CHRIS ROJEK

PRESUMED
INTIMACY

PARA-SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MEDIA, SOCIETY
& CELEBRITY CULTURE

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Living with Statistical Men and Women

Modern democracy is speared with a sharp paradox. Formally, it is a body of life and blood equals, primarily consisting, at the level of experience, of empty apparitions. For the greater part we are oblivious to the details of the real circumstances and destines of the human species of which we are a part. Yet we glimpse fractured aspects of them through media transmissions of various sorts. It is certainly not out of the question that we may be moved by the apparent circumstances, conveyed via the media, relating to multitudes of people, who we have never met, do not know and, in all probability, will *never* know. For a variety of reasons, relating chiefly to the force of the media in organizing moral density, we may have the temerity to feel that we *belong* to their story and vice versa. Notwithstanding this, for the most part we confine ourselves to issues surrounding our families and friends. Of course, some of us are passionately devoted to justice and matters of human dignity involving the lives of others. Nearly everyone respects a person of this stamp, even if they disagree with their specific political views. However, despite paying lip service to venerated Enlightenment ideals of individual responsibility and civic action, we are wary, highly provisional, travellers in the art of global human fellowship. The global media provide an outline of the conditions of the lives of the aggregate. As watchers we are party to the shallow surface of what we see. Because the TV eye and the world wide web seems to be empowering in exposing data for us, we may even affect to grasp a little bit more than the ordinary person might know about what is going on, out there in the world of people who are separated from us by the magnitude of distance. [1] Some of us

care enough to dig deeper. There are cases of individuals in the afflu-ent societies of the West forsaking all, to engage in struggles that are situated way beyond their doorstep. A case in point is the activism and horrific death of the 23-year-old American protester, Rachel Corrie, killed in 2003 by an Israeli armoured bulldozer, while protest-ing against the policies of Palestinian land clearance. [2] The Rachel Corries of this world are brave, idealistic, worthy of our respect. [3] Still, they are very much exceptions to the rule. We may register global emergencies, injustice and suffering but for the most part we let them pass us by as distant, glancing relations having no direct, durable bearing on our personal responsibilities or sense of self. This is not necessarily a cause for self-reproach. How can knowledge of the global aggregate be anything other than shallow? The numbers in the world are so huge and diverse that their details exceed the capacity of the individual brain to capture them. We identify with the lives of others, but only with strings attached. Our lives, and the lives of those immediate relations who depend upon us, impose obli-gations and duties that are too relentless and unyielding. Their clamour for our attention, even while we register and feel for the pain and mortality of others, is insistent. So we devote the greater part of our lives to pursuing our narrow, private ends and those of the kith and kin networks to which we are attached.

However, global media society insistently imposes a counter-life upon us. We are constant, often furtive, watchers of the lives of others. Usually, we become activated only when the media seize upon an event, episode, incident or emergency deemed worthy of public attention. Even then, our emotional connection is tenuous and capri-cious. We live in a world of statistical men and women. Typically, our leaders speak of abstract numbers, rather than flesh and blood people, and champion or condemn them through briefings via press attachés and researchers rather than direct experience. There is a real sense in which relations in democracy are stamped with the mark of being once removed. Much of the mandate for official action is sheer word magic. The political challenge in the art of political rhetoric is to utter passable empathy with others. The combination of democ-racy and the global media impose presumed intimacies of the counter-life upon us. Not to care about the lives of others, or the condition of the planet, is to risk being stigmatized as selfish, irresponsible and heartless. Fiormanti (2014) shows convincingly that credit ratings, growth figures and other 'hard data' have a powerful influence in public debate. But he also raises the point that these numbers are often misleading and are typically *selectively* constructed and applied in order to suit the needs of vested interests. Presumed intimacy can

