carrier introduce two similar ideal-models for interpersonal relations, and both argue that engaging in such relations is of huge importance to the construction of self in Western modernity.

Giddens explores "the reflexive project of the self" in private relations. To avoid seeing the self as an entity that *is* persistent over time due to a continuity of actions taken, he uses the term "self-identity" by which he means "*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*" (1999a:53). He sees the self as a reflexive project for which the individual is held responsible (ibid.75). Modern individuals are not only reflexively trying to understand themselves, but are also trying to control and develop their selves in direction of a fulfilling and rewarding sense of identity (ibid.75-79).

The frequent references to "the reflexive project of the self" requires a little explanation, and small surprise, given Giddens' existential phenomenological inspiration, the explanation can be found in e.g. Sartre's writings (1975). Sartre gives primacy to awareness, and writes that it is quite common to be aware of something without any sense of self. He describes a situation of unreflected intuition where his ever-returning friend Pierre needs help. This much is registered by Sartre, but the point is, that in the situation it is not relevant in Sartre's mind that it is *he*, who observes it. Only Pierre who needs help exists for his awareness and must clearly be helped (1975:29f). But when becoming aware of his own awareness of Pierre who needs help, Sartre moves his awareness from Pierre to himself and his own helpfulness, and it is only in this reflective act that the idea of a coherent self with certain characteristics (here the characteristic is helpfulness) is constructed (ibid.32, 48-49, 60). Thus, both Sartre and Giddens refuse to take for granted an inner core of

self (or ego<sup>6</sup>) from which thoughts and actions flow in a continuous and coherent manner, and move attention to the construction of such a fictional coherence, and that fiction takes form in the reflective act, or when being aware of ones own awareness (Sartre 1975:25f; Giddens 1999a:76).

Giddens is as mentioned inspired by existential phenomenology and argues much in line with Jackson that intersubjectivity does not derive from subjectivity, but the other way around (Giddens 1999a:51; Jackson 1998:11). There is however, according to Giddens, a special type of relations to others that has become particularly important to the construction of self in late modernity, namely intimacy<sup>7</sup> (Giddens 1999a:94, 189). He introduces the term "pure relationship", which is an ideal intimate relation that is from both sides appreciated for the pure enjoyment of it, not for any practical or financial reason. Friendships and romantic relations are in late-modernity supposed to *approximate* pure relationships (ibid.88ff, 95, 189). The pure relation is an ideal, which is above all dyadic, but people can engage in several relations that are all sought approximated to the pure ideal (1999a:97; 1999b:63,138f). The pure relation as ideal pervades Western modernity in general and is sought approximated in relations between two people, who have chosen each other as intimate partners.

However, according to Giddens, the backside of the liberty to choose friends and romantic partners without considering economical benefits and kinship obligations is that the pure relation is per definition insecure. As it depends on the free will of another individual, it can be terminated at any time if one of the persons involved does not any longer find the relation satisfactory, and therefore intimate relations are continuously negotiated, evaluated, and reflected upon (1999a:88ff; 1999b:137). Giddens sees the development of the pure relation as closely linked to Western democratic ideals (1999b:99, 181, 185-88). Private relations are increasingly pervaded by negotiations between individuals, both when the relation is entered,

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<sup>6</sup> Sartre sees no reason to separate the ego and the self. When these two aspects of the I have been described separately the ego has been referred to as the unity of actions, and the self as the unity of conditions and qualities. But to Sartre the two aspects are part of the same fiction, and he finds it unnecessary to distinguish between them (Sartre 1975:32f).

<sup>7</sup> Sennet too has argued that Westerners celebrate intimacy, local communities, warmth, and closeness, resulting, according to him, in a new type of nervous illness (narcissism) when taken to an extreme. Narcissism is not to be understood as selfishness, but rather as a tendency to relate to others only as far as they resonate with or reflect

when it is reflected upon, and when it is terminated (ibid.186). This democratization of privacy is according to Giddens summed up in the principle of autonomy: People ought to be free and equal in taking decisions concerning the relation, under the condition that they do not exploit agreed rules to deprive the other of his/her rights (ibid.182, 186). Thus, Giddens links the idea of the pure relation to a Western ideal of the self as an autonomous entity, and he explains how these freely chosen relations are closely linked to the reflexive project of the self, as the pure relation both allows and requires an organized and continuous self-understanding to be conveyed to the other in an authentic manner (1999a:186, 189).

James Carrier has made similar points about the Western notion of friendship. He does not use the term pure relation, but he describes the Western friendship in much the same manner. The modern Western friendship is supposed to be established irrespective of economical benefits, kinship-obligations, geography, and interests, and in short it can neither be forced nor bought (Carrier 1999:21ff, 26). Much in line with Giddens, Carrier considers the Western idea of friendship closely linked to a certain notion of the self, and according to Carrier the self who is capable of this friendship has to be autonomous and spontaneous (ibid.21, 24f and 31). He traces the celebration of spontaneity back to the 18th century, when romanticists rebelled against enlightenment ideals, and claimed individual feelings to be the best and most valid source of moral judgment. Human beings were seen as containing an intuitive moral sense, and would instinctively feel "natural sympathy" for the good while being repulsed by the bad (ibid.24ff). Therefore, the most moral relation became the one based on spontaneous affection between two autonomous, unconstrained people (ibid.25). Though Carrier explains how both the Western idea of friendship and the corresponding idea of self are not universal and probably not even very good descriptions of a Western reality (ibid. 30f, 35), he also points out that these ideas of friendships and selves have become normative ideals (ibid.22 and 34ff). The notion of friendship has become a way of thinking about affectionate relations in Western modernity, a standard against which people judge themselves and each other, and

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the self – with emphasis on *feelings* rather than *actions* (1976:219, 261, 324ff). The new god is warmth, Sennet provocatively claims, and the worshipping of it, is definitely a religion that he doesn't applaud (ibid.259).

people with few or no friends are seen as somewhat emotionally impoverished (ibid.36).

Thus, whereas Giddens sees the link between self-identity and the pure relation as being based on the reflexive organization of both, Carrier suggests that the establishment of private dyads does not only affect the way in which the self is constructed *within* the relation, but also affects the way in which the self is seen by others *outside* the relation in question. However, with different words and by referring to different types of relations, Giddens (writing primarily about romantic relations) and Carrier (writing about friendships) describe how Western people tend to idealize voluntarily entered private, equal, and mutual dyads, and both authors link these ideals to the ideal notion of the self as an autonomous entity, valuing spontaneous feelings. But as Giddens has pointed out, marriages, friendships, and sexual relations are supposed to *approximate* pure relations, but do not necessarily live up to the ideal (Giddens 1999a:6, 95). Similarly Carrier stresses that not all Westerners fit the idea of autonomous actors, and not all private relations are entered without constraints (Carrier 1999:32f)<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, Giddens and Carrier point to the existence of a Western ideal type of private relations, cleansed of market-calculations and external requirements. Of course these ideal relations and selves must not be seen as universal nor must they be seen as terms describing actual relations and selves. Rather they must be understood as cultural *models for* private relations and people in them. They must be seen as idealized and celebrated standards or principles, as third parties or as shared ideas to which people relate while relating to each other (Jackson 1998:9).

Though Giddens is the only one of the two writers using the term "pure relation", Carrier argues the existence of a similar ideal. I will use the term "pure relation" to refer to this ideal model for private relations, irrespective of which author is referred

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<sup>8</sup> In stressing the lack of correspondence between real and ideal in private relations, Giddens and Carrier are supported by Simmel, who writes that the more private a relation gets, the more is it based on *the idea* of the whole person. Whereas public interaction is based on the idea of partial knowledge of each other, private relations like friendships and marriages are built upon the idea of the whole person (though knowing another person completely is of course impossible). Private relations, according to Simmel, involve psychological intimacy

to, and irrespective of which types of private relations they have based their arguments on – simply because the characteristics of the ideal type seems to be quite similar in both writings.

By now the analytical approach and some of the most important theoretical tools necessary should be clear. I have argued that fandom must be seen as part of a larger social setting which I have called Western modernity. I have argued that it must neither be assumed that people react automatically when exposed to a given material, nor that they react without being influenced by cultural ideas at all. I have shown that fans in their attempts to pre-empt prejudice draw attention to the type of relation existing between themselves and the artist in question, and that they must somehow expect to be personally measured and judged against both the stereotypical fan-image and against cultural ideas for appropriate relations. I have therefore introduced a theoretical concept – the pure relation – in order to be able to refer to such an ideal-relation, which is linked to an ideal self. And the overall idea is to examine how exactly the informants relate to both the negative stereotype and to the idea of desirable ideal-relations. It will be demonstrated that the negative stereotype corresponds very poorly to the cultural ideals, and that the negotiation of self according to the negative stereotype and according to these ideas of pure relations and proper selves can teach us about these cultural ideals, and about how the existence of such ideals influence the conditions for balancing between being one and being one of many in Western modernity.

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# Fandom as Feeling

All informants (interviewees as well as questionnaire respondents) were asked what a real fan was. While some lined up long lists of signs to rely on in order to measure the degree of fandom most agreed that it was some sort of inner condition that was invisible and incomprehensible to outsiders. *"It's just this special fan feeling you have when you see them!"* a 13 year-old Spice Girls fan said, interrupting herself in her attempts to give me a visible and measurable definition of fandom. Many of the other informants found themselves in similar situations during the interviews. After trying to explain why it was so important to own or know this or that, they suddenly claimed that possessions and knowledge was of course not what it was all about – it was more a matter of what emotions the music could evoke. In spite of numerous references to more or less dependable signs to rely on in attempts to measure fandom, most of the informants seemed to agree that basically fandom was about emotions, it was something invisible and incomprehensible to outsiders. "The only way to understand it is to feel it!" I was told.

In the following I will address the emotional bond from fan to artist. The empirical material is primarily derived from the answers I received after distributing questionnaires to Bruce Springsteen fans and Cliff Richard fans over the internet. There are several differences between the two groups of respondents that could have been mentioned, but they are not particularly relevant to my analysis. The object is to show that music can be felt as a social relation - and it is this experience of a relation rather than the exact messages in and interpretations of the music and the musicians that will be addressed. But before beginning the actual analysis, a few concepts of emotion and feeling must be introduced.

## **Social relations embodied**

Several social scientists have criticized the tendency to universalize the Western construction of the person as containing a natural inner core forever at odds with cultural conventions (e.g. Rosaldo 1997: 139-40; Gergen 2000:8-16). When the topic

comes up, it is often linked to the massive influence of Freudian theories of suppressed instincts, the unconscious, and the restraining norms of civilization, and Freud's theory of suppressed sexuality is indeed a very clear example of such a dual notion of the person. E.g he argued that the natural sexual instincts were suppressed by a "civilized" morality allowing only reproductive sex within legitimate marriages, resulting in a number of nervous illnesses among his patients in Vienna (Freud 1975)<sup>9</sup>. The criticism against Freud as well as against the dual notion of the person and the primacy of the inner core of self more generally has primarily been directed against attempts to universalize these theories, and rightly so. Several anthropologists have after conducting fieldwork in different societies argued that this dual notion of the person is far from natural and universal, but rather culturally constructed (e.g Rosaldo 1997; Jackson 1998:6; Geertz 1997:126).

However, the topic in this thesis is not to join the classical discussion of where exactly to fix the border between nature and culture, heredity and environment. My material derives entirely from what could be labeled "the Western World"<sup>10</sup>, and the dual notion of personhood was quite common among the informants. They frequently referred to the unconscious, suppressed feelings, and the incomprehensible and uncontrollable inner life of emotions. Often the informants were actually very interested in reading my material and hearing whether I had found an explanation of this irrational or non-rational phenomenon that inhabited their inner lives, and that they had never really understood themselves. Thus, my material *in it self* does not provide an opportunity to discuss universalities (or the lack of) in relation to selves and emotions. But the least one can do is to use theoretical concepts that are combinable with cross-cultural analysis, thus leaving the comparative possibility open. And during the theoretical discussion of feelings and emotions cross-culturally, a number of relevant notions have emerged. By using some of these, the topic can

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<sup>9</sup> Freud was however, not suggesting something entirely new. His theory of a natural inner core and its clash against normative restrictions can be seen as a continuation of a long discussion between enlightenmen-thinkers and romanticists (Schweder 1997:27ff). On one side was reason, rationality, objectivity, division, and order and on the other emotion, imagination, pleasure, unity, rebellion, and expression. In the one case the individual was seen as a "character" to be normatively constructed and restricted, in the other it was seen as a "self" to be liberated from restraining social conventions (Campbell 1983:285f). As Campbell has pointed out, the values in romanticism were actually heavily dependent on moralities to rebel against, so Freud's ideas of the repressed inner core of self were actually much in line with Western ideas of a dual person.

be addressed in a Western setting without uncritically adopting the duality of the person and the primacy of the inner core of self in general.

Robert I. Levy has addressed the issue of emotions and feelings cross-culturally. There are in my opinion serious problems with his analysis, but they relate more to his interpretations than to his theoretical concepts of emotions and feelings<sup>11</sup>. Levy makes a distinction between feelings and a specific type of feelings called emotions. Both are bodily felt and involve in the verbalization and interpretation of them the total person, the "I", and not merely a part of the body (e.g. *I am tired* rather than *my nose itches*) (Levy 1997:221). But where non-emotional feelings concern a total person's relation to his or her own bodily support, emotions are about a person's relation to the external social world, to persons and personified elements (ibid.221-22). Thus, emotions can following Levy be seen as *embodied social relations*. And the criticism that can be turned against him does not concern this definition, but can be directed at his tendency to *evaluate* the social aspects of a feeling according to his own Western notions and categorizations of feelings. The theoretical concepts of emotions and feelings must be defined in a way that does not depend on a specific notion of self and a specific idea of when a feeling is social and therefore an emotion. The concepts must be open to grasp the diversity of conscious interpretations and open

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<sup>10</sup> Besides the characteristics to which I refer by the term "Western modernity" (see the introduction), it can be mentioned, that all the informants involved came from geographical areas, which would usually be labeled "the Western world", that is, Western Europe, North America, Australia, and a few from New Zealand.

<sup>11</sup> Though Levy attempts to address the issue of feelings and emotions without taking either of the extreme positions of feelings as totally universal or as completely depending on cultural systems of thought and meaning, he makes the (in my opinion) serious mistake of basing his cross-cultural comparison on a rather ethnocentric view. This is seen in two ways. First he describes how some "emotions" are in Tahitian terminology hypercognized and others are hypocognized, depending on how many verbal subcategories are available to describe a feeling (Levy 1997:218ff). But in making such an evaluation, Levy simultaneously makes the Western labels for types and subtypes of emotions the somewhat neutral base for comparison. It could just as well be argued that some of the Western notions of emotions were hyper- or hypocognized compared to Tahitian terminology. The second aspect showing Levy's ethnocentrism is his evaluation of a given Tahitian feeling as an emotion (ibid. 221f). The emotional aspect ascribed to the feeling derives from his own idea of the social aspect in it. The argument is based upon an example of a Tahitian man who feels sick and explains it with the influence from an evil spirit, and Levy does not explain the social aspect of the feeling by referring to the spirit as personified, but with reference to how the man must somehow be aware of his condition being linked to the sense of loss, following his wife's departure. Levy then claims that the Tahitian man in question must have some sort of covert first-order-knowledge about the social aspect of the feeling – the departure of the wife and the following feeling (ibid.222ff). But in drawing that conclusion, Levy makes his own second-order-knowledge (culturally informed interpretation) the intuitive or unconscious first-order-knowledge of his informant, and such a conclusion is in my opinion seriously lacking in scientific support. It must however in defense of Levy be mentioned, that he is aware of his own ethnocentrism (or at least "etic" analysis) (ibid.219), but that does not alter the fact that he has actually built his analysis on Western concepts and has even freely mixed first and second-order knowledge in spite of this awareness.



to embrace local ideas of selves and socialities, however they are understood in the given setting.

