The Struggle for Recognition in Times of Deep Mediatization

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the overall research question of how deep mediatization constitutes and changes, and limits or enhances, processes of and struggles for social recognition. Thus, it contributes to an emerging research area within media and communication research that utilizes and discusses social-theoretical frameworks of recognition, which have their roots in Hegelian philosophy. More specifically, the dissertation is placed within the field of mediatization research to discuss the consequences of the latest wave(s) of mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), in the form of digitalization and datafication, for recognition processes and struggles – and thus for questions of social justice and freedom in times of deep mediatization.

This discussion is approached via the development of a conceptual framework – which links recognition theorist Axel Honneth's (2014) conceptualization of freedom with Catriona Mackenzie's (2019) conceptualization of relational autonomy and Douglas Giles' (2020) concepts of affirmational and transformational recognition struggles, to differentiate between legal, moral and social models of freedom – as well as an ethnographically based case study of the everyday recognition processes and struggles of a small group of young Danish media users.

Based on the conceptual framework, a twofold analysis of the ethnographic material examines processes of affirmational struggles for recognition within what Honneth calls the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships, as well as processes of transformational recognition struggles within the institutional sphere of the political public sphere.

The analysis first presents the argument that affirmational struggles are characterised by a re-orientation of the self (Hepp, 2020); a concept which is expanded and nuanced by the conceptualization of two overlapping processes termed a *decoupling of the space of the self* and a *replacement of the space of the self*. Secondly, it is similarly argued that transformational struggles are characterised by a visibilization of the self (Tomažič, 2020); a concept which is also expanded and nuanced by the conceptualization of two overlapping processes termed *from accessibility to notability* and *from will-formation to brand-formation*.

The analysis of these processes indicates that individuals' seeking of mediated recognition in times of deep mediatization via both the re-orientation of the self and the visibilization of the self risk to undermine the social attachments and role obligations, within the aforementioned institutional spheres, that secure the forms of mutual recognition and cooperation, which Honneth (2014) terms social freedom.

In continuation of this analysis of media-related recognition processes and struggles, the dissertation finally presents the argument that the established conceptual framework can also be used to differentiate between, as well as to analyze, different suggestions of how we might secure the conditions for the good life in times of deep mediatization (via the distinction between legal, moral and social freedoms): the emphasis of legal freedom on subjective rights is manifested (in relation to media and technology) in regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation and the Digital Services Act within the EU; ideas of moral freedom provide the basis for suggestions for better media literacy; and the ideas of social freedom can be found in arguments for platform cooperativism and the public service internet.

Danish Abstract

Denne afhandling adresserer det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål, hvordan dyb medialisering konstituerer og ændrer og begrænser eller forstærker processer omkring og kampe for social anerkendelse. Dermed bidrager afhandlingen til et voksende forskningsområde inden for medie- og kommunikationsforskningen, der anvender og diskuterer socialteoretiske teorier om anerkendelse, som har deres rødder i hegeliansk filosofi. Mere specifikt er afhandlingen placeret inden for feltet medialiseringsforskning for at diskutere konsekvenserne af de(n) seneste bølge(r) af medialisering (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), i form af digitalisering og dataficering, for anerkendelsesprocesser og kampe – og dermed for spørgsmål om social retfærdighed og frihed i en verden kendetegnet af dyb medialisering.

Denne diskussion tilgås via udviklingen af en begrebsramme – som forbinder anerkendelsesteoretikeren Axel Honneths (2014) konceptualisering af frihed med Catriona Mackenzies (2019) konceptualisering af relationel autonomi samt Douglas Giles (2020) begreber om affirmative og transformationelle anerkendelseskampe, for at differentiere mellem legale, moralske og sociale frihedsmodeller – samt et etnografisk baseret casestudie af en lille gruppe unge danske mediebrugeres anerkendelsesprocesser og -kampe i hverdagen.
Med udgangspunkt i dette begrebsmæssige rammeværk bidrager afhandlingen med en todelt analyse af det etnografiske materiale, der både fokuserer på affirmative kampe for anerkendelse inden for det, Honneth kalder den institutionelle sfære af interpersonelle relationer, samt transformationelle anerkendelseskampe inden for den institutionelle sfære af den politiske offentlige sfære.