be a political tool. It gains votes. In public life its assembly and presentation often follow hidden agendas. Global statistical men and women constitute a multi-dimensional category. Yet they are generally politically represented too us in no more than one or two dimensions. Can we really know the lives of those who live in politically troubled areas such as Sudan, Syria, the Gaza or North Korea? Can we truly grasp the actual context in which they find themselves or the indivertible forces which they confront (with only a slender chance for inserting their own agency to make a difference)? Yet governments and activists reduce complexity by making schematic statements about the lives of others in these geo-political hot spots. This should not be a cause for surprise. Social statistics are not independent of social relationships. Rather, the correct way to analyse and understand them is to see them as products of social relationships (Best 2001). If we incubate and exhibit presumed intimacy for the lives of others, it is partly because our propensities in these respects are framed by political leaders and media pundits. It would be rash to proclaim that the fundamentals here are new. Humans have always passed their lives with others who are obscurely acknowledged, but never encountered. They are impenetrable features of our social landscape. Their co-existence is recognized as a fact of life, but it hardly prohibits us from going about our own lives. It has been ever thus. At the same time, possessing awareness about the lives of others is a more prominent aspect of what might be called, *favoured identity*, that is, the positive status differentiation which represents a relevant, decent, caring person. The sheer volume of data about the lives of others that we are privy to, is unprecedented. Everyday cable, satellite and other forms of digital communication carry fact-finding bulletins and op-ed pieces on conditions in distant places, the geography, culture, religion and history of which are fuzzy to us, but about which we feel obscurely connected. Numerical force is frequently the basis for moral force.

News about the lives of others is often troubling or downright bad. The media tend to concentrate upon dramatic episodes that correlate with high human interest potential because this is what wins ratings wars. In communicating troubling data to us, they have developed codes of propriety and conventions of disclosure to convey and register emotions in an approved, acceptable manner. These instruments of exchange marry up with emotional management technologies developed in professions and occupations where handling and communicating bad news is a significant element in case-load performance (Furedi 2003). In this study, the term *presumed intimacy* will be used to refer to the skills required to provide concrete feedback

to an individual who has done something wrong, to deliver bad news to those who may be dismayed or troubled by it, and to assert authority over those with whom one disagrees at work or in other public settings. It is a tool to smooth-out awkward situations and avoid negative or destructive behaviour. Typically, it works through the disclosure of empathy and offers an action plan to overcome blockages, disruptions or difficulties of one sort or another. In a wired-up world, where more people are in one way or another in touch with each other than ever before, it is ubiquitous. Agents of persuasion use statistics about the relationships of opportunity, risk and threat with statistical men and women as the pretext for moral and economic action. The role of the media in delineating these issues for the public is decisive. However, framing only has purchase because we spend a large part of our life alone or with others, not acting, as such, but secretly watching.

That old technological determinist, Marshall McLuhan (2001) knew this only too well. He famously speculated that 'cool' technologies of audio-visual communication would galvanize human sympathy, break down social, political and cultural divisions and create 'the global village'. For McLuhan, it was inevitable that watchers of the world would unite. History has not turned out like that. On the contrary, cool technologies have proved fully compatible with thin readings of social reality. Greater data about the lives of others does not necessarily assist sound moral judgements or moral action. Our lives are passed in a condition of data overload. Under its sway, we find it difficult to work out what data to believe and what to question and reject. The more informed we are, the more we hedge our bets, since we are conscious that the information upon which our perspective is founded is necessarily partial. For every point of view, there is a counter-point of view. Modern men and women are mostly sharply conscious that they lack the knowledge and time to decide on global issues by themselves. Democracy is a proxy form of government which empowers elected representatives to take these decisions for us, and to subject themselves to accountability via the due electoral process. This has ramifications for the emotional density of the counter-life they share with others.

Amid a sense of obscurity about the lives of statistical men and women, naked fear is an element that it would be unwise to underrate. Since 9/11 the West has learnt to view globalization more widely than questions of deregulation and outsourcing. [4] The terrorist threat, itself mostly obscure, is acutely stressed by the authorities, especially in metropolitan cultures. Vigilance and awareness are promoted as public necessities. It is short sighted to soldier on without

even a dim awareness of the world out there and the hidden risks that it conceals. But it is a peculiar feature of modern life that this awareness, which can be like lighting blue touchpaper when it comes to emotional transference, is actually a darkling place where it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. 9/11 has been instrumental in standing the logic of vulnerability upon its head. We are inured to thinking of men and women in the developing world as worthy recipients of aid. The unbearable, patronizing backdraft of this outwardly benign Western outlook has been rightly deplored by critics (Moyo 2009). Now the statistical men and women who share our world may take our jobs, claim welfare benefits that we have paid for and may plot and take steps to kill us. *Removed intimacy* is the opposite side of the coin of presumed intimacy. That is, the social condition in which presumed intimacy based in care and respect for the lives of statistical men and women is withdrawn and inverted by redefining them as a threat or risk.