When Levy points out that an emotion, a social relation which is bodily felt, can be directed not only to other persons but also to personified elements, the idea leads right back to Jackson's notion of intersubjectivity, mentioned in the beginning of this thesis. Intersubjectivity too is a term allowing relations to become center of attention. Rather than focusing on the subject or the self as a distinct and bodily contained unity (or duality, when confronted with normative roles to enact), intersubjectivity moves the focus to the relational interplay characterizing social life (Jackson 1998:6f). In order to take the idea of intersubjectivity seriously, the opposition between subject and object must be abandoned. In fact, a blurring of the border between these two notions occur in all sorts of societies. As several anthropologists have shown, objects can be personalized, ascribed subjective meanings, and social destinies in a number of cultural settings. And similarly people can relate to both themselves and others as objects of their awareness (Jackson 1998:7-10; Sartre 1975:21f). However, questioning the subject-object opposition does not mean denying the existence of awareness and bodily sensations. Rather it means that an awareness of a bodily sensation must be seen as a vivid reminder of a relation between awareness and body, between awareness and the external world of others and objects, or between awareness and constructed abstractions like self, culture, or tradition. *Thus, feelings can be seen as embodied intersubjectivity.*

This definition of feelings embraces all sorts of awarenesses of bodily sensations involving in the interpretation of it the total person, the "I". Emotions as well as feelings more generally create a pressure for conscious action to adjust the whole organism's relation to the external world (Levy 1997:218ff). The specific type of feelings called emotions can be seen as bodily felt *social relations*, requiring adjustment of a persons relation to the *social* world, but whether a feeling qualifies as an emotion, depends on whether it is by the individual feeling it, interpreted as concerning social relations or not. *Therefore, I will view emotions as embodied social relations, creating a pressure for action and adjustment of the social relation between the total person and a person or a personified element.*

The embodiment and especially the focus on relations are extremely relevant to my analysis. Some of the informants stressed that while music in general could be heard and enjoyed, listening to music by the specific artist in question could be bodily felt. It could send shivers down people's spines, make them cry or dance or laugh, touch them on a deep and visceral level, or create a gut-feeling of belonging. These references to embodiment occurred once in a while but links between music and different sorts of social relations were even more common. Two types of such bonds will be analyzed below. The first bond is a feeling of being understood by someone feeling in a similar way. The second of feeling special and directly addressed by a caring voice. The analysis will as mentioned be based on the replies from Bruce Springsteen fans and Cliff Richard fans. It must however be stressed that while these two types of bonds were extremely common references in the two groups of replies respectively, they were not entirely confined to these groups. Similar references occurred in interviews with fans of all ages, both sexes, and favoring a number of different artists.

## **Connection**

Connections, relations, and bonds were mentioned over and over again, especially by the Springsteen respondents. The questionnaire itself did not contain any of these words, but they often occurred, when the respondents tried to formulate either what fascinated them, or when describing Springsteen's music and performance, and some actually suggested that it was exactly the feeling of connection that distinguished fans from ordinary Springsteen listeners. A few explained the connection by referring to similarities in background or life situations between themselves and Bruce<sup>12</sup>, but most of the respondents were talking about an emotional bond that did not necessarily have anything to do with visible similarities. Some described it as a feeling of having found a soul mate, others described the music as the soundtrack of their lives, or Bruce as a friend who was always there. Some felt they knew the people in his songs, some said it made them feel part of the whole, and quite a few were just plainly amazed how someone they didn't know could pinpoint their feelings so well.

In most cases the examples used to illustrate the point were references to difficult periods in life where the music or the lyrics had expressed exactly the emotions involved. But many pointed out, that in spite of these situations being particularly clear in their memories they could also use the music when they were happy and just wanted to sing along or be energized while cleaning up, washing dishes, or driving. In general the answers suggested an appreciation of the diversity of Springsteen's music, and many of the respondents emphasized how the music could keep them company in all sorts of situations and travel with them through their lives. There was a song for every occasion, and this was further illustrated by the difficulties the respondents had when asked to pick a favorite song. In short this feeling of connection seemed to have less to do with particular experiences, and more to do with an appreciation of Springsteen's ability to express relevant emotions through his works in general. Bruce and his music could be counted on no matter what situation occurred. A male Bruce fan, aged 23 summed it up very convincingly:

*He [Bruce] manages to distil all of the emotions and questions that you go through/have, at all points in your life into a living, breathing organism of music. He just makes that connection with you, be it live or on record, which just makes you sit up and say, "yes, this is me, this is where I am, this is what I'm about...hell someone out there understands that!" (Bruce-respondent 72)*

A female Springsteen fan, aged 39 echoed him:

*His [Bruce's] music keeps me company as I follow my own journey...In short, I connected. I connected with a real person who felt the things that I felt. That feeling of connection has now lasted 20 years. It never lessens, it never abates, perhaps it changes form, but it does not disappear. I know that Bruce does not know me, but to me, he's a friend I've had for 20 years. (Bruce-respondent 63)*

The two quotations are picked to illustrate what the answers suggested to be fairly common ways of describing the connection. The first respondent describes how Bruce connects with the fan, and the other how the fan connects with Bruce. But in both cases it is stressed that through the music a relation to a *someone* or a *real person* is established. The whole body of Springsteen's music can be used as a source of understanding that can accompany the respondents in various situations through their lives. Although most informants stressed that what seriously mattered in

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<sup>12</sup> Practically all informants referred to their idols with the familiar first name, while other artists were referred to with their full names.

Bruce fandom was the music, the frequent references to connections and relations, make it necessary to take into consideration an implied sender, who is more or less personified. The music seems to be seen as the means of communication, but the feeling of connection is directed not to the music, but to the *someone*, the *real person*, who has musically expressed and pinpointed feelings that the respondents can relate to. In other cases the music *itself* was ascribed personified qualities. In some cases fans could relate to the different persons in the songs, and sometimes the music could be related and connected to, without involving Bruce as a person. An example of this can be seen in the following quotation from a 29 year-old male Bruce fan:

*People probably think it is like a cult. For me, it is a connection, a bond. The most important thing I can say is Springsteen's music is one of my closest friends. (Bruce-respondent 7)*

As can be seen, the respondent ascribes to the music some personified qualities. The music is described as a close friend to whom a bond is felt. Thus, whether the music itself was ascribed personified qualities or whether Bruce was seen as its personification, a connection or a social bond is felt. Which ever is the case, the feelings involved must be seen as emotions, as embodied social relations rendering the fan immediately involved in a social world.

## **The voice**

Cliff was just like Bruce cherished for his ability to convey emotions – not through writing (Cliff Richard rarely writes his own music) but through singing, and he too was considered a steady element in a life full of changes. However, in the replies from Cliff fans there was only one reference to a felt connection, and none referred to soul mates or kindred spirits. The emotions involved seemed to be of another sort. He was sometimes compared to a friend or a family member, who was always there, and what was stressed was often that Cliff could make the listener feel directly addressed. Several described how he could sing as if he actually meant what he was singing and as if the songs were sung directly to *you*. A 23 year-old female Cliff fan expressed it like this:

*If you just lay back and listen to his [Cliff's] voice, it has an amazing soothing quality about it, very important to someone who finds it hard to relax! Another thing that intrigues me, and I don't know how he does it, but it feels as though he's singing to you. I've heard other people say this, including people who aren't fans. It's lovely, and it makes you feel special, for it's like he's in the room with you singing just for you. I don't know how he does it but it's there! (Cliff-respondent 4)*

A 43 year-old female fan made a similar reply, but found it necessary to use comparison in order to explain the bodily comfort felt when listening to Cliff Richard's voice:

*Cliff's voice is "personal" you can almost feel he sings for you. [...] It's difficult to explain, but if you have ever been really irritated by a sound, like when someone is banging on a wall hours on end, you can almost feel your whole body being uncomfortable after a while. With Cliff it is exactly the opposite, you feel how everything is right with the world. The sound of his voice is just right for ME (and thousands of other fans), I feel comfortable listening. (Cliff-respondent 6)<sup>13</sup>*

The quotations above are just examples picked out among many others stressing both the calming effects of Cliff's voice and the sense of being individually addressed. Some compared his music to that of other singers, pointing out that although the style of the music was somewhat similar, they felt addressed when listening to Cliff, but not when listening to e.g. Rod Steward or Elton John. As mentioned it seems more to be a matter of feeling sung *to* than feeling sung *about* or feeling directly addressed and comforted by the sound of a soothing voice, rather than feeling understood by a soul mate. Just like in the analysis of the Springsteen replies, the above quotations make little sense without an implied sender. Feeling addressed by a voice certainly implies a more or less specific someone behind this voice. Like the Springsteen fans, some Cliff fans found it unnecessary to specify this someone, but most linked the felt relation to the singer. Sometimes it was stressed that it was as if Cliff knew the fan, knew his or her problems and wanted to comfort him/her, and sometimes it was as if the fan knew Cliff and wanted to support him when needed. The second respondent quoted above wrote elsewhere in her replies:

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<sup>13</sup> I would have liked to present quotes from both male and female Cliff-Richard respondents, but none of the male respondents referred to feeling individually addressed. Whether or not this has anything to do with sex, I can not say, as the number of male Cliff-respondents amounted to as little as 8.

*I think that a Cliff-fan feels almost like Cliff is family. If newspapers put Cliff down we feel offended or hurt on his behalf and when he does well we are proud (like you would be with your brother or friend). You feel concern for his well being, and are very defensive of him when people are putting him down. (Cliff-respondent 6)*

The respondent describes her relation to Cliff by comparing it to friendships and family ties, and such comparisons were many, but the concern, pride, and loyalty, mentioned in the latter part of the quotation, were even more common references in the Cliff replies. Just like some Springsteen respondents suggested a felt connection to be what made a Bruce fan, several Cliff respondents based their idea of a Cliff fan on a felt loyalty.

References to both types of social bonds were also frequently occurring in interviews with other fans irrespective of which musician was favored, and there are several other types of bonds that could be mentioned<sup>14</sup>. What matters to my argument, is however not *which* type of social bond is felt, but *that a* social bond is felt. The feelings evoked by the music are felt as social relations to *a someone*, who is usually (but not always) equated with the actual singer. The feelings involved in fandom must thus be seen as emotions, creating a sense of involvement of the total person to a person or a personified element. The music, the emotions, and the felt social relation mattered to the fans. Music provided the fans with an imaginary place in relations to the many – some felt special and directly addressed, some felt they belonged and were understood. The emotions described concerned the total person and its immediate involvement in the social world.

After showing how being a fan involves emotions and thus embodied social relations, it might be relevant to return to Levy, who writes that feelings create a pressure for action necessary to adjust the relation between the whole organism and the environment (1997:220). Michelle Rosaldo explains this further by stressing that

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. Erica Doss has in her study of Elvis culture stressed how a felt individual connection with Elvis was often more important than Elvis's musical talents and stardom (Doss 1999:12). She describes how the late, fat, drug-addicted and unhappy "Las Vegas-Elvis" was often among his fans the image of greatest importance. In that image was found a fellow-sufferer, someone who had actually needed support and care in spite of the apparent success. For that reason the image of Elvis promoted by Elvis Inc. – that of a drug-free, fat-free, all-white and fully successful Elvis – did not get much support from devoted Elvis fans, whose "kitchy tastes" were excluded from the construction of an official dignified and profitable image of Elvis (Doss 1999:111-112 and 222-224). This study too shows a felt bond to a person behind the music and the facade.

feelings, which are embodied thoughts, create a sense of being immediately involved in the world. As an example she mentions the difference between merely hearing a child cry, and actually *feeling* the hearing, when realizing that the child is one's own or that it is in danger (1997:143). In the second case the felt cry concerns and involves the individual hearing it - something must be done. Thus, she is much in line with Levy, as both emphasize how feelings call for action. When talking about *emotions* the actions required concern the adjustment of the total person's relation to a *social* environment, and most fans actually expressed quite clear pressures for action, after having become emotionally involved with either the music or the singer or both.

### **Being hooked**

Most of the informants explained that there were things they *had* to do and objects they *had* to own, and often these necessary actions were linked to the sense of emotional involvement with stories about how they became "hooked". Being hooked referred to a more or less obsessive eagerness to make the music and/or the musician behind this capturing force a part of one's daily life. Experiencing a certain event or obtaining a certain object could turn into a *must*, and the thought of missing it could be very stressful. Some of the informants just *had* to hang out after the shows in case something extraordinary happened exactly that night. They *had* to watch every program with the artist, because he might say something new. And they *had* to stand in line or press "redial" on the phone for hours to maintain the connection to the ticket office in order to get tickets for a show that would be unbearable to miss. The thought of missing a concert could cause stomach-ache or sense of loss. Even the thought of having missed something that they could not possibly have experienced could to some be disturbing. E.g. a number of the younger Springsteen fans complained about being born too late to experience Bruce in the 1970's, or having become fans too late to be aware of what they were actually missing.

Certain experiences and certain things were so much of a *must* that all risks of missing them would have to be minimized or eliminated. One informant bought extra copies of her singles if they were on sale – just in case something happened to the ones she already had. Practically all informants bought new books or new CD's on

the day they were available – just in case they would suddenly be sold out. Several would not drink much before concerts, in order not to risk having to leave for the toilet during the show. Many phoned the ticket offices to check that they had not slipped out of the computer system due to a mistake. And the whole hassle of booking tickets was the most stressful experience of all, as the recently introduced computer and phone booking systems have much more to do with chance than has standing in line.

Whether fans attempted to minimize risks or optimize the amount and intensity of experiences related to the music and the artist, there was clearly a pressure for conscious and strategic action. The felt relation called for adjustment of the relation between the experiencing person and the social world. The research made, knowledge obtained, and strategies thought out about ways to acquire tickets, get close to the stage, fool security guards and other disturbing elements, obtain backstage-passes, smuggle in cameras and tape recorders, and get noticed by the artist, were quite impressive<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, to conclude on this chapter: Music can evoke emotions and create pressure for conscious action. Complicated strategies are thought out by fans in order to adjust a social relation, which is felt as involving the total person.

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<sup>15</sup> To mention some of the more entertaining camera smuggling strategies, here is a few: 1. Wear two pairs of underpants and a long shirt, and hide the camera between your thighs. 2. If you are a woman hide the camera in your bag covered with sanitary towels and aim for a male security guard. 3. Wrap the camera with gift-wrapping-paper, ribbons, and a card, tell the security guard that it is a present for the artist, and unwrap it yourself when seated. Apart from these examples there were many others, including the establishment of telephone networks, making friends with roadies or security guards, and much more.



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# Pure Relations and Cool Cash

In the previous chapter I have argued that music can be sensed as an emotion, creating a pressure for action to adjust the felt relation. Through the rest of the thesis I will examine how fans attempt such adjustments. The primary object with this chapter is to show how the emotional involvement is linked to a certain type of exchange. *I will show that Western modernity is characterized by two culturally constructed spheres of exchange, which are morally held apart – one sphere is for the exchange of gifts and emotions, and the other for the exchange of money and commodities between anonymous individuals.* It will become clear that the pure relation (introduced in the theoretical chapter) belongs in the first of these two spheres. This chapter does not in itself show the importance of this dyadic ideal-relation, as many of the empirical examples on which the chapter is built concern group-exchanges. Yet the pure relation will be introduced in the analysis, as the arguments in the next chapters will rely on the culturally established link between the pure relation and the two spheres of exchange.

In his book on music and meaning among Springsteen fans, Daniel Cavicchi devotes an entire chapter to “Ignoring the music business” and describes how Springsteen is by his fans seen (or constructed) as a down to earth guy, who is far more interested in making music than in making money (Cavicchi 1998:66), and most of my informants described their idols in similar veins. According to Cavicchi the music business is seen as something to be tolerated, while it is Bruce and his music – not the way it is distributed and acquired – that plays the important role in the lives of his fans (ibid.63, 85). Therefore he criticizes the cultural-studies tendency of seeing fans as revolting against a “consciousness industry”. Cavicchi is a Springsteen fan himself, and writes that he has never spent much time thinking about how to “resist” record companies (Cavicchi 1998:8), why he finds scientific writings describing fandom as a resistance against or a negotiation with the music-industry completely besides the point (ibid.63, 184f). I agree - there is no reason to invent a resistance, if it is by the informants not seen as such. But resistance or not, my own fieldwork and

Cavicchi's book show how fans describe musicians as ordinary guys, totally approachable and not controlled by the music business or driven by desires for money and fame (1998:66ff). In addition to that, many of my informants sought to repay the singers for the gift of music with means that were not simply money payments, and to keep considerations of economy away from their relation to the musicians. Rather than seeking to establish the informants as revolting against something, I intend to analyze these actions as being part of a larger cultural setting, and I will do so by using anthropological theories of exchange.

### **Paying back the right way**

Surely the informants in my study were in most if not all cases very aware that they were part of economic transactions, that they were consumers of products, and they often stressed that being a fan was a very expensive hobby. Economical matters were not forgotten or ignored - they were just rarely described as an exchange between the fans themselves and the artist, but as transactions between the fans and the music industry. The musicians were usually described as idealistic people, who were far more interested in conveying feelings than in earning money. And several fans told me about a feeling of debt or about wanting to repay the singer for the gift of music that had meant so much to them – with out relating it to the fact that they had already bought and paid their records. Often they had even bought the records in several editions from different countries, so one might assume they had reason to know that they had contributed more than average to the singer's economical welfare. But economy seemed to be besides the point in that relation. The expenses to CD's and concert tickets were considered payments for the products giving access to the music – not for the music itself. Or rather, the music was considered another type of value, something not measurable in money and not appropriately repaid by the money value of a CD or a concert ticket. Many fans took great effort in keeping economy out of their relation to the musicians and wanted to repay the music with something other than money. Four types of observations from my fieldwork should be sufficient to illustrate the point:

### Gifts:

A number of the fans involved in my project had individually or in groups sought to repay the music with gifts. In many cases the gifts given to the musicians were home-made and therefore very personal. Such gifts were for example poems, paintings, photographs, songs (either written or recorded on tape), as well as other handicrafts and letters. Additionally some had bought gifts, ranging from flowers to nicely wrapped presents. In all cases, there was a great element of personalization involved – either by the fact that the gifts were home made (Carrier 1995:56), or because they consisted of non-essential luxury articles (gift articles), carefully wrapped in order to show the personal bond between the giver and the gift (Lévi-Strauss 1969:56). But not all presents were from individual givers. In some cases fans had formed groups and presented the singers with gifts that had been bought collectively or by representatives of a group. This way the giving of expensive luxury articles, like clothes, perfume, or coffee sets was facilitated. These collective presents were also wrapped and thus transformed from commodities to gifts, but they were not personalized in the way that the gifts presented each giver individually to the singers. In some cases the gifts were presented as combinations between individual and collective gifts. E.g. a group of Cliff Richard fans gave Cliff a CD-rag which was a collective gift, and each member of the group had bought an example of their favorite CD and placed it in the rag with a personally written card attached to it.