Analysen præsenterer først argumentet, at affirmative anerkendelseskampe er karakteriseret ved en re-orientering af selvet (Hepp, 2020); et begreb, som udvides og nuanceres via en konceptualisering af to overlappende processer, som bliver betegnet en *afkobling af selvets rum* og *en udskiftning af selvets rum*. På tilsvarende vis præsenteres argumentet, at transformationelle kampe er karakteriseret ved en synliggørelse af selvet (Tomažič, 2020); et koncept, som også udvides og nuanceres ved hjælp af konceptualiseringen af to overlappende processer, som betegnes *fra tilgængelighed til notabilitet* og fra *viljesdannelse til brand-dannelse*.

Analysen af disse processer indikerer, at individers søgning efter medieret anerkendelse i tider med dyb medialisering via både re-orienteringen af selvet og synliggørelsen af selvet risikerer at underminere individers sociale tilknytning og rolleforpligtelser inden for de førnævnte institutionelle sfærer, der sikrer de former for gensidig anerkendelse og samarbejde, som Honneth (2014) betegner social frihed.

I forlængelse af denne analyse af medierelaterede anerkendelsesprocesser og -kampe præsenterer afhandlingen til sidst argumentet, at den etablerede begrebsramme også kan bruges til at skelne mellem, samt til at analysere, forskellige bud på, hvordan vi kan sikre betingelserne for det gode liv i tider med dyb medialisering (via sondringen mellem legal, moralsk og social frihed): legal friheds fokus på subjektive rettigheder kommer til udtryk (i relation til medier og teknologi) i forordninger som den generelle forordning om databeskyttelse (GDPR) og forordningen om digitale tjenester (DSA) inden for EU; ideer om moralsk frihed danner grundlag for forslag om bedre medie-literacy; og ideerne om social frihed kan findes i argumenter for platformskooperativisme og et public service internet.

Contents

1 Introduction

> Recognition is a term with significant philosophical depth (Honneth 2007), although it has been little developed in the field of media studies (for an important recent exception, see Maia 2014).
>
> (Couldry et al., 2017, references in original)

The sentence quoted above was the starting point of this dissertation. It is written in a research article called 'The Public Connection Project Ten Years On', in which Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham provide a retrospective evaluation of the research on so-called *public connection* based on a research project about this phenomenon they conducted in the UK during the mid-2000s. Their original project revolved around questions of whether and how the British population had "a shared orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are, or at least should be, addressed" (Couldry et al., 2007, p. 3), and the project particularly investigated the role of media (use) in this regard. In the book from 2007 that summarizes their project, *Media Consumption and Public Engagement: Beyond the Presumption of Attention*, the three authors conclude that the problem for a democracy like the one in Britain:

> is not a 'motivation crisis' – expressed formally by Habermas (1988: 75) as a gap between the motivations required by the social system and the motivations supplied by the social-cultural system – but rather a recognition crisis, a gap between what citizens do, or would like to do, and the state's recognition of what they do.
>
> (Couldry et al., 2007, p. 189).

In their retrospective article ten years later, which was written in the summer of 2016 and published in 2017, Couldry et al. emphasize the continued relevance of their original conclusions. At the time of writing, as they point out, the UK had just voted to leave the EU, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders were frontrunners in the US presidential election, and two protest parties (Podemos and Ciudadanos) had shaken up the Spanish two-party political landscape. According to Couldry et al., these events and circumstances were broadly interpreted as a result of a lack of political *recognition* of poor voters.

Pointing to recognition as a central concept for understanding and analyzing such social and political contexts resonated with me for several reasons when I first read their retrospective article in 2018, a time during which I was involved in a small research project about public connection in Denmark (see Hartley & Pedersen, 2019). First of all, public disenchantment or even frustration with established politics that Couldry et al. related to a lack of recognition (exemplified by Brexit, as well as the US and Spanish elections at the time) was also a key aspect of the experiences of the informants in our small Danish study.

Secondly, these rather abstract (yet similar) popular sentiments in different contexts around the world – these recognition crises – had also manifested in a diverse range of social movements and struggles in the decade that Couldry et al. reviewed (such as the Arab Spring, Los Indignados and Occupy Wall Street), but were not confined to this decade. Indeed, as center-right intellectual Francis Fukuyama (2018) argues in his book *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*, these different articulations of a "politics of resentment" (or identity politics, as he also broadly names it) all share a common denominator in a deep-seated preoccupation with dignity and recognition which became increasingly common in the second part of the 20th century:

> Because human beings naturally crave recognition, the modern sense of identity evolves quickly into identity politics, in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth. Identity politics thus encompasses a large part of the political struggles of the contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics on contemporary American university campuses (…) While the economic inequalities arising from the last fifty or so years of globalization are a major factor explaining contemporary politics, economic grievances become much more acute when they are attached to feelings of indignity and disrespect.
>
> (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 10)