This darkling sensibility in the public mind is exploited and developed by political leaders of all stripes. Presumed intimacy can turn into aggression in the wink of an eye. It also points to something sociologically important, and little considered, in the ways that we go about relating to others in the world. What does it mean to live with statistical apparitions? And how is this category used by leaders for the ends of power and influence? And what does it mean to be a furtive watcher?

Familiar Strangers

Goffman (1963) put 'the nod count' (the number of people with whom we are on 'nodding terms'), at a hundred. The core consists of primary relationships with family and friends. Nonetheless, a considerable proportion fall into the fascinating and little understood category of 'familiar strangers' (Milgram 1992: 67–9). That is, persons who populate our known social landscape, yet with whom we never interact beyond a glancing recognition. Like the famous 'lost letter experiment', the subject reveals Milgram's lifelong interest in the nature of modern altruism. [5] The springboard for this research question was the anonymous people Milgram saw regularly on the station platform where he caught his subway train into Manhattan. The familiar stranger relationship is not the absence of a relationship, but a 'special kind of frozen relationship' (Milgram 1971: 71). Basic to it is a history of principled non-communication and the acceptance of this as the normal state of affairs. This supports a system of

non-negotiated, restraining conventions which is mutually accepted, but turns out to be rather odd on closer inspection. For example, you are more likely to ask a total stranger for the time than a person that you have seen for years but never spoken to. Why? What is the inhibition that stops us from asking someone who we have watched as a familiar stranger for months or years, and what is behind the preference for asking a *bona fide* stranger? Doubtless, it is a matter of not wishing to be emotionally beholden to familiar strangers. The glance or the nod are enough.

Still, Milgram held that in exceptional circumstances familiar strangers may become 'real people'. As an example, he (1992: 68) refers to a woman who slipped and hurt herself on a Brooklyn street, close by her apartment. She had been known as a familiar stranger by another resident for years. The resident immediately came to the assistance of the woman. Not only that, she organized an ambulance and accompanied her to the hospital to ensure that she received proper care. This suggests that triggering real interaction seems to be associated with out-of-routine encounters. Yet typically, the chief identifying characteristic of familiar strangers is that they remain recognized but unknown to us. By extension, we do not want to know more about them.

The analytical import of Milgram's discussion is that there are latent 'background expectancies' in social relationships with persons who are manifest to us as strangers in everyday life. [6] There are unwritten rules that govern the extent of our moral involvement with men and women that we do not directly know. Familiar strangers seem to switch to direct encounters only when a crisis or emergency occurs. Milgram (1971: 74) is very much a man of his time in posing the question: 'Is there any way to promote solidarity without having to rely on emergencies and crises?' However, this over-dramatizes the occasions in which familiar strangers become 'real people' for us. For example, should you bump into the man who has sold your bottle of mineral water to you for years, some form of greeting, more elaborate than a nod, is highly likely. The decisive factor in unfreezing the relationship is not the presence of an emergency or crisis, but a de-routinized encounter. Yet in our day the question of using this as a basis for constructing solidarity seldom arises. Routine and semi-detachment are ascendant. When they do break down can we really be certain that it leads to emotionally satisfying, durable relationships? As we shall see in the last chapter of the book, the de-routinization that accompanied the *Occupy* demonstrations in the autumn and winter of 2011 to 2012 established the broad notions of the 99 per cent and the one per cent. But at the society-wide level

there is little evidence that the notion of the 99 per cent has endured. It has not moved from a rhetorical interjection to revitalize civic life into an actual, meaningful force capable of marshalling and directing transformative collective behaviour.

The research front that Milgram does not expand very much, is the question: What role do the media play in humanizing familiar strangers by introducing new categories of screen amity and fluid sub-communities organized around celebrity culture and the counter life of recognition with the lives of others? To be clear, our immediate environment remains peopled with familiar strangers with whom a nod count still means something. At the same time, the field of screen apparitions in life has multiplied and vastly grown. With *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat* and other social networking sites and digital chat rooms, we live under the illusion of 'being connected'. Celebrity culture *is* the global village of the present day (McLuhan 2001). Most of us may have nothing but a vague knowledge of rural life conditions on the Ivory coast or political relations in the Ukraine, but we know about the Kim (Kardashian) sex tapes and how Kim is handling the challenges of motherhood with West, her baby daughter; and we are aware of what Chris (Martin) and Gwynneth (Paltrow) went through in their 'conscious decoupling' and the tough road they face in bringing up their children on different sides of the Atlantic. Celebrity culture insistently imposes onto our radar private, emotional data relating to public figures who are socially and geographically remote. We feel close to them, or at least, well informed about key aspects of their private lives. You may be totally unaware of the personal traumas being faced by the person who works in the office with you, but you know what Mel Gibson and Oscar Pistorius went through in their respective, very different trials with the media. The cases of celebrity culture and statistical men and women require a rethink of both Goffman's notion of 'nod count' and Milgram's concept of 'familiar strangers'. Unprecedented media expansion constitutes a technological re-casting of relationships with others, which is partially based in a history of principled *non-communication*. One interesting aspect of this is social networking. This has contributed much to our general sense of being connected. We receive postings from people we may know slightingly, or who post because they share the same surname, or went to the same school or university. Even if we make no direct response we are conscious of these wraith-like presences in the background. Yet, while we record communication with others in this format, we do not necessarily reciprocate. We are conscious of relationships, but we deal with them by principled non-communication.