### Charity:

In other cases fans donated money – but it is important to note, that the sum was never (at least to my knowledge) directed to the musicians themselves, but redirected to e.g. different charity programs that the musicians were known to support. Such was the case with a number of Springsteen fans individually donating money to e.g. Amnesty International or the Kristin Ann Carr Fund<sup>16</sup>. Another example can be found in Erica Doss's book “Elvis Culture”, in which she describes how Elvis fans took over after the King had left off by supporting a number of charity programs in Memphis that Elvis had financed while he was still alive. These programs were

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<sup>16</sup> The Kristin Ann Carr Foundation is an organisation supporting research in sarcoma cancer, a rare type of cancer of which the daughter of Springsteen's co-manager, Dave Marsh, died in 1993.

supported to such a degree, that Elvis Inc. at one point congratulated the fan clubs but also urged them to support charity in their own local areas in stead of only in Memphis (1999:56). Finally can be mentioned an anniversary present to Cliff Richard from his Danish fan club. The present was a cheque of 10.000 Danish crowns, but again the sum was not for Cliff's own personal use. The fans had in advance arranged for it to be redirected to finance the repair of the tower of the English church in Copenhagen – a project Cliff was assumed to applaud, as he is a devoted Christian. A ceremonial handing over of the cheque from the fans to Cliff and from Cliff to the church was arranged, and perhaps in contrast to the other two examples mentioned, this gift was clearly meant for Cliff to notice. Yet, with or without the knowledge of the singers, the donations are not to be considered money payments to the musicians, rather the redirection of the donations must be seen as attempts to contribute to carrying out ideals, which were supported by the singers.

As Mauss has cleverly noted, alms and charity can be seen both as a demonstration of wealth and as a sacrifice (1997:18), and he links charity to his "fourth obligation"<sup>17</sup> – namely the obligation to give to men in the sight of gods and nature (ibid.14). To Mauss alms can be seen as a redirection of the gifts meant for the gods to the needy, and such a redirection is in religious terms pleasing to the gods, and in secular terms it is the morality of the gift extended into a principle of justice (ibid.18). I do not mean to imply that singers are necessarily seen as gods, rather I will emphasize the idea of seeing charity as a redirection of a gift to the needy "in honor of" or "in the spirit of" the singers. So even while these charity donations involved economical transactions, and even if they were not directed to the singers themselves, the gestures are still to be considered return gifts, which are loaded with personal meaning and they are definitely not simply money payments.

#### Loyalty:

In even other cases the repayments did not involve money at all. Examples of non-economical group repayments can be seen in the loyal support of artists in different popularity-polls or when they are criticized. On the Cliff Richard mailing list, Move-It,

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<sup>17</sup> The other three are the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate (Mauss 1997:39-42)

there were often messages either encouraging list subscribers to vote for Cliff, or reporting his present position on different popularity-polls. Such encouragements and popularity reports were also found on other mailing lists and home pages centered around other artists, e.g. Jamiroquai, Back Street Boys, and Bruce Springsteen. A similar fan support, (this time motivated by critical comments), was evident through the posted messages on Move-It in December 1999 when Cliff's new single Millennium Prayer was released. Angry reports about the lacking or negative media coverage of the single as well as suggestions to boycott George Michael, who had publicly criticized Cliff and his new song, dominated the list. Some even arranged different ways of putting pressure on reluctant radio stations by making demonstrations or sending petitions and complaints in order to help Cliff getting more airplay. And as one fan remarked, those gestures of loyalty are great to be part of, as you can then imagine Cliff sitting at home thinking: *"these are my friends, these are my fans, doing something for me!"* (interview, January 17, 2000).

#### Applaud:

Finally another example of non-economical repayment must be mentioned. Many fans told me, how they tried to be "good fans". For example a 39 year-old female respondent replied to the question about what she would say to Bruce if she met him:

*How can you thank someone for making your life better in one sentence or less without sounding like a lunatic. He sees a sea of faces, people rushing at him, wanting something from him. I'd be only one more fan, saying what he's heard countless times. Trying to put it all into a sentence seems to diminish its importance. So, I do what I can do as a fan ... I try to be the best fan I can be (sounds corny, huh?). If I did meet him, I'd say thanks and make a quick getaway before I started to gush about how much I loved him and how much his music changed my life. I feel like I want to give something back to Bruce, rather than take something away. He's given me so much. (Bruce-respondent 63)*

Just like the woman quoted, many other informants expressed a similar desire to thank the musicians and a similar reluctance to gush about how much the music had meant to them. Often I was told that a good fan would respect the singer's right to privacy, and that concerts were more or less the only opportunity of giving something back without intruding oneself on the singers' personal lives. Forming waves, singing along, or being silent at the right times was of great importance in order to show appreciation. The fans wanted the singers to have a good experience, by e.g.

enjoying the view of thousands of people simultaneously doing the same movement. In such cases fans are not repaying as individuals, but rather as parts of a united audience. A 25 year-old Springsteen fan explained:

*The concerts are one of these situations where we are like "the mob", because we try to make everyone join in. It is important to us. In the first verse of Hungry Heart I'm shouting it out, so others can understand that we are now singing the first verse. [...] It is important to me what Hungry Heart sounds like in Copenhagen. It is important. Man, it was dreadful in Gentofte [a suburb of Copenhagen]. I was yelling and screaming Hungry Heart, so everyone could hear it. But that is probably more to give him [Bruce] something back than to feel connected to the fans. (Interview October 21, 1999)*

Many of the return gifts to the artists involved fans grouping together to buy an appropriate gift, but as the informant quoted above stresses, during the concerts fans do not only group with other fans but attempt to make the whole audience unite in order to show appreciation. In other words the only way of conveying appreciation and be visible to the artist during a show is to merge with others, be invisible as a distinct person, but visible as a crowd.

In short, there were numerous attempts to keep money out of the relation to the artists<sup>18</sup>. The artists were seen as having little interest in making money, and the fans took great effort in paying them back with other means than money. Sometimes they tried to repay the music individually, sometimes as a small group, as a fan club, or as anonymous members of a united audience. Based on the examples mentioned, it is tempting to view the repayments as carefully being loaded with meaning and placed in another sphere of exchange than that of anonymous economical transactions -

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<sup>18</sup> In parenthesis it can be mentioned that fans also often seek to keep money or at least profits away from their relations to each other. While researching Bruce fandom, a whole alternative swapping "economy" occurred. Bootlegging is a big thing among many Springsteen fans, and both such recordings as well as tickets are exchanged. The important thing to notice, however, is not so much the exchanges themselves but the attempts to keep money out of the transactions if possible. As one Bruce fan told me: "*There aren't money between Springsteen fans!*" and later he added: "*scalpers can not be considered real fans!*" (interview October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1999). Similar moralities about keeping money out of Bruce fans' relation to each other were seen at LuckyTown (a mailing list for Springsteenfans). It is considered appropriate behavior to sell tickets at face value, and if someone charges more or decides only to swap with better tickets that those they already have, they are immediately told off by other list members, and there are similarly unwritten rules for swapping taped bootlegs. Of course one concert recording can be exchanged for another, but in case some do not have anything to offer, they are sometimes given the opportunity to swap for blank tapes. The interesting part is however, that it is considered okay to ask two blank tapes in exchange for one recorded, where as it is considered immoral to ask for money. One fan told me he had recently been forced to ask for money to pay the postage, since he simply couldn't afford spending several hundreds of Danish crowns a week sending tapes to distant parts of the world, but he felt really bad having to do so. When confronted with my theory of a distinct exchange sphere outside money economy, he concluded: "*It is actually funny, that this exchange of tapes can be considered so different by different people. Seen from a legal perspective, it is of course not permitted, it is criminal. But we feel kind of idealistic keeping*

and spheres of exchange have certainly been one of the favorite theoretical models in anthropological writings over time.

## **Spheres of exchange**

Bohannan is often credited for having introduced the structural model of spheres of exchange. In his writings on Tiv in Nigeria he describes 3 different spheres of exchange, all characterized by the items/valuables exchanged within them. (1964:140f). Roughly, he works with a theory of how exchanges within spheres are seen as ideal and morally neutral, while exchanges across spheres are morally judged or compensated for, and the ideal principles of exchange are kept intact in spite numerous exceptions from the rule<sup>19</sup>.

Joel Robbins and David Akin suggest expanding Bohannan's model, and base their arguments on studies of currencies in Melanesia. They consider a sphere of exchange as constituted by three theoretically separable characteristics: the objects exchanged, the modality of exchange (e.g. sharing or trade), and the relationship between the people exchanging. An alteration of any of these factors would make the transaction morally questionable or it would become another type of exchange in another sphere (Akin and Robbins 1999:10f). Taking the theory to an extreme, one might easily imagine oneself in the midst of a festival of separate spheres, one for each single example of exchange taking place between people. But the idea is rather to create a theory that can embrace, how different people in different places are actually themselves working to maintain strong moral links between modalities of exchange and the relations they create, maintain, or represent (ibid.15). As such, an exchange taking place between people may in theory be described by separating it into these three characteristics, while the people actually performing the exchange may think of it as a taken for granted unity of appropriate behavior.

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*money out of it, and as long as you don't make money on it, I think it is okay"*. Thus, there is a certain implicit (and sometimes explicit) moral in trying to keep money or at least profits out of the internal trading business.

<sup>19</sup> Barth has extended this structural model and taken a more actor oriented approach in his description of Fur economy in Darfur. He elaborates on a number of possible conversions across morally established borders, and argues that individual strategies and speculations can not only make it possible to convert one type of value to another, but also that such strategies can influence the moral evaluations over time, even though there is of course a certain rigidity to be overcome (Barth 1967:168-73). Barth's focus was thus on actors' possibilities of changing ideals, whereas Bohannan's was on how the ideals influenced individuals. By now, nobody would limit

Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch among others have observed that the idea of seeing economical relationships as inherently impersonal and calculating, is at its base a Western thought. Money has according to these writers become the symbol of these impersonal relationships, and is often opposed to the more "warm" and personal gift-exchange (Bloch and Parry 1989:9; Carrier 1995:59; Belk 1995:90). Parry and Bloch object to anthropologists exporting this opposition to other parts of the world seeking its universal confirmation, and Mauss engaged in a similar project when writing *"The Gift"*. He showed with examples from a number of different societies that what might appear to be pure gifts voluntarily given without any expectations of repayment, were actually in most cases quite obligatory exchanges (Mauss 1997:3,13f, 39-42, 46).

Yet, the distinction between cold economy and warm gift-exchange seems to be fundamental in Western modernity, and people make great efforts to transform anonymous commodities into personal gifts at e.g. Christmas rituals (Carrier 1995:60-63; Belk 1995:90; Lévi-Strauss 1969:56). As both Belk and Carrier stress, modern Westerners are often brought up to equate giving of gifts with giving of love, and often we are reminded that "it is the thought that counts" (Belk 1995:95; Carrier 1995:60). The exchange of gifts is in Western modernity seen as symbols of the exchange of emotions, and Carrier actually makes an interesting link between these ideas of free and unconstrained gift-giving and the idea of independent and spontaneous individuals engaging in free and voluntary friendships (Carrier 1999:23). He argues that the development of an impersonal sphere of economical transactions between strangers made personal relations less crucial to subsistence. Therefore personal relations became more purely optional and expressive, facilitating the spread of the notion of the autonomous and spontaneous self and the modern idea of friendship (Carrier 1995:64-65; 1999:35). The construction of a commercialized world of work and trade and the modern notions of friendships and pure relations pervaded by ideas of optional and spontaneous affection and celebrated with the giving of personalized gifts, go hand in hand.

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themselves to one of the two aspects, and Barth did note the rigidity to be overcome, yet it is still Bohannan whose theory is usually referred to whenever the sphere-model is to be extended or revised.



Carrier's analysis can be seen as a combination of Robbins' and Akin's ideas of forms of relationships corresponding to forms exchange on the one hand, and Parry's and Bloch's description of the Western distinction between cold economy and warm gift-exchange on the other. And it is exactly in combination that the two theories are explanatory in this case. The modality of gift-exchange is linked to emotional relations and opposed to the modality of money-trade and the corresponding cold and unaffectionate business relations. The reluctance to mix money and emotions can be seen as a moral separation between two spheres of exchange. In one sphere people are supposed to give and receive (modality) personalized gifts (objects exchanged) and the *relation* between the two exchange partners should be private, intimate and characterized by mutual affection. In the other sphere people buy and sell (modality) commodities for money (objects of exchange), and the *relation* between the exchange partners are expected to be anonymous and unemotional. Two spheres of exchange have been constructed, and the distinction corresponds to Simmel's distinction between private and public relations – the first type is based on the idea of total persons involved in psychological intimacy, and the other on the idea of partial interaction between people that are psychologically anonymous to each other (Simmel 1950:324-34).

Both Simmel, Giddens and Carrier exemplify the intimate or private relations by referring to dyads. Simmel primarily concentrates on marriages, Carrier writes about friendships between two unconstrained individuals, and Giddens explains the principles of intimacy with reference to the pure relation. All of these writers concern themselves with dyadic ideals to be approximated. These dyads are important cultural *models for* relations, but as was seen the return-gifts from fans to musicians were often collective. Yet Carrier also explains how the modality of gift-exchange may induce cordiality and attractive warm atmospheres in relations that may involve more than two individuals. He stresses that when people attempt to make the modern American Christmas as homely and warm as possible, it is not to be understood as a natural and instinctive tendency to gather around the hearth (Carrier 1995:70). In fact he concludes that what is actually celebrated in American Christmas rituals is the very distinction between the two spheres. Thus, he is not giving primacy

to a natural inner core of self, from where feelings and actions flow instinctively to become manifest through the exchange of gifts, but stresses exactly the existence of two culturally constructed spheres of exchange, which are morally held apart.

The Western notion of self corresponds to a Western notion of affectionate relations existing in a sphere of gift-exchange and opposed to another sphere of exchange where money, trade, and anonymous relations belong. Through rituals of transformation like shopping, wrapping, and cooking, gifts are created from the dubious raw material of commercialized goods. They are then given as presents to other people and the warm and the homely atmosphere is evoked (ibid.). Carrier's primary conclusion is that the warm in here can not be understood without the cold out there, why the two spheres exist only as each other's opposition<sup>20</sup>.

### **Transforming relations**

Carrier has suggested that the modality of gift-exchange in modern American Christmas rituals can evoke the attractive warm atmosphere (Carrier 1995:70). But Robbins and Akin more directly express the transforming capacities of the modality of exchange. Sharing creates kin in Melanesia, and trade between kinsmen therefore threatens to change the kinship ties to another type of relation (Robbins and Akin 1999:6f, 14ff). In their example the change is not desired, and the negative consequences that trade is imagined to have on kinship relations makes trade between kinsmen worrying and immoral. However, it is of course also possible to influence a relation in a positive direction.

An illustrative example of this is Lévi-Strauss' well known account of two strangers eating *platte du jour* at the same French restaurant. One pours his wine in the glass of the table companion, and the other immediately returns the gesture. Although the glasses of wine exchanged may be more or less identical, the atmosphere can from the moment of these gestures only be one of cordiality (Lévi-Strauss 1969:58f). The example shows two things: First, that even though the modality is gift-exchange and

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<sup>20</sup> A similar point is made by Maurice Godelier, who writes that money and feelings are morally held apart in France, as though money were fatal to feelings and as though money killed affection. Gift-giving has become the

not economical trade, the idea of reciprocity is not forgotten. And second, that the modality of exchange may influence the relation – or more precisely the way the relation is perceived by the two men individually. Both aspects can be transferred to relations in general.

Giddens actually suggests that pure relations can not exist without a substantial element of reciprocity (1999a:93; 1999b:139). He is however not talking about the exchange of glasses of wine or gifts in general for that matter, but about the exchange of emotions (1999b:67). Friendships as well as romantic relations require commitment, but in order to decide whether a relation is worth the effort, it is continuously reflected upon, and one normally stay friends for only as long as sentiments of closeness are reciprocated (ibid.90). Thus, pure relations may be devoid of economical interests, but they are not devoid of ideas of reciprocity.