Thirdly, and most importantly, noticing the potential of combining recognition theory and media and communication research in Couldry et al.'s text about public connection – which is written in an audience research tradition (Schrøder, 2018, 2019) with an understanding of media as practice (Couldry, 2004) and a focus on everyday life – oriented me towards the fact that the changing dynamics of identity and recognition in today's world go *beyond* the relationships between states (or other political, economic, and social institutions) and citizens. That is, questions of recognition and disrespect have also come to the forefront in *interpersonal relations*, not least with the rise of

the internet in general and so-called social media in particular. Indeed, while it took a research article about public connection for me to realize that recognition has become "a keyword of our time" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003a, p. 1), approaching recognition theory via an audience research tradition laid the foundation for the main emphasis of this dissertation. Thus, this emphasis is not on social movements per se, or public connection for that matter, but rather on processes of recognition and disrespect in everyday media use in Denmark, which is one of the world's most digitized societies.

Hence, this dissertation asks the overall research question of *how deep mediatization constitutes and changes, and limits or enhances, processes of and struggles for social recognition*. I will address the notion of *deep mediatization* shortly, but first, I will make a few preliminary comments on working with this research question. Partly due to epistemological and methodological reflections that occurred along the way, and partly due to a global pandemic and various lockdowns that overlapped with my research project in ways that caused complications, my contemplations relating to this research question have been less grounded in empirical work than I originally intended. However, I am endlessly grateful for the kindness and openness that four young Danish media users showed me as research interlocutors in this project. Without them and the many interviews, exercises and observations we did together, the theoretical work of this dissertation (which contributes to the emerging intersection of recognition theory and media and communication research) would have lacked interaction with originally generated empirical material. Indeed, without them the dissertation would have been much more meagre, if not entirely impossible.

Nevertheless, even without these complications and their resolutions – which I will clarify further in the methodological chapter (Chapter 4) – this dissertation has been strongly colored by theoretical ambitions from the outset. Following the initial quote set out in this introduction, I simply saw a potential for unfolding the "philosophical depth" of recognition theory within media and communication research. Thus, as the quote also indicates in its reference to Rousiley C.M. Maia (2014) and colleagues' book *Recognition and the Media*, this dissertation is placed in a small yet growing subfield within media and communication research that explicitly engages with the vast

and eclectic literature on social theories of recognition (for an overview, see Driessens & Nærland, 2022), which mainly originate from other fields such as social and political philosophy, and sociology.

Being situated within this new subfield of media studies, I hope to make a small contribution to the ambitious goal of establishing what David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee call "basic premises about the media in modern society" (2008, p. 1). The articulation of this ambition comes from the introduction of *The Media and Social Theory*, an anthology edited by the two authors in 2008. In the introduction – titled 'Why media studies need better social theory' – they try to formulate one of the "major historical questions" being raised in the field of media studies at the time:

> Should we understand contemporary developments in media (globalisation, the internet, the proliferation of media platforms and so on) as marking our entry into a new period characterised by unprecedented forms of mediated social relations? Or rather do these same developments simply make for continuity in the order of social life?
>
> (2008, p. 1)

According to Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, more and more empirical studies were already addressing such questions, often leaning towards one or the other of these interpretations, but they lacked a "metatheoretical dimension" that could help establish those aforementioned basic premises about media in today's world:

> Except in a rather oblique fashion, [these studies] fail to confront issues of *causation*, from, within and to the media; or of *norms*, that is to say how far putative changes in the character of communication bear on social justice, or prospects for a good life for all.
>
> (2008, p. 1, original emphasis)

Almost 15 years on, I would argue that what they call "issues of causation" have been comprehensively confronted in media and communication research. In particular, we see this with the rise of mediatization research (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Driessens et al., 2017; Hepp, 2020; Hepp et al., 2018; Hjarvard, 2013; Kaun & Fast, 2014; Lundby, 2014; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), which in different research strands try to explore and explain "all the transformations of communicative and social processes, and the social and practical forms build from them, which follow from our increasing reliance on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation" (Couldry &