An embarrassing irony for the philosophy of modern liberalism is that the concept of individual autonomy to which it cleaves is articulated at a moment in which consciousness of co-presence is greater than ever before. Even the most diehard neo-liberal is conscious of being *alone, together*. Consecutive to the autonomy to act however I please, so long as it does not damage the interests and wellbeing of others, is now a freedom to record the intention of others to communicate with me without my taking any action whatsoever to reciprocate. Certainly, social networking makes Goffman's nod count of a hundred seem hopelessly outdated. The disconnected awareness we have of familiar strangers has proliferated and become more hierarchical, with layers of celebrity culture and ranks of statistical men and women crowding in for our attention. It is part of the social landscape and contributes to our sense of modern personal and social order. Yet, save for exceptional circumstances, we go through our whole lives without making contact, and with no more than superficial, fleeting knowledge of the apparitions and the actual conditions of life in which they are situated. Even in the closer world of celebrity culture, we scarcely have the means of discovering what is really going on in the lives of public figures. Which, of course, is not to say that, as with statistical men and women, they are not without weight in the cultural, political and economic conduct of our everyday lives.

Conversely, it must be granted that social networking partly unfreezes the essence of not knowing, which Milgram (1971) attributed to the concept of familiar strangers. Social networking is not only about recording, snooping, the absence of communication or the political positioning of a measureless entity to support vested interests. It is a relatively new form of communication and social association. Its format encourages exchanges that reward displays of personal disclosure and *screen amity*. As with the pen-friend culture of old snail-mail days, screen amity is perfectly capable of building ties with people separated from each other by great spatial and cultural magnitude. But why bother with a pen friend when you have instant contact available to Skype at your fingertips? Through these means we may acquire a deeper sense of the lives of others. Yet the exchange is not natural. It does not unfold in the way that a direct, physically co-present relationship develops. It is a semi-detached, removed relationship, which often complies, in obvious ways, with the logic of commercial media culture. For many of us, screen friends are becoming more numerous. It is too early to reach conclusions about how they influence moral density, that is, our awareness of the mutual rights and obligations that obtain between

people. Yet unquestionably, their presence constitutes a new relational hub in 'society'.

During the course of this, old notions of co-presence are being recast. An interesting new insight into this may be gleaned from work on new digital technologies of communication. Researchers into the psychological and social consequences of webcam have devised the concept of the technology being 'always on'. (Miller and Sinanan 2014: 54–60). That is, webcam is left in the background while we get on with cleaning the house, cooking or writing an essay, without paying attention or having a direct conversation with the pixillated other. Webcam is therefore compatible with two types of intimacy. The first is face-to-face, often intense, conversation. The second is 'the intimacy of taking for granted the co-presence of the other' (Miller and Sinanan 2014: 55). A few words of explanation are necessary. When we are 'always on' we are digitally co-present, but physically absent from our nominated interlocutor. But what does it mean to be 'co-present' in these circumstances? We allow a webcam interlocutor or a webcam familiar stranger into our dwelling space, just as we bring our boss in our work appraisals 'into confidence' about the reasons for not reaching our work targets having to do with personal relationship problems. A new gestural economy has emerged in which a high degree of personal disclosure is accepted as a quality of good civility. But it is by no means clear if disclosure is clarifying reality or a personal technique to manipulate outcomes.