Surely, such evaluations of a relationship require communication or exchange between the partners. As I have argued in the previous chapter, emotions must be seen as embodied social relations, but one can only experience these relations through ones own body and not (at least not directly) through the body of others. Emotions concern social relations, but are experienced individually. It is not possible to actually know if feelings of closeness are reciprocated, and one must rely on gestures and signs expressed by the other (Giddens 1999a:96, 186f). Pure relations require, however emotionally involving and spontaneous they may be seen by an individual, the exchange of *signs* of affection, and as Carrier and Belk have argued, gifts are in Western modernity seen as symbols of emotions (Belk 1995:95; Carrier 1995:60). So one way of approximating a relation to the pure relation is by using the modality of gift-exchange.

But while distinctions between objects exchanged, modalities of exchange and relations are theoretically important, they are in practice inseparable. Relations are in general visible through communications and exchange of words, facial expressions, gifts, favors, touch, or other signs, and pure relations as well as relations in general

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bearer of a utopia of solidarity and open-handedness and is contrasted to money-economy associated with calculation (1999:5, 208).

are experienced as *forms of exchange*. The modality and objects exchanged can actually *influence* how a relation is seen or felt by the individuals engaging in it. Sharing creates kin in Melanesia. Exchange of glasses of wine creates cordiality in France. Giving presents at Christmas creates warm and homely atmospheres in America. All of the examples show how the modality and objects exchanged can create a sense of a certain type of relation belonging in the corresponding sphere of exchange.

Music can invoke emotions and can by individuals be felt as social relations belonging in as sphere of exchange appropriate for gift-exchange and incompatible with money-economy and anonymity. Fans are, as I have argued earlier, often emotionally touched by the music, and the mixing of the *modality* of economic exchange and emotional *relationships* is in Western modernity considered an inappropriate cocktail. Music can invoke emotions, and since emotions are so closely linked to the ideal pure relation and to the warm sphere of gift-exchange, the music creating these strong emotions can not simply be repaid with cool cash. By repaying the emotionally involving music in the modality of gift-exchange the relation is adjusted by being “placed” in the right sphere of exchange. Thinking of the artist behind this touching music as a trade partner or a merchant is quite contradictory to the emotional impact that the music has. Music invoking emotions, invoking embodied social relations, must be repaid with gifts and the relation must be thought of in terms that are not economical.

Thus, when fans construct the singers as independent from the musical industry and seek to repay the singers with gifts, I do not see it as a resistance to economical institutions. *Rather, fans are actively trying to transform a relation from being based on trade between strangers to being based on the exchange of gifts symbolizing emotions. This is done through changing the modality of exchange, and must be seen as a sign – not of resistance - but of the informants being part of a society where a separation between anonymous money-economy and emotional relationships makes sense.*

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# The Individual and The Crowd

In the previous chapter I have shown that emotionally involving relations are in Western modernity constructed in opposition to anonymous relations belonging in another sphere of exchange. The two spheres of exchange and the corresponding ideas of relations, modalities and objects/signs exchanged are morally held apart. The pure relation is an ideal model for emotionally involving relations and certainly belongs in the “warm” sphere of gift-exchange. However, many of the fans’ repayments to the singers were collectively arranged. And the previous chapter does therefore not in itself show the importance of the pure relation as an ideal model for emotionally involving relations. However, through this chapter the importance of the pure relation will become clear, and the concept will be discussed in relation to individuals and crowds.

Obviously, fans do not only relate to the artists, but also to each other. This has been shown in the examples of fans grouping together in order to repay the singers. And many fans deliberately sought the company of other fans – not only in order to give presents to the singers, but also because fans admiring the same artist were thought to be likely to understand how each other felt. Many described how they had initially discovered the music and felt a certain connection to the artist. Later they had found out that they were not the only persons in the whole world feeling this way, but that there were actually others who were emotionally touched in similar manners. Most informants found it important to know other fans and tried to find pen pals and friends over the internet, via fanzines, or through fan clubs. By knowing other fans individuals could find recognition and understanding for actions taken and emotions felt. Communities were formed and negotiated, and many considered the social relations to other fans a pleasurable side effect of being a fan.

The atmosphere among fans was however, also quite competitive at times - cliques were formed, people excluded, and fan clubs split up or closed down due to interpersonal problems. In some situations the aim was clearly to be the biggest fan,

and e.g. owning many records or having attended many concerts were in some situations prestigious. Some referred to being "huge fans" in order to demand special privileges, and while most of the informants found such claims immoral, everyone seemed to agree that the competition was there. The relation between fans was a balance between on the one hand highly valued communities and friendships and on the other hand competition between individuals, and discussions on the mailing lists as well as among fans meeting in person often concerned this issue. Most wanted the relation between fans to be characterized by openness and inclusion, but some stated that basically everyone was on their own, and others explained that e.g. getting tickets and good seats were heavily influenced by hierarchies and the formation of cliques.

This balance between community and competition or between unity and division can be illustrated by analyzing concerts. In the descriptions of concerts, two types of fantastic experiences were referred to again and again - one was *communitas*, and the other will be called "standing out". Based on these types of experiences, the relation between the individual and the crowd will be discussed, and during the chapter it will be demonstrated that relating to the artist is completely inseparable from relating to the crowd. The analysis will provide the basis for theoretically returning to *the pure relation*, and I will argue, that the pure relation too, is meaningless with out a notion of a crowd of anonymous others.

### **Magic among many**

During the interviews I was often reminded that concert experiences were extremely difficult to put in words. Concerts evoked a whole range of feelings and states of mind. Often the informants could tell in detail, how they had obtained their tickets, which clothes they had worn, which people they had met, where their seats had been, how the stage was arranged, and name some of the songs that had been performed. But those aspects were not the ones that made the concerts great experiences. The concerts were total experiences, and the states of mind and the feelings that could be felt were very difficult to verbalize. However a 26 year-old male U2 fan tried to describe the feeling of merging with the crowd during a concert:

*Part of it, I think, is creating a total-experience. [...] In stead of being 4000 people at a lawn, not knowing each other, you are suddenly 4000 people, who have become part of the same. [...] Therefore, if you sort of invisibly make yourself part of this large group...in one way or the other you become something...some big lump, or just a big ocean of people, waving their flags and jumping up and down, when they are supposed to jump up and down. [...] I prefer seeing myself as a part of the whole thing, which is just this huge pack (Interview October 11, 1999).*

Other informants described similar experiences. Some explained, like the informant above, that during concerts, one merged with the crowd, while responding to the artist on stage. Others described the experience of union as including the artist, who became "one of us" during the concert. But most did seem to agree that one of the great things about concerts was the sense of absorption. During these experiences there was no exact sense of time, and some stressed that the feeling of merging could possibly have lasted for a few seconds and possibly for hours. The experiences were not possible to describe in a detailed or chronological manner. They were magic and extremely great, but quite unexplainable. Such accounts do of course make Turner's notions of *communitas* and *flow* come in mind.

The two concepts refer to similar experiences, where the individual finds him/herself absorbed. *Communitas* refers to a merging with others, whereas *flow* is the merging of awareness and action (Turner 1982:47f, 56). Thus, *communitas* must be seen as an emotion concerning the individual's relation to others, and *flow* is a feeling concerning the relation between awareness and body (ibid.58, Levy 1997:221f). But both concepts refer to a situation in which the individual is absorbed in a single synchronized fluid event. It is magical, mysterious, and marvelous for as long as it lasts, but as the experience is unreflected and characterized by loss of ego, self-reflection would immediately interrupt it (Turner 1982:48, 57; Sartre 1975:25). Therefore *flow* and *communitas* are somewhat difficult to provoke or relive at will. But as the experience must be considered a feeling (and if it is *communitas*, an emotion), it is not surprising that it invokes a pressure for conscious action (Levy 1997:222). Often this pressure was described as a desire to preserve or relive the experience. A quote from an interview where a 30 year-old man, describing his entrance into Bruce fandom, illustrates the point:

*The big break through happened during the summer 86. I had recorded a song – The River – from the radio [...] and something just happened! I kept listening to that song over and over again all summer [...] until I couldn't even rewind the tape, it was that worn. And I was just sold! [...] I had had favorites before that. I had gone through a Beatles phase, a Simon and Garfunkel phase, and in the beginning Bruce wasn't more than that. I, and everyone else, expected it to be just another phase. But then I saw him in Idrætsparken [a sports arena in Copenhagen] the summer 88, and that changed my whole life. [...] I never really got over that concert. I walked around in some sort of uplifted mood – and missed something. I wanted to return to that concert. I was looking for something to bring back the feeling that I had felt at that concert. [...] This feeling, it's like a big community and a connection both with Bruce up on stage and with the other fans. It's a sense of belonging. And that is what you want to obtain. And that is what you obtain by just knowing other fans in daily life. You get an intimacy from it (interview October 21, 1999).*

Something obviously happened – both after listening to a recorded song and after experiencing a concert with Bruce Springsteen. While some informants can not refer this something to particular events, the man quoted above is definitely not alone when describing it as some sort of captivation. In the replies to the questionnaires it was striking how many respondents used expressions like "I was hooked", "I was blown away", "I was captured for life", "I was mesmerized", "the music grabbed me", or "I was sold" in their descriptions of how they became fans. What is noticeable about the above description is not only the reference to some overwhelming force outside the individual that somehow hooked or grabbed him<sup>21</sup>. The informant also describes the sense of belonging as directed to both Bruce *and* the other fans and emphasizes how the experience was so great that it ought to be preserved or relived somehow.

Turner describes *communitas* as a deep sense of total involvement and mutual understanding, an experience of merging with others in a way that seems so right it ought to be relived, made permanent, or institutionalized (Turner 1982:47ff). But following Turner, any attempt to preserve the initially felt spontaneous *communitas* in a more stable social structure is bound to fail, as spontaneous *communitas* is more the exception than the law, or more the miracle than the regularity (ibid.49f). If this state of mind is about being grabbed or blown away by something external it can

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<sup>21</sup> Note that all the expressions are grammatically in the passive voice. The informants did not actively grab the music or mesmerize themselves, something outside the individual is in these expressions ascribed the active role. The language actually clearly illustrates that absorption is impossible to provoke actively. One cannot simply absorb!



obviously not be entered at will. Indeed conscious states are extremely difficult if not impossible to provoke at will (Sartre 1975:62). However, although Turner explains how spontaneous *communitas* is unpreservable and unprovocable, he suggests that the similar type of absorption, flow (which may lead to *communitas* and opposite), can some times be provoked by focusing ones awareness on something specific, by framing it and filtering out all irrelevant noise of with a set of rules – e.g. in a game (Turner 1982:56). It is however, not guaranteed that e.g. a football player will actually be absorbed in the game just because a whistle has been blown and the rules have come into force. It is quite possible that he will during the game, occasionally be thinking of other things, e.g. that he is playing football, and such thoughts would immediately interrupt the flow experience. But the likelihood of being absorbed in a football game is nevertheless extremely increased if one is actually playing (or watching). As such, one can seek out or establish framed events hoping to be grabbed, but there is no guarantee that it will actually happen. This, I believe is what many fans do after having once experienced this altered state of mind or this absorption. If they have been blown away by a musical experience, and want to relive it, they seek out events where this grabbing is likely to take place. And if a performance by Bruce Springsteen has done the trick once, it seems quite straightforward to seek the same performer again, hoping for something similar to happen.

Besides the urge to experience another concert with the same artist, many fans did as mentioned also establish fan communities. The informant quoted above actually suggests that the intimacy and the sense of belonging that he had felt at the concert can be extended beyond it. He may not be able to relive the exact same feeling of absorption, but knowing other fans surely helps enhancing the shadowy memory of it. However, I will concentrate on the concert experience and the different ways in which relating to the artist intermingles with relating to the crowd. As can be seen in the above clippings, the *communitas* experience, the overwhelming mesmerization was an emotional experience of merging with others, all having their attention directed to the same music, the same stage, and the same artist. Sometimes the experience was described as merging with the crowd, sometimes as merging with the music, sometimes as merging with the musicians, and sometimes all these aspects were so

intermingled that they could not be separated. The following questionnaire reply from a 34 year-old female Cliff Richard fan sums up a number of emotions experienced during concerts (the reply is the answer to a question of differences between listening to music at home and at concerts):

*At the concert he [Cliff] is physically there... and he keeps contact with the audience, chats and jokes.... When just listening to CDs I can actually concentrate on songs themselves better - at a concert I just tend to look at him!!!! And I love it if I'm lucky enough to get to the front of the stage and give him something - flowers, a present or a card - so that he looks me in the eyes and smiles and says thanks.... That is so always fantastic, no matter how many times I experience it. And then there's the company of other fans in the concerts - I really feel I'm part of a big, happy crowd, united by Cliff! There's always such a warm, "family" feeling at Cliff's concerts (Cliff-respondent 4).*

As can be seen the woman names a number of elements, which make concerts fantastic experiences. There is the warm family feeling and sense of community with other fans. But she also enjoys when it is possible to attract the attention of Cliff as an individual person. As can be seen the sense a relation between herself and Cliff is in this case obtained through the modality of gift-exchange. The woman gives Cliff a present, and the gesture is returned with a look in the eye, a smile, and a "thanks" to her individually. I have already argued that the modality of gift-exchange may influence the way in which a relation is perceived by individuals, and in this example the relation sought approximated is clearly a dyadic one. What is interesting at this point is however, that the woman obviously relates emotionally to both Cliff and the crowd. Merging with numerous others was great, many explained, but getting the attention of the artist individually during the show was also something very special. All the above quotations seem to suggest that there is little contradiction in relating to one and to many simultaneously, but sometimes the desire to attract attention created a quite competitive atmosphere at concerts as well as in fandom more generally.

## **Standing out**

During the interviews I usually asked the informants about their best fan-experiences. And in most cases the informants told me about an experience of being noticed, recognized, or addressed individually by the artist, and some explained that that was actually "what it was all about". A few had had songs dedicated to them, had received

birthday cards, had been remembered by the artist from a previous encounter, or had had eye contact during a show. Such experiences were "the highest you could achieve as a fan" I was told. E.g. a male Springsteen fan, aged 25 was telling about his best concert-experience:

*I have a very clear memory of the best concert experience. That was in Warsaw in 97. In the afternoon I had asked him [Bruce] to play a certain song, and he played it in the evening and said "this is for Paul!". So there he sort of ruined the rest of the concert, because I just sat there "What??" – I blocked completely and just sat there "What?" [...] I was totally dumbfounded and couldn't concentrate on the rest of the concert. So that was surely the best experience. [...] I had never imagined that he should directly remember my name, because we were 20 people standing there. That was rather shocking. So that was clearly the best [concert], and that is surely because of that experience (Interview, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1999).*

As can be seen, the informant did not exactly expect to be recognized and remembered. On the contrary he found it quite shocking that Bruce had remembered exactly *him*, rather than someone else. And although the experience was shocking and blocking, it was a good experience. It was an experience of "standing out" – a term, which the above informant did not use, but a common "emic" expression describing "what it was all about". The above quoted young man clearly shows an awareness of a crowd. What makes the experience of being addressed individually so shocking is exactly his awareness of the meta-message contained in the medium of mass communication (Bateson 2000:177ff). He knows that Bruce's music is listened to and liked by millions of people, he tells that he was among 20 other people at the time of requesting the song, and it is exactly because he was picked out among many that the experience was so shocking and so fantastic. Thus, the relation to the artist can not be separated from relating to the existence of other fans or a general audience. Yet, the feelings concerning the general audience were often quite ambivalent. A clipping from an interview with a 20 year-old female Bryan Adams fan, telling about a concert experience, illustrates this ambivalence:

*You get some sort of strength, you let go, you freak out, and all you can think is – I wish this would never end. You just go on and on, and then there are these little expectations in-between the numbers – what will be the next? Or things like doing everything you can to make him [Bryan Adams] look at you or point you out one way or the other, so you feel he has noticed exactly me. That keeps you going all the way through, and it is an incredible feeling [...].*

*Nana: You were talking about wanting to be noticed by Bryan Adams – why is that?*

*Because, as I've said earlier, it is some sort of dream to have a relation to him - a private relation, so that you are not just one of these millions of fans in the world. If he noticed me it would probably give me some sort of self-confidence-boost, because then you stood out from the crowd, right. Being noticed by someone like him would give me so incredibly much, a feeling that he could see something in me that he didn't see in others.*

*Nana: I think I understand that. But what about the other people. You are there in a huge crowd and want to stand out, but how do you feel/think/perceive the others while you are there at the concert?*

*I think, most of all I think of them as competitors [...] because most of all I would want it to be just me and Bryan that it was all about. And it can't be. But at the same time I can be happy when I see that all the others are jumping and dancing and what not. That can make me really happy, because then I know it is a good concert. But at the same time I can be really mad at them, if there are some who are not even bothering to clap. Because I feel that Bryan Adams is really giving something of himself here, and why can't they express their appreciation? So you are actually going through a whole range of feelings, because sometimes you are annoyed with the others and other times you are glad they are there (Interview, November 30<sup>th</sup> 1999).*

As the young woman explains, she wants it to be just her and Bryan Adams that it is all about, but that it can not be - relating to Bryan Adams is inseparable from relating to the crowd, and relating to the crowd involves a whole range of feelings, besides the feeling of absorption. On the one hand the concert is sketched as a competition between individuals trying to stand out - the other audience members become competitors and are seen as disturbing the felt or wished private relation to the artist. On the other hand the situation is described as a scenario where the artist ought to be appropriately applauded by a united audience, rather than by separate individuals. The emotions concerning the crowd are rather mixed, and the informant is both happy and annoyed with the presence of other audience members. Many other informants told about concert experiences in similar veins - both merging and emerging were desirable experiences, and while most fans were eagerly trying to stand out and be noticed individually, they were usually also very concerned with the totality of the crowd. It was important that the crowd was clapping and showing appreciation in synchrony - both in order to create the right atmosphere (*communitas*) and in order to give the artist a good experience and a fantastic view (as described in the chapter about exchange).