Hepp, 2017, pp. 3–4). As indicated in my research question, I follow a group of scholars who argue that these socio-cultural transformations have now reached a "deep" phase with the processes of digitalization and datafication (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2020; Hepp et al., 2018), something which I will unfold in Chapter 2. Of course, these processes are examined across various fields of media and communication research, but the conception of mediatization as a meta-process (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2017) – which is on par with, for example, individualization, commercialization and globalization – can provide the basis for establishing the meta-theoretical dimension that Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee called for in their diagnosis of media studies' relation to social theory. Indeed, ten years after this, the notion of mediatization was, for instance, called "media theory's word of the decade" (Corner, 2018). This at least demonstrates how prevalent this notion has become for (metatheoretically) explaining the media-related developments Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee mention in the quote above. However, the notion of mediatization is not designated a meta-theory or grand theory in itself (Ekström et al., 2016). Rather, as a meta-process, it is an object of analysis "whose complexity and contextual manifestations require a research agenda that invites a spectrum of diverse theories and analyses focusing on media-related transformations in society" (Ekström et al., 2016, p. 1093). Thus, there is still much work to do, especially when it comes to the issues of norms (also mentioned by Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee): that is, issues surrounding social justice and the good life in relation to media-related changes of the last few decades.

At the moment, lawmakers around the world are starting to (indirectly) confront such issues in debates about – and relating to the regulation of – tech companies, state agencies and other actors that drive or exploit the processes that have ensured media technologies permeate almost all social domains and practices of contemporary societies and communities. In this regard, scholars and activists are continuously playing an important role in raising awareness about these questions of social justice in both academic and public debates. Therefore, via the overall research question stated above, this dissertation specifically aims to contribute to this endeavor, with an interdisciplinary objective to bring mediatization research (closer) together with the social justice approach of social philosopher Axel Honneth (2014).

Honneth is one of the most influential recognition theorists in the so-called left-Hegelian tradition, and, within the emerging field at the intersection of recognition theory and media and communication research, it is also often his work that is cited and his theoretical framework that is utilized. We see this, for example, in the book on recognition and media edited by Maia (2014), which is referenced in the initial quote of this chapter. However, Honneth's (2014) explicit attempt to build a theory of justice in his book *Freedoms Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* hardly plays any role in the emerging field (for an important recent exception, see Magalhães & Yu, 2022). In contrast, I regard this work as a crucial theoretical resource for addressing, for example, the questions put forward by Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, and this dissertation revolves around precisely Honneth's theory of justice.

In the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2) and the outline of my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) I will, of course, delve into the work of Honneth and those who have critiqued it, as well as the work of other recognition theorists. But for now, I will mention that although I have some reservations about Honneth's theory of justice (and his broader recognition-theoretical framework for that matter), I do follow his overall Hegelian argument that a theory of justice should not be developed "in isolation from the norms [Sittlichkeit] that prevail in given practices and institutions" (Honneth, 2014, p. 1). Honneth thinks that one of the problems of contemporary political philosophy is "that it has been decoupled from an analysis of society, instead becoming fixated on purely normative principles" (p. 1). In contrast, he argues that a theory of justice must be rooted in the values and ideals (of freedom) that are already institutionalized in existing (democratic) practices and social institutions, but in a manner that leaves room to criticize the very same practices and institutions. Much can be said about Honneth's Eurocentrism in *Freedoms Right* (and elsewhere) as well as his teleological assumptions. But here, I first and foremost rely on his argument that in order to discuss justice and the good life, the traditional division of labor between philosophical analysis and "empirical disciplines" must be overcome (p. 5). Although Honneth only refers broadly to "social sciences" (p. 5), or sometimes more specifically to historiography and sociology, I will argue that, given the permeation of media in almost all social domains, media and communication research plays a central role among these empirical disciplines.

In *Freedoms Right*, Honneth uses his proposed procedure to examine how the social institutions of interpersonal relationships (friendships, intimate relationships, and families), the market (the sphere of consumption and the labor market), and the political public sphere (the public sphere and the democratic constitutional state) embody values of mutual recognition. However, while this analysis is one of the few places in the recognition-theoretical literature where "media" (in this case, traditional mass media and the internet) are considered to some extent, Honneth and other recognition theorists do not generally take the prevalent and "deep" mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2020) of these – and many other social institutions – into account.