So, to summarize, since Goffman's day, the nod count of familiar strangers has grown massively and proliferated new relations of presumed intimacy. New media have augmented the social presence of statistical men and women, and celebrities. These 'familiar strangers' are people with whom there is no history, and little obvious prospect, of communication in the social landscape. Not all forms of social networking avoid principled non-communication. The type of communication that occurs, its intensity and social meaning, is the subject for another study. In this book my focus is upon emotional relations in which the history of communication takes the form of principled non-communication. Despite permeating into our lives mostly as screen presences, the subjects with whom we do not communicate and have no history of communication are not blank slates. To be sure, a characteristic of modern life is that we often know a good deal about the private lives of others, *before* we meet them. The data about statistical men and women are certainly uneven, but can be accessed without too much trouble. A visit to *Wikipedia* now provides a window on a good deal of the world. Of course,

much is left out of *Wikipedia* accounts. But that is precisely the point about the social category of statistical men and women; that is, in our counter-life as secret watchers we do not need or, generally, seek to access, anything more than superficial data about them. Flanking this category, is the qualitatively distinct category of celebrity culture. This is also defined by a history of non-communication. But, unlike the category of statistical men and women, interaction with celebrity culture is with famous personalities, about whom much private data percolates into, and is retained by, the public domain. Celebrity blogging sites and web chat rooms affect to offer a backstage pass to the real lives of the famous. They provide the patina of emotional closeness that affords status differentiation for participants. In the case of celebrities and statistical men and women, social interaction around presumed intimacy is commonplace. The emotional intensity of this interaction varies according to setting and content. If a celebrity is involved in a scandal, or statistical men and women are caught up in an 'incident' or 'emergency', our emotional interest magnifies. In both cases our response is aided, abetted and some might say, orchestrated by the media. The remarkable thing to note, which is the real subject of this book, is that personal, emotional involvement occurs without a history of communication or any real prospect of direct communication. We live our lives with familiar strangers. The relationships that we have with them are second order, that is they are not based in bloodline or direct kinship. Nevertheless, at the level of meaning, they often give our lives direction and a rewarding sense of place and purpose. Yet familiar strangers are also apparitions whom we never encounter and never really get to know.

Moral Density and Human Sympathy

Since they obviously influence the emotional composition of populations, statistical men and women and celebrities have bearing upon moral density. That is, the background expectancies of obligations and responsibilities that we recognize with each other. In the history of non-communication a palpable moral dimension exists. In its original formulation, Durkheim (2013: 202) insisted that moral density is inextricably tied to physical density. As the division of labour concentrates populations into urban settings, with well-defined national boundaries, 'the mutual acting and reacting with one another', which is the basis of moral density, increases. 'This act of drawing together morally', writes Durkheim (2013: 202) 'can only

bear fruit if the real distance between individuals has itself diminished'. The awareness of moral density is enshrined in human rights legislation and debates. However, the dynamics that compel us to exercise these moral provisions in the form of concrete action are fuzzy. Nearly everyone would say that they feel some sort of responsibility to help those who are in urgent need. But this is again, closely bound up with issues of setting, content and hidden motivation. Our responses are structured by presenting need as a temporary emergency, incident or episode. The questionable rider to this is that action will produce lasting solutions. In an earlier work, I coined the term 'event consciousness' to refer to an orientation to the world that presents social reality as a succession of disconnected incidents, emergencies and events (Rojek 2013). [7] Event consciousness privileges the episodic over the structural and rooted processes. Need in the third world is a grinding, perpetual sorrow that requires a major transfer of resources from affluent societies and well-off strata (Bourdieu 1999; Easterly 2007). By framing it through the lens of event consciousness, supplied via television and other branches of the media, the causes of sorrow are often mis-attributed and the solutions prepared in its name misfire. Incidents, episodes and emergencies are not adventitious. They are the result of traceable structures and identifiable processes. But this level of interpretation is confined to the lecture hall or the 'serious' media. The main currents of popular media are events or episode based.

Our lives play out amid a vast aggregate of statistical men and women. When we speak of 'aggregate' we are referring to the seven billion with whom we presently co-exist. When an emergency or incident occurs which puts some of them in danger, through, for example famine, earthquake, industrial catastrophe, most of us immediately empathize with them. We have a relationship of presumed intimacy with them, which proceeds on the basis that we 'know' their pain, we 'care' and we are prepared to 'act'. The same species of presumed intimacy prevails for many of us in our relationships with celebrities. Because we know so much more about their private lives, it is apt to be more intense and enduring. Some of us follow the private lives of stars like Rhiannon, Lana Del Ray, Justin Bieber, Oscar Pistorius, Kanye West or Kim Kardashian, so that they become virtual members of our kith and kin networks to whom, in some cases, we maintain life-long attachments. How are we to explain the contagion of emotions that pass with the utmost ease and facility from one person to another when physically and socially remote statistical men and women or superstars are portrayed as being at risk?