What the fan assumes would give her a boost of self-confidence is exactly being pointed out as a singular and special person *among many* by someone with the authority to make such a judgement, someone who has already stood out from the crowd. *Thus, the applauding crowd is, besides a group of competitors and a group to merge with, also a necessary condition for an experience of standing out.* The united audience has to be there if an experience of standing out has to have any meaning. Additionally, the informant explains that an experience of standing out, would make her feel special and different from all those millions of fans admiring Bryan Adams, since such an experience would prove to her, that Bryan Adams could see something *in her* that he did not see in others. What she wants confirmed is not specific abilities, but an inner uniqueness. Thus, to the above informant the issue at stake is not feeling unique in her own conscious world, but to have her uniqueness confirmed socially, by being singled out from the crowd. Being unique in solitude is not being unique at all, and being chosen in a situation with no alternatives is not being chosen at all. Precisely because the star is faced with an endless amount of people to whom he could direct his attention, being singled out by such a person can be sensed as the ultimate proof of personal uniqueness. Without the general applaud, the singer would not be singled out, and being pointed out by him would not be so attractive to the fan. Not all informants were as explicit about wanting to obtain private relations to the artists as the Bryan Adams fan quoted above, but striving to stand out was always linked to getting attention from the artist on a one-to-one basis. However, as the quotation illustrates this strive to stand out and be confirmed worthy of a private relation implies relating to the crowd. Standing out is clearly about being confirmed unique in relation to one *and* in relation to many. *The issue is not just feeling unique in ones own conscious world, but being singled out as worthy of a private relation by a significant other on the background of numerous insignificant others, the crowd.*

### **The aim of the game**

In the previous chapter I have suggested that pure relations are linked to a sphere of exchange fit for emotions, and opposed to another sphere where emotions are matter out of place. Fans can repay the music appropriately as individuals or groups, but that alone does not make the relation to the artist pure. Pure relations have other

characteristics than merely being cleansed for economical interests - pure relations are above all dyadic (Giddens 1999a:97; 1999b:63, 138f). They are supposed to be established between two autonomous people who have voluntarily chosen to enter an intimate, mutual, and equal relation with each other (Giddens 1999b:185; Carrier 1999:25). The influence of the ideal model of dyadic pure relations may already be clear from the description of standing out. The Bryan Adams fan quoted above explicitly linked standing out to a wish for a private relation to Bryan Adams, but others were more specific in their descriptions of how the relation between themselves and the artist should preferably be. The importance of the dyadic ideal as an aim, which is sought approximated but which is never realized can be further illustrated through an analysis of the informants' descriptions of how person to person encounters between fans and idols are supposed to take place. Thus, with the intertwinement of the relation between fan and artist and the relation between fan and crowd in mind, I will move the field of interest from concerts to face to face encounters. In the following I will show that in meetings between fans and artists, the relation is sought approximated to the ideal pure relation.

Many fans stressed that meeting the artist, being able to walk over to him and shake hands or address him as an individual person, was indeed a wish. Some had already experienced such meetings, others were still wishing, and a few did not particularly want to meet the artists. But of course meeting famous singers face to face was not always easy, and most found themselves in situations of having to attract the attention of the artist from their positions in a crowd. Some dressed in significant ways, held banners, or did in other ways try to attract attention during concerts. Others waited in front of hotels, in airports, or by the entrance to concert halls hoping to meet the singers, and usually they had prepared something special to say in order to be noticed and remembered. But such attempts to attract attention did not always result in the *type* of attention desired. An 18 year-old female Mark Owen fan explained some of the complications:

*When you are with your friends, the object is to be the ultimate fan. And when you are not close to them [the members of the band] – if you write letters or see them at concerts – it's all about being a good fan, the one you notice, right. But if you meet them, the aim is not to be too fan-like, because what if they think bad of you? You know they get tired of such fans, right. Then it is important to sort of think: "Well, I just think you are an ordinary person" – you don't obviously! – but that's how you want to appear – as if: "hey, I don't think you're anything special". It's about getting them to like you, and then it is important not to seem too fan-like, that is what it is primarily about. [...] It's always about trying to keep your dignity. (Interview, August 26 1999)*

The informant is obviously using different strategies in different situations. In the company of her friends there is one object, when she is trying to catch Mark Owen's attention from her position in a crowd there is another, and when meeting the idol face to face, there is a third aim. Her account is quite illustrative for the shifting strategies used in order to control the relation to the artists in general. However, for now I want to focus on the face-to face encounter with the idol. The informant explains how "it is about" being *noticed* and *liked* by the artist in question. She has her attention on Mark Owen and wants him to pay attention to her too. When meeting her idol she is not particularly interested in relating to him as a fan to an idol. She emphasizes the importance of behaving dignified by acting "as if he was just an ordinary person", and as if she was not a fan.

The informant is in other words trying to change the relation from one that fits the stereotypical image of a devoted hysteric, throwing herself at the feet of a successful star, in direction of a pure relation. As described in the theoretical chapter the pure relation is an ideal, an ideal that corresponds to the Western ideal of the self as an autonomous being, engaging in private and mutual relations on equal terms (Giddens 1999b:185; Carrier 1999:25). In pursuing this aim of a pure relation, the informant is obviously in a dilemma. She is in the middle of a crowd, and the only way of attracting attention is by being "a good fan", but she is not particularly interested in being seen as a fan by her idol. Such a relation is far too unequal and not very dignified, so when meeting Mark Owen face to face she tries not to be too "fan-like". She wants the meeting to be a dignified encounter between two equal individuals, and she is trying to control the relation by controlling her own appearance.

The problem of seeming too “fan-like” in the eyes of the idols was quite common among the informants – some actually changed clothes between a concert and a possible encounter with the singer afterwards. Obviously different strategies were used, and in face to face encounters, it was important to act dignified, which was by some equated with not seeming to “fan-like”. A meeting with a singer should preferably take place as an encounter between two equal individuals, rather than as a meeting between devoted fan and a popular idol.

As the informant, quoted above, stresses, one of the things that “it was about” was getting attention – but not any kind of attention. It had to be the kind of attention, that proved the fan to exist in the conscious world of the artist, just as the artist existed in the conscious world of the fan. In short, one of the aims was mutuality. A 30 year-old male Depeche Mode fan, who was also the owner of a shop selling “star-items” explained:

*As some of the girls<sup>22</sup> may have expressed it, the first goal is to meet the artist. The next goal is to meet him again. And this time the star should preferably be able to say: “Hey, we met before on this or that occasion!” And I have felt that way with Depeche Mode too [...] I was interviewing David Gahan for a radio program in 86, and on that occasion I also talked to Fletcher – he is the one I’ve talked to the most – and I said: “Well I’ve actually met you before”. [...] And then he said: “Yeah, that’s right. You were with your father, right!” And there he said something that I didn’t say, something that verifies that he actually remembers. And that does give you some sort of kick. You can’t help feeling a little flattered. [...] It’s nice to be recognized, or that some of your admiration is reciprocated or welcomed. It parallels if you give your girlfriend a good hug, and she does the same to you. Well, get me right, that there is a little mutuality in this relation, that it is not completely one-way. (Interview, September 15, 1999)*

As the informant emphasizes, the important thing is not having met the idol twice or thrice, but the fact of recognition that proves the relation to be somewhat mutual, reciprocal, and not completely one-way. Mutuality is a core element in the pure relation (Giddens 1999a:96), and all signs of mutuality in the relations to the artists were highly valued by the informants.

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<sup>22</sup> He is referring to some of the informants, whom he knew I had already interviewed, as he was the one establishing the contact.



Some emphasized like the man quoted above how they had been recognized from a previous encounter, others that the artist had written something special to them while signing autographs, had taken the time to chat, had hugged them while having a photograph taken, or had laughed about their jokes. It is important to stress that what the fans appreciated about these experiences was that they had had attention from the artist *individually*.

Thus, while many fans were, as described in the previous chapter, trying repay the singers in the modality of gift-exchange, they surely also wanted something *from* the singers - they wanted attention and they wanted their emotions reciprocated. Some of the "best fan-experiences" referred exactly to situations where the musicians had done something or said something to please the fan individually. These experiences showed how the singers had reacted to the fan's individual existence, rather than having seen him/her as just another fan in the crowd. The fans had their attention firmly directed to the artists, knew there was an awareness behind the music, behind the face, and they wanted to exist for this awareness. They wanted to exist and matter in the conscious world of the artist in question. However, the quotation above also has an implicit reference to the mass. The man quoted is flattered by being remembered, exactly because he knows that the artist is recognized by a lot of people and cannot be expected to remember all of them. He is flattered because the relation turns out to be less one-way than expected. Thus, the relation to the artist cannot be separated from the awareness of the existence of other fans or a general audience. The inseparability of the relation between fan and artists and the relation between fan and crowd is very visible during concerts, but the two relations are also inseparable in other situations.

The above accounts show clearly, that many fans wanted to approximate the relation to the artist to the ideal pure relation - the more private, mutual, equal, and respectful a meeting with the idol had seemed, the more it was appreciated. Most of the informants were quite satisfied with the singers' reactions in face to face encounters. The Springsteen fans often stressed that "there was a lot of respect the other way", and congratulated the members of the E-street Band for their respectful and friendly attitudes towards fans. Similarly Cliff Richard was described as a friendly and caring

person, who took his fans seriously, and never forgot to let them know that their contribution to a show was essential. But while friendly attitudes and signs of mutuality were highly valued, most fans did not expect these nice reactions from the singers. They usually thought it was quite acceptable and understandable that Bruce or Cliff could be busy or in a bad mood without wanting to talk to the numerous fans trying to attract their attention. The singers' personal lives should be respected, and the wish for mutuality and person to person encounters was always influenced by the awareness of the many others, who were also wishing a person to person relation to the same singer. The awareness of a crowd seemed to be there all the time, and most of the descriptions of the highly valued signs of mutuality included more or less explicit references to the existence of many other fans.

### **Notes on pure relations**

As I have demonstrated many fans attempt to approximate the relation to the artist to the pure relation, and this aim can not be separated from relating to the crowd. Surely, it is not very surprising that fans in Western modernity seem to value the same ideals that writers like Giddens and Carrier have described as pervading Western modernity in general. The interesting part is however, to examine whether fandom can then shed new light on some of the theories of these ideals. I have just shown that fans when seeking to approximate their relations to artists to pure relations are simultaneously relating to a vast crowd, and now I will argue that approximating a relation to the pure dyadic ideal in general implies relating to numerous excluded others.

One of the aims in fandom is, as I have demonstrated, to transform the relation between the fan and the singer from an unequal relation that matches the stereotypical devotion with popular idols in direction of an equal and mutual dyad. Experiences of existing in the conscious world of the artist in question can help the fan creating a sense of being a unique individual. In some cases music-listening can in itself invoke such a sense of being special (see the quotation on page 34), but such experiences were usually disturbed by the meta-message in the medium, clearly reminding that the music was *not* directed specifically to the listener but to

anyone or to no one in particular. Many informants sought the sense of an inner uniqueness *socially* confirmed by attempting to stand out. In other words the type of uniqueness the informants seem to value is not merely being unique in ones own particular conscious world, but to have this uniqueness confirmed by a significant other on the background of numerous insignificant others.

The attempts to stand out in the eyes of an artist can thus be seen as attempts to solve *socially* the contradiction of on the one hand experiencing uniqueness in ones own conscious world, and on the other hand being aware of being just one out of many. In attempting to balance this paradox, the informants relate to the cultural ideal of the pure relation. It surely seems that the way in which they wish to solve the paradox is by having their uniqueness socially confirmed by being singled out as worthy of a pure relation to a significant other on the background of the crowd. And the next issue is of course to use the above descriptions and findings to shed light on theories of the pure dyadic ideal.

When Giddens describes the ideal pure relation, he focuses on the reflective organization of it, as it both requires and allows continuous self-examination to be conveyed to the partner in an authentic manner (1999a:88-91). The informants however, have their attention directed to the act of choice, not to the processes characterizing a relation, *after* it has been established. Thus, while ideal pure relations presuppose the freedom of choice, it is not the choice itself that Giddens sees as influencing the reflexive project of the self. When he *does* elaborate on choices, he focuses on *choosing*<sup>23</sup>, whereas the fans quoted are concerned with *being chosen*. The symmetry on which pure relations are ideally based (Giddens 1999b:181-86), ought however make these two aspects of choice equally important, and the fans were actually and contrary to Giddens quite interested in the latter of the two.

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<sup>23</sup> For some reason Giddens does not write much about the act of choice between many, and its influence on the construction of self. In many other relations he elaborates thoroughly on the issue of choice. He sees modern Westerners as struggling to filter away choices and ignore possibilities in order to keep some sort of basic trust intact (ibid.80ff, 102ff). But when it comes to pure relations, Giddens has his attention on the processes characterizing the relation *after* it has been established, and considers the freedom of choice the factor that allows the pure relation and the reflexivity inherent in it to exist.

While the reflexive organization of the pure relation is by no means irrelevant, I would like to dwell on the aspects of choice and possibility. Just like standing out makes little sense without a background to stand out against, pure relations too presuppose an idea of an anonymous crowd from which individuals choose each other as intimate partners. In fact, I will argue that in relations approximated to the pure ideal the possibility of alternative partnerships never disappears.

Giddens stresses that as the pure relation is a voluntary arrangement established between two people who have chosen each other, it is per definition insecure – each partner can leave if he/she so pleases (1999a:187). Put differently: The pure relation is inherently *a possibility among many*, which is why it is insecure. Therefore, when Giddens describes the pure relation as lacking external referents (ibid.186), I would like to correct him. The pure relation lacks *goals* outside itself, as it does ideally not depend on external obligations or aims of any kind (Giddens 1999a:90; Carrier 1999:21ff). But that does not mean that the pure relation lacks external referents. In fact, some of Giddens' own examples show how friends and sexual partners often demand "proof" of the intimate character of the relation in the form of secrets that *only they* are told (1999b:139).

In such examples the background of others who do not know these secrets are clearly there as referents, but not as goals. Similarly Simmel describes the importance of sharing secrets within private relations, and the attractiveness of being let in on secrets is exactly that so many others are denied access (Simmel 1950:330ff). The external referent is one of *alternative choices* - it is *a background*, without which the notion of the pure relation would just like the notion of standing out lack all meaning. Though pure relations do not necessarily require a united applauding audience, *the act of choice among many is still what makes pure relations and the individuals involved in them special in the eyes of each other and on the background of the numerous excluded others.*

Thus, the establishments of intimate dyads can, just like attempts to stand out, be seen as ways in which the paradox of experiencing uniqueness in ones own conscious world, and knowing to be just one out of many, is sought balanced in

accordance with a cultural celebration of the ideal pure relation. In striving to stand out, the informants obviously relate to cultural ideals. They are perfectly aware of *how* the relation to the artist should be in order to be dignified - that is equal, mutual, voluntary, and dyadic. They also relate to the stereotypical fan-image from which they seek to distance themselves and their relation to the artist. In attempting to stand out fans seek to transform the relation to the artists in direction of the pure ideal, while simultaneously being aware that such attempts easily make them fit the stereotypical image of a devoted hysteric, willing to sacrifice his/her own dignity in exchange for a handshake from a person, that does not even know his/her name. The way in which the informants seek to manage this balance of being one, yet one among many, is certainly culturally informed, and the ideal pure relation plays a crucial role. It is against this ideal that the informants judge and adjust their relation to the artist and the crowd. Thus, there is actually *three* types of intersubjectivity at stake simultaneously – the relation to one, the relation to many, and the relation to a cultural ideal, in terms of which the balance between the other two is sought handled.