Dealing comprehensively with all the interrelations between contemporary mediatization processes and recognition processes within such a wide range of social institutions or social domains is beyond the scope of a single PhD project. Instead, my ambition has been to utilize the insights brought forward by the growing momentum of recognition theory within media and communication research to build a tentative analytical framework that can help us to understand the role deep mediatization plays in individuals' experiences of, and struggles for, recognition *across* varying social domains in everyday life. However, as I have indicated throughout this introduction, I want to engage with this task not only from a descriptive perspective, but also from one that asks questions like the one recently articulated by Andreas Hepp (2020) in mediatization research: "What would deep mediatization look like if it was to promote a good life for as many people as possible?"(p. 177). This is what I mean when – within my overall research question – I say that I want to ask how media "limit and enhance" processes of social recognition. Thus, while mediatization research can help to create nuance when analyzing today's recognition struggles, it is, conversely, in dealing with normative questions like this that recognition theory can offer particular benefits to mediatization research, and to media and communication research in general. Indeed, such an interdisciplinary cross-pollination seems immensely relevant when media scholars and philosophers are increasingly called upon to address questions of freedom and justice in relation to mediated democratic debate, online populism and protest, algorithmic bias, digital bullying, digital labor, online counter cultures, digital divides, and many other aspects of our deeply mediatized world.

2 Theoretical Foundations: Recognition and Mediatization

> Hegel's old figure of 'the struggle for recognition' finds new purchase as a rapidly globalizing capitalism accelerates transcultural contacts, fracturing interpretive schemata, pluralizing value horizons, and politicizing identities and differences.
>
> (Fraser & Honneth, 2003a, p. 1)

With apologies to Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, one might add the phrase "and deepening mediatization" after "globalizing capitalism" in the above quote and arrive at a meaningful – and perhaps even a more apt – description of the social processes in today's world that recognition theory can help explain. As stated in the introduction, I follow Couldry and Hepp's (2017) understanding of mediatization as a "shorthand for all the transformations of communicative and social processes, and the social and practical forms built from them, which follow from our increasing reliance on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation" (pp. 3-4). Since recognition is "a fundamental mechanism of intersubjectivity and sociality" (Ingram, 2006, p. 229) – that is, of the communicative and social processes and forms referred to by Couldry and Hepp – this chapter sets outs to unfold the existing insights of how this "mechanism" has been transformed or reconfigured in the light of the latest wave of mediatization. Together with my conceptual framework (Chapter 3), this will provide the theoretical foundation for my analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

However, while the overlaps and interrelations of the *phenomena* of recognition and mediatization have arguably been extensively examined and debated in much scholarly literature, particularly within the interdisciplinary field of media and communication research, the theoretical developments and discussions of the *concepts* of recognition and mediatization have mostly taken place in separate academic fields. There is, nonetheless, a growing body of both theoretical and empirical research within the broad umbrella of media and communication research that explicitly operationalize recognition-theoretical terminology or frameworks (for overviews, see Campanella, 2022; Driessens & Nærland, 2022) and some have also placed themselves within the subfield of mediatization research (e.g., Campanella, 2018; Fast & Jansson, 2019; Hjarvard, 2013; Jansson, 2015). As mentioned in the introduction, this is also where this dissertation is located: it is a

contribution to mediatization research at the (still limited) intersection between the two broad, eclectic research areas of recognition theory and media and communication research (see Figure 1). In this chapter, I want to outline the two concepts and theoretical frameworks of recognition and mediatization, respectively, in order to establish a theoretical foundation for the analytical discussions in the latter part of the dissertation. Thus, the chapter is divided into two descriptive sections: 'What is recognition?' and 'Recognition and media(tization)'.

