In their critique of the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno identify a contradiction in Hollywood’s production of celebrities. On the one hand, film stars are crafted to appeal to the widest audience, thereby inviting identification with those figures on screen. The female starlet—Horkheimer and Adorno’s primary example—lulls female spectators into the false belief that such fame is attainable by all. On the other hand, celebrities remind spectators how minimal the chances of attaining fame truly are. Faced with this contradiction between identification and distance, filmgoers resign themselves to believing in the potential of such an ascent without seeking to realize it. Ultimately, Horkheimer and Adorno insist, celebrities further the culture industry’s manipulation of the masses.

But as the growth of celebrity studies in the last decades has shown, fame is more complex than Horkheimer and Adorno contend. More than pawns in a system of manipulation, celebrities serve as sites where power relations are open to constant re-negotiation. In other words, stars not only reinforce given social structures; they can also encourage an interaction between cultural artifacts and the public, thus opening up the potential for other forms of empowerment.

One might consider, for example, how the myths of Icarus, Prometheus, or Rumor have shaped contemporary understandings of celebrity, or how authors and their literary figures have negotiated fame. Here one thinks of Goethe’s Werther, Rilke’s Malte Laurids Brigge, or Thomas Mann’s Felix Krull. Investigations could range from conceptions of heroism in Wolfram’s _Parzival_ to Sophie von La Roche’s achieved fame through _Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim_ to the phenomenon of the _Fräuleinwunder_ surrounding _Judith Hermann, Julia Franck, and Charlotte Roche._ Discussions in the field of media studies might include Richard Dyer’s definition of the star in _Heavenly Bodies_, Andy Warhol’s statement that “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes,” or the filmic adaptation of Daniel Kehlmann’s _Ruhm_.

This year’s conference welcomes papers that examine how celebrity is produced, represented, and consumed in German literature, film, and culture.
We look forward to contributions that claim fame as an insightful category of inquiry in German Studies, a category that sheds light on how individual and social identities are generated and transformed. Defining celebrity broadly, we welcome papers that investigate the phenomenon of fame in German-language texts in all historical periods and forms of media.

Possible topics could include:

Public enemies, infamy
Celebrity biography, journalism
Obscurity and comebacks
Rumors, gossip, scandal
Authorship/Auteurism
  Celebrity, gender, race, sexuality
  Pop/cult stardom
  National, transnational celebrities
  Literary celebrity, awards
  Charisma, heroism, glory
Fan groups, idolization, stalking
Disease, death and the construction of celebrity

Please send all abstracts (250-300 words) for a 20-minute presentation along with a short biography (100 words) to Ruhm2013@gmail.com by February 10, 2013.

Papers may be presented in German or English.

Let us know if you require assistance with accommodation.

Conference organizers: Olivia Albiero, Lena Heilmann, Verena Kick, Jasmin Krakenberg, and Nathan Magnusson