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# To Be or Not To Be

## – A Question of Autonomy

Until now I have argued that music can be felt as a social relation, that it can create a pressure for adjustment, that this adjustment can take form as gifts, placing the relation between fan and artist in the appropriate sphere of exchange, and more specifically that the pure relation, characterized by mutuality and equality between two unconstrained selves, is an important model striven for by fans as well as other people in Western modernity. I have further argued that seeking to approximate the pure relation implies relating to others outside a given dyad, and of course also implies relating to a cultural ideal - the pure relation. Three types of intersubjectivity were thus demonstrated to be involved simultaneously.

The next issue is to examine how the self is presented and negotiated in these intermingled intersubjectivities. Fans are, as has been explained, far from unconcerned with how others interpret their relations to the artists, and they expect such interpretations to affect the way in which they are seen as persons. Being able to present the self to strangers and acquaintances in ways that are in accordance with cultural ideas is obviously quite important. Giddens' notion of self-identity – the self as understood by a person in terms of his or her biography (1999a:53) – does not explicitly point to the intersubjective construction of self-narrations. But Bruner has explained that even when seeing the construction of self, as the authoring of a personal narration, it is indeed constructed interactively, as it has to live up to certain ideas of plausible narrations. A narration of the self that does not ring true and authentic to actual or imagined listeners is not a very satisfying construction (Bruner 1999a:208-28). And Bruner has a good point in stressing the importance of seeing the construction of self as something taking place *between* people, and not merely *within* them.

As the primary object of the thesis is to describe the relation between the one and the many, I will begin by analyzing the presentation and reflections concerning the self as a part of a concert-audience. I have earlier dwelled upon concerts, describing e.g. *communitas* and flow, but such experiences are unreflected and without any awareness of self (Turner 1982:48,57). However, these experiences are of course reflected upon after (and when regularly "zooming out" during) the shows. In such reflexive acts, the self is constructed and narrated to an actual or imagined listener, and the narrations may easily include references to situations in which there was at the time of experience no sense of self (Turner 1982:57; Sartre 1975:25f). In this and the following chapter, I will examine such reflexive evaluations of experiences and demonstrate their importance for the construction and representation of self.

### **The spontaneous crowd-member**

Merging with others was usually described as a great sense of absorption or as a possibility of repaying the singers as a united audience while being invisible as a distinct person. But the experiences also evoked reflection and many informants expressed ambivalence when representing themselves as members of a huge crowd under the spell of so few. A female Bruce fan aged thirty something explained about her ambivalence:

*E: It is a little weird, because of all this...you kind of see all Hitler's soldiers standing there [holds up her arm] on a stadium in Berlin, right. [...] In Barcelona this year there was general admission on the floor [...] There were twice as many people on the floor as there should have been. The floor was packed, and as soon as someone had his hand in the air, everyone had their hands in the air, including the ones all the way in the back. The first night I sat on the side and I could see it all. It was really fantastic, and it must have been fantastic for Bruce. But still it is a little scary with all this unification.*

*Nana: Don't you think that's because precisely that movement makes you associate to something specific?*

*E: But it is not only that movement – it doesn't matter what we do. It is so easy to make people do the same as everyone else (Interview, December 13, 1999).*

Clearly the woman quoted is ambivalent about her own participation in the concert as a member of a crowd. In the above quotation she sums up some of the reflections she has made concerning the experience. She presents three different evaluations of

the unified crowd of which she is a member. Firstly, the unified mass is fascinating and fantastic – this aspect has already been addressed in the part about *communitas*. Secondly, the movements are gestures of appreciation meant for Bruce to enjoy – which has been addressed in the chapter about exchange. And thirdly, the thought of being a member of such a huge crowd, doing the exact same movement is quite scary, and the informant herself has (in spite of her admiration for Springsteen's music and messages of social concern) horrifying historical references to what can happen if one floats along, thoughtlessly obeying the powerful few.

She explained elsewhere in the interview that during concerts she didn't think much - and that was the whole idea (understandably, if she desires to experience *communitas*). The movements, she told, came all automatically, actually so automatically that she sometimes caught herself with her hand in the air while listening to Bruce Springsteen's music at home in her own living room. Like many others she found that the best way of experiencing the music was to let go and forget about one's own appearance and ideas about appropriate behavior, in order to let oneself be carried away by the music and the atmosphere. According to her, some people, especially Norwegians, tended to be very tense and had difficulties loosening up and being spontaneous. They were far too concerned with their appearances, and probably did not get the same wonderful experience out of concerts. The trick was, she explained, not to care about how others saw you, to simply let go and be yourself.

This, in combination with the quotation above, illustrates the ambivalence with which both the woman in question and many other informants evaluated their own positions as crowd-members during concerts - and as one fan among many more generally. On the one hand it was scary to find one's individuality and uniqueness lost in exchange for a position as one among many obeying so few, and on the other hand it was important not to let other people's ideas of appropriateness keep you away from spontaneous behavior. The Western self is supposed to be spontaneous and autonomous (Giddens 1999a:93-97;1999b:62,182; Carrier 1999:24, 35f), and the woman is obviously aware of that and tries to present herself as living up to these ideals: On the one hand, it would be quite un-autonomous and other-dependent to do



like the tense Norwegians, to obey "the gaze of others" and desist from spontaneously throwing ones hand in the air, just because others find it inappropriate. And on the other hand spontaneously throwing ones hand in the air just like everybody else, in response to a few people on the stage, also threatens the sense of being an essentially unique and autonomous individual, since you then end up loosing individuality for a membership of a crowd. "The gaze of others" is one type of external control to avoid, but the unified mass movements occurring at concerts also constitute a poor reference, if the self is to live up to the Western ideals.

Several of the other informants expressed a similar reflexive ambivalence about whether or not to surrender their own selves to different types of external control. Some referred like the woman to concert experiences or other situations of physical crowd-membership. Many emphasized that they did not obey the little hints from the singers because they enjoyed being part of a controlled crowd, but because they wanted to repay and please the singers. You never knew when the singer might suddenly spot you individually, and he should not have to think that the fan was not enjoying the show. It was important to show appreciation. It was great to merge with the crowd. But surrendering will and individuality to crowd-control was not something that avoided reflection and comment when the informants reflected upon and presented themselves.

### **When to wear the Bruce-uniform**

Fandom is about being many relating to one – both at concerts and generally. Some explained that it was quite nice to discover that others felt just like them, while others found it scary to find their individuality threatened by the thought of being one out of many acting similarly, and most expressed both opinions on different occasions. There was clearly a balance to be handled cleverly, and in accordance with cultural ideals of the spontaneous and autonomous self. A clipping from a conversation between two male Springsteen fans aged 30 and 25 illustrates some verbalized reflections concerning the dilemma, this time not with reference to a concert experience, but in a discussion of dress-code:

*Tom: If you see gatherings of Springsteen fans you see that some are trying to imitate him [...] some of them almost look like clones. Such things make me think: that is too far out! Then the object is almost the opposite [...] about distancing yourself, and showing that after all you do have control over this, right.*

*Simon: I was actually thinking about that when I went here. I discovered that I was wearing a pair of worn-out jeans. Man, what a cliché: a Springsteen fan wearing worn-out jeans! That's something you think about. And I thought: "should I wear some other pants?"...but on the other hand, that would also be too much, if you changed in order not to look alike (Interview October 21<sup>st</sup> 1999).*

The clipping is taken from a long discussion between the two men, concerning when to wear "the Bruce-uniform", what to wear, and for which reason. In some situations, when meeting with other fans a rare T-shirt could be worn in order to find or impress like-minded people, but it was also important to distance oneself from the fan-image and showing control over ones fandom - also in the company of other fans. Headbands and other items suggesting a fascination of the popular mega-star-macho-Bruce of the 1980s were clearly out – unless, the second fan added, you were wearing it as kitsch, thus showing ironic distance to the mass phenomenon. Yet on the other hand, he further speculated, in a time dominated by a tendency to keep an ironic distance to everything, it did quite often induce respect to actually mean something seriously. After having discussed the issue for close to an hour, the two were still unable to explain when it was appropriate to dress up in "the Bruce uniform" and when it was not, which items were appropriate to collect and exhibit in one's home and which were not, or in general where exactly to find an acceptable balance between showing to be in control of one's fandom and still standing up to one's preferences.

There is a clear dilemma at stake: The two men are perfectly aware that their relation to Bruce may by others (or the other in themselves) be seen as "too much", and that it is therefore sometimes necessary to distance oneself from the fan-image, thus showing to be *in control* of the relation. Yet, as the second fan suggest, distancing oneself from the cliché too deliberately is also "too much" – it would in other words be just as other-dependent and un-autonomous as would matching the stereotype. The aim is not simply a non-fan appearance, and neither is it a fan appearance. *Rather, it is a reflexive understanding and presentation of the self as an independent and*

*autonomous actor, someone who is not controlled by but in control of relations to others.*

## **Fashions and fountains**

The interviews were indeed pervaded by different attempts to present the self as autonomous, often by positioning the self against the influence of the musician and the influence of "gazing others". A quotation from a 29 year-old female Cliff fan illustrates this quite clearly, and the subject of this part of the interview is prejudices:

*People may make comments, but it doesn't bother me. I have never been bothered about what people say about me, about what I was or did and such. Of course they commented it [her fandom] in school, but then I said that they were stupid and other things. It didn't bother me. It has never bothered me. I was also the type who would wear home-made sweaters in school, because I preferred my mother's hand-knitting, and I didn't care whether they were fashionable or not. [...] He [Cliff] is very Christian, which I am definitely not. [...] That way I'm not letting him influence me, but clearly some of the things he says and does are things I can acknowledge. But not because he says so, but because I have thought about these things myself over the years, and they correspond to how I am (Interview November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999).*

This woman is clearly not very interested in presenting herself as obeying other people - neither Cliff nor anyone else. The autonomy that she emphasizes includes having opinions that are different and independent from Cliff's, but also includes standing up to her fandom in spite of what others think and say about it. Such self-presentations were included in many of the interviews, though often not as clearly as above. Most informants were reluctant to overdo the fan-image, but they were also reluctant to distance themselves from it too deliberately and due to other people's opinions. Being too much of a fan, suggests being under the control of a singer (or the management and media), and not standing up to one's fandom suggests being controlled by other people's prejudices. Neither would provide good references in a reflexive construction and presentation of the self as autonomous, which is obviously what the woman quoted above, is aiming for. In stead of attempting to balance between these two influential relations, she draws on her past, and explains how she has since her childhood been an independent type wearing whatever she pleased irrespective of fashion and comments made by others. She presents herself as *essentially* autonomous. Her actions and preferences are according to her not induced by any external source, but springs spontaneously from what is essentially

her. She is perfectly aware of the celebration and normative requirement of autonomy, and is uncomfortable having to balance between two relations, as she expects, no matter where she finds her equilibrium between them, to be seen as acting under the influence of either the musician or the prejudiced others. In stead she turns to another type of argument, also in accordance with the Western idea of self, and emphasizes how she is independent from both influences, as her autonomy springs from an inner fountain of self.

Presentations like the one above were as mentioned quite common. Most of the informants had often themselves wondered why there were so many things they simply *had* to do or own, but usually they ended up concluding that after all they themselves were in charge of determining when they thought it was “too much”. Many had wondered why they simply *had* to buy “the same” records in several editions, why they *could not* walk by a magazine featuring an article about a certain singer without buying it, or why it was absolutely *necessary* to spend several hours standing in line for an autograph, which was basically just a name on a piece of paper. All these somewhat obsessive musts were commented and reflected upon, but the informants practically always made clear that as long as they did not harm anyone, they intended to do as they pleased. Such comments show not only that the Western idea of the autonomous self is a forceful model, but also that in seeking to construct and present the self as living up to this ideal, people reflect on possible external influences. In the clippings there are primarily two influences, which are sought balanced. But even when simplifying the construction and representation of self to the reflexive balance between just two external sources of influence, the balance seems quite insoluble, unless the inner, spontaneous, and essential self is introduced as the solution to the dilemma.

### **Notes on the Western self**

The dilemmas of the reflexive project of the self, described above, provide a good opportunity to discuss the idea of self in Western modernity more generally. The informants were perfectly aware of the importance of presenting themselves as autonomous individuals, and that this involved the quite difficult task of balancing

between standing up to being a fan and making sure not to be too "fan-like". And usually the way in which this dilemma was resolved and the autonomy of the individual conveyed, was by referring to an inner self, essentially different from others. Often the informants emphasized that they were *not* typical fans, that they were *not* like the stereotype, that they did *not* arrange their lives around their idols, and that they did *not* obey the gaze of others. It was by referring to relations to other people – be it idols, stereotypes, Norwegians, crowds, or gazing others – that the informants presented themselves as autonomous. Just like standing out or pure relations require a background of numerous insignificant others, the construction and presentation of the self as autonomous too requires others, against whose influence, the self can be reflexively positioned as independent. Even simple choices of wearing or not wearing, doing or not doing, being or not being, evoke reflections concerning possible external sources, under whose influence the choice may have been made – or may be seen as having been made. Thus, the autonomous self is indeed *a related self*, as it is in relation to others that autonomy is negotiated. The self was surely negotiated intersubjectively - both because it was presented to an actual listener with a tape-recorder switched on - and because the presentations concerned a self-in-relation. *It was ironically by referring relations to other people and often by positioning it against the influence of others, that the self was presented as essential and autonomous.*

Yet, one relation, that somewhat escaped the contrasting use in the informants' presentation of self, was the relation to the very idea of the autonomous self. I am not able to say whether the informants actually felt autonomous or not, nor is such an evaluation relevant to the argument. What matters is that *all seemed to agree that autonomy was a desirable characteristic*. When presenting the self as independent from external ideas and forces, the informants actually revealed a clear other-dependency – not only because autonomy was typically emphasized by referring to being different from someone else, but also because *autonomy was taken as the unquestioned ideal to be approximated*. The informants, like most other Westerners, strove eagerly to present themselves as independent. Yet, in doing so they obeyed exactly one of the basic normative ideals – that of the autonomous self. None challenged the ideal of the autonomous self, and neither could they have, since this

ideal is a paradoxical and quite bulletproof cultural construction – not necessarily a bad one, but bulletproof and contradictory nonetheless.

Western norms celebrate and *proscribe* the autonomous self (Carrier 1999:36). But actually such a norm is a contradiction in terms. Proscribed autonomy is nonsense, since obeying a proscription is exactly surrendering one's autonomy. But there is no way in which proscribed autonomy can be resisted: Deciding to be un-autonomous and always obey the requirements of others would be a quite autonomous action, as it goes against the normative requirements. And striving to be autonomous is actually quite un-autonomous as one simply obeys what is culturally required. Both actions are paradoxical combinations of autonomy and the opposite. The ideal of the autonomous self does simply not make sense, if it is understood as being induced upon the individual by any external source<sup>24</sup>. Autonomy as an ideal only makes sense if it is believed to spring from an inner source of self – which was also the solution that the female Cliff fan resolved to in her attempts to present herself as an inherently independent personality. Thus, when Carrier describes how the Western self is supposed to be autonomous *and* spontaneous (Carrier 1999:21ff), I will emphasize that these two ideal characteristics are inseparable. The autonomous self *must* be reflexively constructed as an inner, essential self, as all signs of other-dependency must be shunned in the narration. By ascribing autonomy to an internal and spontaneous spring of self, the contradiction of a normatively proscribed autonomy is avoided. In short: The idea of the autonomous self and the idea of an inner spontaneous self are parts of the same cultural package.

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<sup>24</sup> I can't help adding a little reference to the movie "Monty Python's Life of Brian" by John Cleese. In it there is a scene that brilliantly illustrates the paradox of induced autonomy. Brian is followed by a huge crowd believing him to be the Messiah, he would however, rather be left alone. From a balcony he tries to convince the crowd-members not to follow him nor any other leaders, that each of them is an individual and different from everyone else. The whole crowd replies by repeating after him in synchrony, that they are all individuals each different from everyone else - except one, who discretely objects to being different.

# Purity and Strangers

In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that the Western norm proscribing autonomous selves is a quite paradoxical construction, and since both Giddens and Carrier have shown an intimate link between the Western ideal self and the ideal pure relation (Giddens 1999a:94, 186, 189; Carrier 1999:21, 24f, 31), it is not surprising that this paradox is reflected in the idea of such an ideal dyad. The establishment of intimate dyadic relations, which are approximated to the pure ideal, can, as I have argued, help balancing the experience of being a singular special one against the awareness of being just one of many. The self is in such a relation singled out from the crowd by another individual, and the inner core-self is thereby socially confirmed unique and special. But given the norm of autonomy it is clear that Western individuals cannot reflexively construct or present themselves as *needing* such a social confirmation of self. Presenting the self as craving to be chosen from the crowd by another individual would be a revelation of other-dependency. Besides, needing another person would not only be un-autonomous, it would also ruin all chances of establishing a pure relation with this person, as the *ideal* pure relation can in principle only exist between *ideal* autonomous selves (Giddens 1999a:93ff, 1999b:96f, 185ff, Carrier 1999:23). So while the reflexivity required to influence private intimacy in direction of the pure relation, is important to a development of a satisfying self-identity (Giddens 1999a:186), satisfying self-identities of the partners are simultaneously preconditions for a relation to resemble the pure ideal (Giddens 1999a:95).