One answer emerged over two and a half centuries ago. It was provided by the philosopher David Hume (1742). In common with other Enlightenment figures, he sought to develop the concept of society as a community of moral and material interests in conditions in which, through rapid industrialization, competing individual interests and prejudices run amok. He found the seat of community in the passions, especially the capacity for sympathy. For Hume (1742) sympathy is a natural passion without which human society cannot abide or prosper. Sympathy extends beyond the affect of limited company to describe all social relations. It runs through human confederacy like blood through a vein.

On this account then, there is no real surprise at the transfer of emotions. For Hume, human sympathy is innate. When one of us ships water, natural sympathy produces a 'correspondent feeling' in 'all human breasts' (Hume 1742). Adam Smith (1790: 10, 12) too defined human sympathy as 'our fellow feeling with any passion whatsoever . . . (which) derives from . . . the situation which excites it'. So there you have it. In the classical Enlightenment tradition, the transfer of emotions is a reflection of the innate quality of human sympathy that enables everyone to recognize vulnerability and suffering when the circumstances arise. Routinely, we may think of ourselves as separate, self-absorbed individuals. But when a crisis and emergency occurs we come through in our true colours and assume the mantle of 'team world'. This account possesses a high feel-good factor, because it points to a common thread of human decency running through life. By the same token it is obviously unsatisfactory. For decency is not always applied when others are obviously in pain and distress. We may profess to feel their pain, to care and to act when statistical men and women or celebrities are in *extremis*. But on a society-wide basis, action is very uneven, and for most, may run no deeper than a glib statement of sympathy.

Hume (1751) himself later moderated his position. He found himself wondering if sympathy in mankind is not in fact unequally distributed by the same social divisions that divide people into what he referred to as 'clubs and companies' (Mullan 1988). In other words, he came to believe that the intensity of human sympathy is not universal. Rather, it is rationed via social attachments and choices. We care for others, but we do not do so equally or indiscriminately. Smith (1790) added a further reservation by proposing that the intensity of sympathy is an inverse of physical and social distance. The capacity to imaginatively 'change places with the sufferer' (Smith 1790: 10), diminishes with physical and social magnitude. That is, generally speaking, human sympathy for our kith and kin and fellow

countrymen and countrywomen is greater than for people who are not connected to us by bloodline or who are foreign nationals. In fine, Hume and Smith recognized equilibrium between physical *proximity* and human sympathy. Where physical proximity is absent, both took the view that emotional disequilibrium must follow. This is also, by the way, the essence of Durkheim's (2013) position in *The Division of Labour*. While we can recognize the validity of the argument to relations of sympathy in our own time, the hub of screen-friend relations and the collateral expansion of the category of statistical men and women in social consciousness through the media-sphere mean that Smith's formula of an inverse relationship between the strength of sympathy and physical distance can no longer be taken for granted. Human sympathy has moved from merely being tied to physical proximity to co-presence. To put it in a nutshell, the instant, electronic representation of emotional need has the power to overcome the magnitude of physical distance. Particularly when exceptional circumstances obtain, statistical men and women may become symbolic *causes célèbres*, marshalled into emotionally meaningful relationships with us by a numinous *esprit de corps*. Attention has shifted from viewing sympathy as an innate characteristic of the human species to the relations of power that make emotional identification with others, with whom we have no history or prospect of communication, possible.

Para-Social Interaction

Although massively under-developed since Milgram's untimely death, the concept of familiar strangers resonates with most readers. From the 1950s, Horton and Wohl (1956) were working with the parallel idea of para-social interaction. This is a concept with more powerful emotional implications for the conventional senses of social responsibility and reciprocity than Milgram's concept of familiar strangers. It refers to relationships of presumed intimacy between media figures and network spectators. Robert Merton (1946) strayed into this ground in his account of the astonishing achievement of the singer and radio star Kate Smith who, during the Second World War, raised $39 million war bonds in a marathon of one day of broadcasting. His (1946: 83. 142) analysis noted the relationship between feigning personal concern and manipulation. He argued that in the newly emerging arena of television media figures consciously call upon audiences to become emotionally involved not only with the content of the broadcast, but to identify with them as personalities. The