In other words, a pure relation can only exist if it is not needed by the partners, who are supposed to be autonomous, independent, and sure of their own self-worth *before* entering the relation. The idea of the pure relation thus invokes a picture of a self-referential circle in which one of the positive outcomes of the relation is also the precondition of its existence, and the "purity" of the ideal pure relation refers exactly to its lack of external goals (Giddens 1999a:90; 1999b:63-68, 190). It is however important once again to emphasize that this self-referential pure relation is rarely

realized, it is an *ideal*, or a *principle* in terms of which individuals reflexively interpret and adjust the interpersonal relations in which they take part.

That the pure relation is a principle rather than a reality is demonstrated by Carrier, who emphasizes that the modern friendship has become a standard or a *norm* against which modern Westerners measure and judge themselves and each other – e.g. when deeming people with few or no friends as emotionally impoverished (1999:36). Thus, he draws attention to a quite important side-effect of relations that are in principle supposed to be "pure". Individuals, who are involved in close-to-pure relations, get the considerable external reward of not being seen as emotionally underprivileged or unfulfilled by strangers, acquaintances, or imagined listeners. Carrier does not refer to crowds or to being singled out from crowds, but the analysis of standing out does indeed shed light on his observation. People with no friends simply lack the possibility of referring to a relation, in which they are considered special by someone other than themselves.

The western individual must be able to refer to having been singled out from the crowd by someone, preferably by a popular someone, who has had many alternatives to choose between. The more popular the partner, the more flattering to the self is being chosen and "proven" special by this someone, and the better is the reference, when the self is narrated to others *outside* the dyad. Having been chosen as a private partner by someone with no or few alternatives is not as attractive as having been singled out from the crowd by someone faced with thousands of possibilities to choose from – e.g. a famous singer. Yet, while being singled out by a popular someone is very flattering, the chances of being singled out by popular people are of course also correspondingly low, and there is a quite considerable risk, that fans' emotions for famous musicians are not reciprocated. And unreciprocated emotions are, as I will show, not necessarily good references in a Western autobiography. Unreciprocated emotions are easily seen as a sign of needing another person, and being needy, Kierkegaard once remarked, is the last thing you want said about yourself (1986:276). A reflexive construction or presentation of the self as needy would in other words be a violation of the normative proscription of the autonomous self.



## The unreciprocated gift

Private dyads are according to Giddens continuously reflected upon, in order to determine whether or not psychic inputs are balanced against psychic outcomes, and in order to determine whether a given relation is worth the effort (1999a:92f; 1999b:63). But I will argue that reflections on the balance between inputs and outcomes in interpersonal relations also include considerations of how the balance, the relation, and the self will be seen by others (or an internalized other). The informants, when reflecting upon and commenting their own actions did not merely consider whether or not they themselves found e.g. an autograph by Bruce Springsteen worth two hours of waiting. They also considered what others might think or say about them based on such a willingness to sacrifice so much for so little. The reflexive evaluation of the balances between inputs and outcomes can be addressed through an analysis of gift-exchange, but I will emphasize that the balance is reflected upon and evaluated even without any gifts actually having been exchanged.

As I have illustrated earlier, the informants often attempted to repay the singers for the music in the modality of gift-exchange, but gifts to artists were not always accepted and reciprocated. A 32 year-old female Cliff Richard fan expressed the following in an interview:

*Through the music one has received incredibly much, so I have actually felt some sort of debt. One feels like giving him [Cliff] something [...] Using ones common sense and imagining oneself in his situation – he does not know me or anything...One feels that one knows him one way or the other, and one thinks: "others have met him, and he has people to whom he talks, who are his friends – why wouldn't I be as good as them?" or something. [...] One feels like saying to him: "really, don't you have 5 minutes?" [...] Those 5 minutes would be something to remember for the rest of ones life. That is why one does some ridiculous things – all these gifts and such. Afterwards one gets mad at oneself thinking: "why do you do such ridiculous things?". One never hears whether he has received these things anyway, maybe they have just been thrown away or something (Interview January 17<sup>th</sup> 1999).*

First of all the informant makes a clear distinction between what she feels, and what her common sense tells her - she feels that she knows Cliff, but knows that he does not know her, and following this distinction, she explains how giving Cliff gifts (a painting and a number of song lyrics and poems, written by herself) makes sense

according to her own emotions, and how it does not make sense according to her common sense, why she deems her own actions ridiculous. Secondly, she makes a link between the unreciprocated gifts and her reflexive construction of self – she wonders why she is not good enough to be considered worthy of a friendship by Cliff Richard, and she is annoyed with herself, not with him.

I will address the second aspect first. Although the informant herself points to two possible motives behind the gift – a feeling of debt and a desire to attract attention - her reflexive evaluation of the experience concerns primarily the second aspect. She interprets the lack of reciprocation from Cliff as a refusal of forming an affectionate relation with her, and this makes her measure her own friendly and sentimental self against those others, whom Cliff has singled out from the crowd by considering them friends. Exactly due to the link between types of exchange and types of relations (Robbins and Akin 1999:6f, 14f), and the link between types of relations and types of selves (Carrier 1999:21f, 34ff), a rejected gift is a rejection of forming an affectionate relation with the inner self of the giver. When the gifts are rejected, the emotions behind them are rejected, and - as the informant explains herself – it leaves her wondering why she is not as good as those other people with whom Cliff has chosen to form friendships. Her reflections do not concern her wealth, they do not even concern her ability as a painter or songwriter, nor do they concern a feeling of being still indebted. Her wonderment concerns her very core-self, the self, capable of friendships, the spontaneous and sentimental self. This self is what can be socially confirmed and is at risk in the formation of intimate dyads, this self is what is involved in the gift-exchange, this self is what is belittled by a rejection, and this notion of selfhood is what has to be considered in the analysis of the above mentioned quotation as well as in analysis of gift-exchange in Western modernity in general.

The informant interprets the rejected gifts as Cliff's rejection of forming an affectionate relation with her, and such reflexive interpretations of rejected gifts are surely not confined to rejected or unreciprocated presents from fans to artists: If e.g. a bouquet of flowers or a box of chocolates is rejected, most Westerners would certainly interpret the incident as the receiver's rejection of forming an affectionate relation with the core-self of the giver. The informant is fully in line with the cultural

understanding of gifts as symbolizing affection, and interprets a rejected gift just like most other Westerners would – as a sign of her emotions being unreciprocated. What makes the example of the paintings and the song lyrics given by a fan to Cliff Richard special is merely the *likelihood* of a rejection, not the informant's *interpretation* of the rejection. Giving flowers to e.g. a close friend or a spouse is usually quite safe, as a rejection within a mutual and well functioning intimate relation is highly unlikely. But irrespective of likelihood: *were* the flowers actually rejected, the rejecting partner would express an unmistakable sign of not reciprocating the giver's emotions.

When the informant blames herself for being ridiculous and distinguishes between what she feels and what her common sense tells her, it is exactly this likelihood which is reflected upon. The informant is annoyed with herself for not having consulted her common sense, which should have warned her against directing her gifts at a person faced with so many fans that a reciprocation is highly unlikely. She considers herself ridiculous for having *given* the gifts, for having brought herself in a situation where her inner self was at risk by being open to social comment. The more popular is the receiver, the more risky is gift-giving, but the interpretation of a rejected gift is irrespective of likelihood belittling to the core-self of the giver. Western gift-giving takes place in the "warm" sphere of exchange, and the exchange partners are sentimental core-selves. Thus, if a gift is rejected in Western modernity it is not merely the gift, but also the inner sentimental self of the giver, which is rejected.

## **Notes on theories of exchange**

The above analysis shows the importance of considering the cultural notion of selfhood in analysis of exchange. Thus, it would be tempting to add yet another theoretical aspect to Robbins' and Akin's model of spheres of exchange, namely the concept of personhood or self involved in a given exchange<sup>25</sup>. Of course the idea of an inner core-self is already implied, when an exchange is performed in the modality of gift-exchange, placing the exchange in the sphere fit for emotions and matters of

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<sup>25</sup> The other three aspects are (as explained in the chapter about pure relations and cool cash) the objects of exchange, the modality of exchange, and the relation between the exchange partners (Robbins and Akin 1999:10-11).

the hart. But although people performing actual exchanges will most likely see these various aspects as one unit of appropriate behavior and taken for granted interpretations, there can be an analytical value in separating these aspects theoretically. Not in order to exclude any of the aspects from the analysis, but exactly in order to draw attention to each of them. One reason for theoretically separating aspects that are in practice inseparable is the comparative possibility. If e.g. a specific cultural notion of personhood is implied in concepts and theories of exchange, these concepts will not be very useful or even misleading when applied in settings where personhood is conceived differently. Another analytical value of theoretically separating inseparable aspects is the possibility of analyzing some of the implications of assumptions that are taken for granted in a given cultural setting.

I will address the comparative aspect first and by giving an example. According to Mauss' analysis of Kwakiutl potlatches one has no right to reject a gift or to refuse to attend a potlatch - and rejections are extremely rare. But if a potlatch or a gift is rejected the refusing Chief may by others be seen as fearing the demands of reciprocation and may thus be considered "flattened" or beaten in advance. Or on the contrary, in certain cases a chief with an acknowledged position in the social hierarchy may after refusing a potlatch be seen as the invincible victor, who does not have to concern himself with a challenge from someone he is obviously superior to (Mauss 1997:41f). A rejection of a gift or a potlatch is thus a rejection of participating in a competition of honor - but a rejection still leaves a winner and a loser in the eyes of others.

The above mentioned belittlement of the fan following a rejection or a missing reciprocation could of course, and in accordance with Mauss' theory, be explained by the difference in status, wealth, or social position between fan and singer. But the rejection did exactly not make the informant question whether her gifts had been rich enough or of a quality high enough to constitute a proper gift, *what was questioned by the informant was not the quality of the gifts but her worth as a friend*. Wealth is not the issue at stake in modern Western gift-exchange, which is supposed to be cleansed of economical considerations. Emotions and inner core-selves are at stake. While a rejected gift may be considered belittling to the giver among both modern

Westerners and Kwakiutl chiefs, a rejection is belittling in different ways, involving different aspects of personhood. Whereas the Kwakiutl make a direct link between *the persona* and an ability to demonstrate wealth through giving (Mauss 1997:39), modern Westerners make a moral distinction between these two aspects. In Western modernity gifts are supposed to symbolize emotions felt by inner sentimental selves, and emotions are not supposed to be mixed up with material riches and economical capacities. A rejection of a gift is therefore not as among the Kwakiutl a rejection of competing and comparing riches, but a rejection of forming affectionate relations, supposed to be held apart from riches and wealth. Theories of exchange based on potlatches can therefore not directly be applied in a modern Western setting, just like Western ideas of exchange would be misleading if used among the Kwakiutl – simply because personhood is understood differently in the two settings, and is linked to exchange in different ways.

By considering the notion of personhood it is as mentioned also possible to analyze taken for granted assumptions and implications of such assumptions. In Western modernity it is believed that an inner fountain of feelings defines "how we really are" (Rosaldo 1997:139, 147), and since gifts are seen as symbolizing emotions (Belk 1995:95; Carrier 1995:60), it is this "true essential self" which is at risk in gift-exchange. Gifts are seen as symbolizing spontaneous sentiments, felt by true and inner core-selves and this cultural link between sentimental selves and gift-exchange is extremely important to an understanding of exchange in Western modernity.

A gift may be given for various reasons. It may be given in order to get something in return, in order to meet gratitude, as a repayment of a debt, in an attempt to establish or change a relation, or it may be given as a "pure gift"<sup>26</sup> without any personal outcome in mind. But precisely because Westerners insist that it is the thought that counts, it becomes very interesting for people to decide for which reason, with which intention, or following which emotion a gift is given. Gifts as well as other actions are

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<sup>26</sup> According to Mauss, there is no such thing as a pure gift, given without gaining any personal outcome (Mauss 1997:73f). The morality of the gift combines freedom and obligation, so that the individual can give what is owed to others or to the gods, while simultaneously serving his own good (ibid. 68, 73f, Hubert and Mauss 1981:100). He is counterargued by Alain Testart, who writes that there are pure gifts - a gift is precisely something handed over, free of charge, why gift-giving is not to be equated with exchange (1998:97). He is however moderating this

reflexively scrutinized and interpreted in order to gain access to hidden emotional aspects of the self behind them<sup>27</sup>.

Kierkegaard has dwelled on this subject, arguing that precisely because gifts can be given with various intentions, there is no gift given, no word said, and no action done, which proves the existence of love in the person performing the gesture (Kierkegaard 1986:278f). Kierkegaard is indeed supporting the idea of the "pure gift" or "the thought that counts", what matters is not the gift itself, but *how* it is given. Precisely because gifts are seen as symbolizing emotions, and exactly because emotions are not visible without becoming apparent through some sort of exchange, but are still believed to define the true and essential nature of a person, the intentions behind gifts are subjected to much curiosity and various interpretations.

In order to gain insight in other people's emotions and selves, one has, Giddens writes, to be able to rely on what the other person says and does, and therefore authenticity becomes extremely important (Giddens 1999a:96, 186-87). In this he is backed up by Carrier who notes that around 1700 Westerners began concerning themselves with the authenticity with which other people conveyed their inner motives and wills (Carrier 1999:24). And Sennet has even noted that modern Westerners seem less concerned with what other people in fact do, and more interested in finding out "how they feel about it" (Sennet 1976:263-266). The quest for authenticity illustrates the Western tendency to give primacy to "the true inner self" which is what has to be conveyed with authenticity. But authenticity becomes important exactly because inner selves and emotions are invisible, can be withheld, faked, or lied about. However, this quest for authenticity moves people's attention from specific actions (e.g. gift-giving) to an interpretation of possible intentions and

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attack on the obligation to reciprocate with six different degrees of reciprocation-requirements or the lack of (ibid.103f).

<sup>27</sup> When Malinowski analysed exchange among the Trobriand Islanders, he attempted to classify transactions according to motive. Some were labelled pure gifts, given without reciprocation in mind, and others were classified as given in self-interest. Mauss, as mentioned, objected to such a distinction, as there is according to him no such thing as a pure gift (Mauss 1997:73). However, Malinowski's idea of making such a classification actually reflects a modern Western understanding of exchange. Malinowski was clearly interested in knowing the thought, the motive, the intention behind the gift, and interested in classifying transactions accordingly. Such a distinction according to motive reflects the Western idea of gift-exchange, according to which it is the thoughts that counts, but is misleading or at best irrelevant in societies where actions or gifts in themselves are what matters. Not all human beings are equally interested in subjecting gifts and actions to analysis of intentions and sentiments behind them.

thoughts behind them. Such an interest in thoughts and selves behind actions is not universal, e.g. interpreting other people's thoughts does not concern the Kuranko very much (Jackson 1998:12). Similarly the Balinese, according to Geertz, see public roles as defining or pervading the essence of a person, not as a mask covering psychological traits of a true self (Geertz 1993:386)<sup>28</sup>. However, Westerners are extremely keen on scrutinizing and making sense of their own and other people's inner thoughts and sentiments, while they are not always contempt with the interpretation made about themselves by others.

The informants were quite used to having their "inner selves" and sentiments interpreted by others, and they often reflected upon, commented, or rejected possible interpretations. When the woman quoted above, deems her own gift-giving a ridiculous outburst of emotions, which ought to have been prevented by a sense of numbers and likelihood, she is much in line with how non-fans usually interpret the idea of fans sending presents to artists. Just like her, non-fans usually blame gift-giving fans for not consulting their common sense and awareness of being one of many before risking a belittlement by sending present to famous artists. But giving a gift is just one way among several in which affection can be expressed. Not only gift-giving, but all other signs of affection, involves the risk of being denied reciprocation, and unreciprocated emotions are, as will be demonstrated below, not very attractive elements in a Western presentation of self.

## **Human or divine**

Fans are, as must be clear by now, very concerned with the ways in which others understand them and their fandom, and they often and quite uninvitedly denied being in love with their idols. They expected to be seen as people in love, and addressed this interpretation of fandom themselves – in order to ensure it was properly dismissed. Another interpretation, which was occasionally brought up and then rejected, was the comparison between fandom and religion. This is e.g. seen in this questionnaire reply from a 26-year-old male Springsteen fan:

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<sup>28</sup> Another cross-cultural example of the Western idea of self is found in Carrier's description of a man originating from Manus in Papua New Guinea but also exposed to Western ideas of self. He explained to Carrier that "we

*Before we start, let me say that I'm not the regular Bruce fan. I try to keep my head over my shoulder. You can be a great fan and still be yourself. That's my point. [...] It has not changed my life. It's not like a religion to me. I do not worship the man. I find suspicious how people can become carbon copies of the people they love. It's just about good music and trying to make your little world more human (Bruce-respondent 176)<sup>29</sup>.*

The informant quoted seems to find the religious comparison disturbing to his presentation of himself as a strictly autonomous individual. But what is important to notice is that he objects to being seen as worshipping the singer *as a person*. Such denials of being religious about the singers were common, and several emphasized that their relations to the artists were rather different from blind beliefs, obsessions, and personality-cults. The religious comparison was *never* used as a description of an *interpersonal relation* between a fan and an idol – except, of course, when describing *other* fans' relations to artists, and the informants did surely not applaud these other stereotypical fans' involvement in obsessive personality-cults. The informants were simply not interested in picturing themselves as adoring anybody – neither in the religious nor the emotional sense of the word. But whereas the equation of fandom and being in love was by practically all informants taken as a personal insult, the religious parallels were sometimes used to describe positive aspects of fandom.

In fact religious references were common, especially among the Springsteen questionnaire-respondents. Expressions like conversions, evangelization, pilgrimages, or the church of Bruce were usual. Some compared the lyrics to a bible, others encouraged me to ask how being a Bruce fan was similar to being a member of a religious community, one had done a thesis on a comparison between Bruce fandom and Christianity, and concerts in particular were by several described as religious or near-religious experiences. E.g. a 41 year-old female Springsteen fan wrote:

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Manus are so incincere", thus demonstrating his Western judgement of Melanesian ideas of selfhood, as bound up with situations and heredity (Carrier 1999:28f)

<sup>29</sup> Though it may not be apparent the latter part of the quotation is actually the full answer to a question of positive things brought into the life of the respondent through fandom.



*Going to a Bruce concert is the closest thing to a religious experience that I have ever encountered. It's all-consuming. The connection between Bruce and the audience is unmatched. When I go to Bruce shows, I meet people who feel the same way that I do and we understand each other, even though we have never met. It's like attending an intimate party with 20.000 (or however many) close friends that you don't even know (That probably doesn't make sense, but it is the only way I can explain it). It also gives me a triple shot of faith. (Bruce-respondent 230)*

The woman is using the religious comparison to refer to a bond *between Bruce and the whole audience*, and in order to illustrate *an intimacy between many*. She, like many other fans, found the religious parallel useful when seeking to pinpoint one of the crucial aspects in fandom – *being many feeling a bond to the same and to each other simultaneously*. Music could whether listened to at home or experienced during concerts, ease the balance of being one among many. It could induce a sense of being part of the whole, of belonging among and being understood by others, be it the musicians, the other fans, or both. When used to address this double-directed affection, or the sense of relating to one and to many simultaneously, the religious parallel was used and approved.

The religious parallels were not as common among Cliff Richard fans as among the rest of the informants, which might be due to the fact that Cliff is a devoted Christian and so are many of his fans. Although nobody mentioned blasphemy, one of the reasons for Cliff fans using religious comparisons less than other fans may be that some Cliff fans found such a comparison blasphemous. But blasphemy is not primarily insulting to the individual – it is insulting to God, and blasphemy did not seem to be what concerned the majority of the informants. E.g. the male informant quoted above was clearly not concerned with rejecting the religious parallel in order to avoid insulting God. He found the religious parallel *personally* insulting and was definitely not interested in constructing and presenting himself as deifying anybody. The problem with the comparison between fandom and religion seemed to be exactly, that the artists were *human beings of flesh and blood*, why the informants did of course in their reflections and presentations of self consider normative ideals for relations between human beings. None of the informants were interested in presenting themselves as relating to other people as gods. When used in connection with the personalities of the singers, the religious comparison was considered

insulting, but the informants were possibly even more against being seen as in love than being seen as religious. The religious comparison leaves open the possibility of understanding fandom as something spiritual, communal, guiding, or moral, whereas the being-in-love-explanation suggests the singer *as a person* to be what attracts the fan. Furthermore the being-in-love-interpretation suggests the informants to be under an emotional pressure of establishing an interpersonal dyad, why the ideals of the pure relation are induced full force as a measuring scale for a relation that qualifies very poorly.

Being in love is an emotion, an embodied social relation calling for action and adjustment – a mutual and affectionate dyad must urgently be established. Being in love does therefore in itself suggest the individual to *need* affection from a specific other, and being needy is not a good reference in a modern Western presentation of the self (Kierkegaard 1986:276), which has to be autonomous and independent (Giddens 1999b:78ff; Carrier 1999:36). Being in love with someone unobtainable who does not reciprocate the affection, suggests being both needy and unfulfilled – and western individuals are held responsible for living rich and fulfilling lives (Giddens 1999a:75,79). Being in love with famous unobtainable artists, who earn money selling music, may be seen as sign of being both needy, unfulfilled, and inappropriately seeking affectionate relations in the wrong sphere of exchange. Being in love with famous artists does so to say go against all modern Western ideas of how emotions are appropriately exchanged – that is in private, non-economical, mutual, and equal dyads established between two autonomous and sentimental selves. Therefore it is quite understandable that the informants found it important not to be seen as being in love with their idols – had they accepted this understanding of their fandom, they would have presented themselves in a very unfortunate way. But what is noticeable is, that the rejection of being in love, was a rejection of *desiring* a dyad – no attempts to establish one had necessarily been made.

When fans gave individual gifts to artists there was due to the number of fans a substantial risk, that the artists would reject their gifts and the emotions behind

them<sup>30</sup>. But even without any gifts having been given and rejected, the informants expected to be seen as people whose affection for another person was not reciprocated, and they did not want to make unreciprocated affection part of their construction and presentation of self. The pure relation is supposed to be equal and mutual as regards exchange of signs of affection and emotional involvement. It is so to say a matter of mattering equally much to each other, or of "standing each other out" from the crowd by considering each other worthy to love or befriend.

The establishment of intimate dyads, which are approximated to the pure ideal, can, as I have argued, be a way in which individuals can manage the balance of being one among many, as each partner is by the other stood out from the crowd. As such, the pure relation, which is in Western modernity celebrated and acknowledged, offers *an ideal model for a position outside the crowd – not within it*. The pure relation is intimately linked to the Western idealization of uniqueness and outstanding personalities: Each partner is provided with an outstanding position in the conscious world of the other. It is through the exchange of gifts or signs of affection that individuals are socially stood out and confirmed special, outstanding, and unique.

But surely, in order for a self to be socially confirmed outstanding, the signs of affection have to be given to exactly this self. Feeling directly addressed by listening to music, which is directed to anyone or no one in particular may ease the balance between being one and being one of many in ones own conscious world, but it does not provide a socially approved solution to the paradox. Outstandingness has to be *given* directly to a specific self – it cannot be taken or bought, but has to be given from one sentimental self to another in the warm sphere of exchange, mutually and reciprocally. Western individuals, according to the pure ideal, are not supposed to stand out, deify, love, or adore another person, without being stood out in return.

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<sup>30</sup> A head of security, whom I interviewed, actually explained that usually all gifts, thrown upon stage during concerts, were left behind by the artists precisely because accepting them would be the same as accepting a private relation with the individual givers – and the artists were usually not interested in establishing private relations with their fans.

The informants were aware of those moral rules, and the blank rejections of being in love can be seen as negotiation of self. The informants were not interested in constructing and presenting themselves as feeling unreciprocated affection for another individual. They wanted to present themselves as people living rich and fulfilling lives, not as emotionally unsatisfied people desperately seeking affirmation without getting it. They knew, that they were crowd-members and would by others be seen as such, why they were searching for a parallel that allowed them to be crowd-members without being reduced to the excluded background against which others stood out by reciprocating each others emotions and gifts. In some cases, when rinsed for obsessions with personalities, the religious comparison could serve this goal - religious communities have room for the many, and no visible or authentic signs of affectionate reciprocation are required. But precisely because the singers are humans, the ideal pure relation kept being the ideal in terms of which the informants reflexively measured and judged themselves. I did not compare fandom to being in love – they did.

The sudden remarks about not being in love with the artists shows that the informants, irrespective of what they felt when listening to music or went to concerts, expected me to think of affection as something appropriately exchanged in non-economical, private, mutual, and equal dyads. They assumed me to see them as needy people, hopelessly in love or craving for a friendship with a famous singer who did not reciprocate their affection, and who was paid to convey and mass produce emotions. They expected me to evaluate their core-selves according to whether or not the relations in which they were emotionally involved were living up to the pure ideal, and they knew that their relations to the artists would not qualify.

Thus, the uninvited rejections of being in love actually support Carriers point – the pure relation *is* the ideal with which we think and speak of affectionate relations, and it *is* a norm against which people reflexively judge themselves and each other. The informants related to this ideal all the time – both in their attempts to repay the artists in the modality of gift-exchange, in their attempts to stand out and meet the artists on equal and mutual terms, in their denials of being controlled by relations to singers or gazing others, and in their uninvited rejections of being in love.

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# Conclusion

In the introduction I drew attention to an existential paradox of balancing between on the one hand experiencing oneself as the epicenter in one's own conscious world and on the other hand being aware of being just one out of many. I have argued that music fandom reflects one version of this balance, and throughout the thesis I have examined how fans negotiate and reflect upon their relation to the many in a complicated network of intermingled intersubjectivities, including relations between people as well as abstract notions of stereotypes and cultural ideals.

I have argued that music can be felt as an embodied social relation – and in some cases listening to music can itself ease the balance between being one and being one of many. Some described how listening to a specific artist made them feel directly addressed, special, or unique. Others explained how the music made them feel understood, created a sense of belonging, or made them feel part of the whole. Whether the music was described as making the listener feel unique and different from the crowd, or making him/her feel part of the crowd, it can surely be seen as easing the balance. The listener is provided with an imaginary place in relation to the many – inside or outside the crowd. Yet, most of the informants were not content with an imaginary solution to the paradox. The emotions induced by the music called for action and adjustment of the total person's relation to the *social* world.

During concerts the relation between the one and the many were given physical form. Both ways of relating to the many were possible to experience - a good concert induced a sense of merging with or emerging from the many. In some cases there was little contradiction between these two ways of relating to the crowd, but in other cases the desire stand out created a quite competitive atmosphere. Each wanted to attract attention and be noticed by the artists – fans are not merely seeking to get close to stage in order to see better, but also in order to *be seen* better.

Based on the analysis of standing out I have argued that the pure relation can be seen as an arrangement through which two people "stand each other out" from the crowd, and therefore that the establishment of a pure relation can ease the balance between experienced uniqueness and awareness of being one of the many, as each partner's inner self is through signs of affection from the other confirmed special by one on the background of the excluded many. Each partner is through the exchange of affection provided with a social confirmation of being outstanding and important in the conscious world of the other. *The Western idea of pure relations does thus not provide a model for a position within the many, but a model for a position in a dyad outside the many.*

The Western idea of the autonomous self is also a model for a position outside the many, but in a quite self-referential way. The informants did not and could not challenge the normative proscription of autonomy, and the balance between various possible external influences proved to be impossible to solve unless the autonomy was ascribed to an inner spring of self. Yet, autonomy was in spite of being ascribed to an inner spring indeed negotiated intersubjectively, and usually the self was "proven" autonomous by positioning it *against others*.

The ideal proscribing selves to be autonomous is as I have shown a quite bulletproof construction, and the pure relation follows in a close race as regards self-referentiality. Both are intimately linked to a cultural celebration of uniqueness and outstanding personalities, why they would be meaningless without a notion of a crowd. Clearly, the many pursue uniqueness and social recognition of uniqueness in similar ways, which shows how the Western strive to escape crowd-memberships insures more or less the opposite. But that does not mean that the two corresponding ideal models provide a culturally acknowledged way of reflexively constructing the self as a crowd-member. None of these ideals provide a recipe for a place within the many. They provide ideal models for positions outside the many. According to these two ideals Western individuals are not supposed to solve existential problems by merging with crowds, but by emerging from crowds. Social recognition is supposed to be a confirmation of outstandingness rather than similarity.

Surely, Western modernity is pervaded by mass phenomena – music fandom is just one of them. But mass phenomena and crowd-memberships correspond poorly to the ideals of autonomy, individuality, and outstandingness. Western modernity is not characterized by an absence of crowds or mass phenomena, but by an absence of a cultural approval of such phenomena. The Frankfurt school and Cultural Studies, though disagreeing on a number of issues, did come together on one subject, namely in their celebration of autonomy – the Frankfurt school bemoaning the lack of autonomy and criticality among the masses, and representatives from Cultural Studies enthusiastically attempting to prove them wrong. But mass phenomena are not only criticized between academics. The informants in this study were themselves against submitting their individuality to crowd memberships, were eagerly attempting to present themselves as autonomous, and condemned other “stereotypical” fans who apparently did not succeed in similar attempts. Additionally mass consumption, mass movements, and mass media are regularly criticized in mass media (!).

Thus, although music and other mass mediated products evoking emotions are popular, and may in some cases provide the consumer with an imaginary position inside or outside the many by inducing a sense of uniqueness or belonging or both, such solutions to existential problems are exactly not culturally approved. Outstandingness is approved, but the attractive position outside the crowd is not entirely in the hands of each individual, it is not something free to take or buy – it has to be *given* by someone other than self.

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# Abstract

**The One and the Many** - a study in music fandom and self - is based on fieldwork among fans of various ages, both sexes, and favoring different artists, though most of the informants are either Bruce Springsteen fans or Cliff Richard fans.

The thesis includes a short sketch of theories of mass consumption and studies of popular culture (exemplified by The Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies), as well as theories dealing specifically with music fandom. On the background of these various approaches it is argued that fans must of course be seen as members of a larger community, why the thesis is both a study of a particular phenomenon and of the society in which it occurs.

In the analysis primacy is given to relations, and the theoretical tools include Anthony Giddens' notion of "the pure relationship", James Carrier's writings on the modern notion of friendship, classical anthropological theories of exchange, as well as various theories of emotions and selfhood.

Through an analysis of music fandom, it is demonstrated that music can be felt as an embodied social relation calling for conscious action and adjustment between the experiencing person and the social world. Cultural ideals for interpersonal relations and people in them are invoked, and the adjustments as well as reflections expressed about them, refer to these ideals.

Some fans seek to adjust the felt social relation evoked by music, by repaying the singers in the modality of gift-exchange, although they have actually bought and paid their records! Therefore it is argued that Western modernity can be characterized with two spheres of exchange, which are morally held apart. One sphere is for the exchange of emotions, the other for money and trade. By repaying in the modality of gift-exchange, the fans attempt to avoid mixing money and emotions, and seek to



place the relation between themselves and the artists in the appropriate sphere of exchange.

Fans also attempt to adjust the relations between themselves, the artist, and the crowd during concerts – either by merging with the crowd (*communitas*) or by emerging from it (standing out). Standing out refers to experiences of being individually pointed out among many by an artist (e.g. by catching attention during a show). Based on an analysis of standing out, it is argued that the Western idea of the pure relation – a voluntarily established, non-economical, mutual, and equal dyad – too presupposes a crowd of anonymous others from which two people can "stand each other out".

The latter part of the thesis is an examination of fans' presentations of themselves and the relations in which they take part. It is demonstrated that when fans seek to balance between on the one hand presenting themselves as standing up to their fandom, and on the other hand seeking to avoid being seen as too "fan-like", the issue at stake is an insoluble attempt to present the self as autonomous. Based on this analysis it is shown that the modern Western norm proscribing individuals to be independent is a contradictory cultural construction, which cannot be challenged as attacking it is obeying it. The only solution to the paradox is to see autonomy as springing from within, why the Western idea of the autonomous self implies a corresponding idea of an inner self. Yet, while many of the informants present themselves as essentially autonomous, autonomy is indeed negotiated intersubjectively – usually by positioning the self *against* the influence of others.

Finally, it is shown that the inner self, which is socially confirmed to be special through the establishment of a pure relation, is also the self, which is at risk in gift-exchange. In Western modernity a rejected gift is a rejection of forming an affectionate relation with the inner self of the giver. But as gifts are just *expressions* of affection, it is further argued that not only unreciprocated gifts, but also unreciprocated affection is belittling to the self. When fans uninvitedly deny being in love with their idols, it can therefore be seen as attempts to avoid being measured against the pure relation - they know that their relation to the artist will not qualify.

Yet, they relate to the ideal pure dyad themselves – both in their attempts to repay the singers with gifts, in their attempts to stand out, and in their unprompted denials of being in love.

Throughout the thesis fandom is linked to an existential question, addressed by Michael Jackson – how does the individual cope with the awareness of being one out of many, similar, yet different? The thesis shows that two important Western ideals – the autonomous self, and the pure relation – can be seen as culturally acknowledged models for solving the existential paradox. But both of them provide models for positions *outside* the crowd, rather than *within* it. Fans, like other Westerners, seek in various ways to present themselves as living up to these ideals of outstandingness, but in doing so they end up acting alike. They end up in the Western crowd of individuals who seek to be different in similar ways.

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