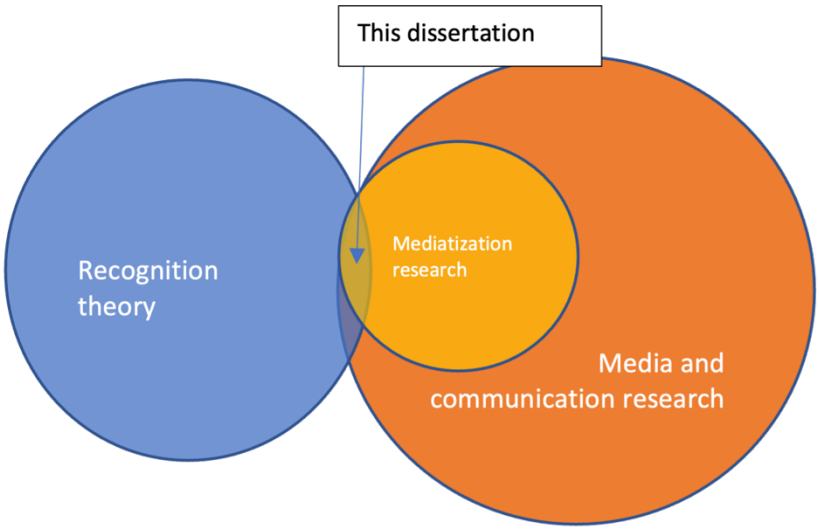

Figure 1

2.1 What is recognition?

The concept of recognition has its philosophical roots in the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (see 1977 [1807], 1979 [1802-04], 1983 [1805-06]), who, in turn, was influenced by Johann Fichte's work in this regard. Hegel used the German notion of *Anerkennung* and regarded it as fundamental to the self-realization and freedom of human beings. Thus, according to Michael Inwood's *A Hegel Dictionary*, the German words "Anerkennung" and "anerkennen" "overlap the meanings of 'recognition' and 'to recognize', and of 'acknowledgement' and 'to acknowledge', but do not coincide with either pair" (1992, p. 245). Inwood identifies five broad meanings of 'to recognize' in English:

1. To identify a thing or person as a particular individual (e.g. Socrates) or as of a certain type (e.g. a lion) (…) 'Recognize' in this sense is not replaceable by 'acknowledge': one may recognize someone, without

acknowledging him. In German it is erkennen, or widererkennen ('to recognize again') if past experience is stressed, but rarely anerkennen (…).

2. To realize, e.g., one's error, a truth, that something is so. In so far as the recognition is private, 'acknowledge' cannot be used: one may recognize one's error, but not acknowledge it. This is erkennen, rather than anerkennen.
3. To admit, concede, confess or 'acknowledge' a thing or person to be something. This is anerkennen.
4. To endorse, ratify, sanction, approve, 'acknowledge' something; to take notice of, acknowledge a thing or person; etc. This is anerkennen.
5. To take notice of someone in a special way, to honour him. ('He has at last due recognition/acknowledgement'.) This too is anerkennen.

(1992, p. 245)

Inwood argues that, according to Hegel, self-consciousness[1] and personhood require recognition in the complex interplay between senses 1, 2, 4 and 5. One cannot "identify" or "realize" oneself (in senses 1 and 2) without one's existence being reflected back from other human beings. To have evidence of this, one must be recognized in sense 4 and, to a certain extent, also in sense 5. This is the socio-ontological idea that the social world – and individual identity – are mutually and intersubjectively (re)constructed by human agents (Iser, 2019, sec. 2.1). This idea is expressed in Hegel's critical stand towards the so-called atomistic conception of the self, where social life is characterized by a struggle for self-preservation as seen in for instance social contract theories (Haddock, 1994). Instead, Hegel sought to reshape the model of social struggle (found in different forms in for instance the philosophies of Machiavelli and Hobbes) to place the idea of a struggle for recognition as the central dynamic (Honneth, 1995, p. 5).

The central idea of intersubjectivity can also be seen in the conceptualization of recognition by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2005). Combining a thorough lexicographical approach with philosophical analysis, he identifies 23 different usages of "to recognize" in French (reconnaître) and argues that they can be grouped into three broad categories according to a logic that moves from the active (to recognize) to the passive (being recognized): identification, recognizing oneself, and mutual recognition. While Ricoeur covers the five meanings identified by Inwood, his emphasis is

[1] The German word that Hegel uses for self-consciousness, *selbstbewusstsein*, also means "self-confidence" or "self-respect".

on the sense of recognition that takes persons as its object, which has also been "the core meaning or family of meanings in the discourses on recognition in critical theory and social and political philosophy during the last decades" (Ikäheimo, 2017, p. 569).

In terms of recognition of persons, it is an important Hegelian starting point that it is not enough for an individual subject to be recognized by certain people. Instead, as Glenn Magee points out in *The Hegel Dictionary* (2010, p. 195), Hegel's idea of recognition is that – in principle – we desire to be affirmed as "what we are" by everyone; that is, we need universal recognition of our human dignity. In Hegel's interpretation, this need is so strong that people are willing to risk their lives to be recognized by others, something which is famously illustrated in his so-called master-slave dialectic (see Hegel, 1977, pp. 104–138). For Hegel, this willingness to risk death for ideals of recognition is also what distinguishes humans from other animals, and he thought that all of human history could be interpreted as the struggle for universal recognition (Magee, 2010, pp. 195–196). According to Hegel, universal recognition was achieved in – and guaranteed by – the modern state which, in the words of Magee, "affirms the freedom and dignity of all of its members, [so that] it is only when the distinction between masters and servants is annulled that freedom and universal recognition are achieved" (Magee, 2010, p. 196). While Hegel's argument that the modern state (within his cultural horizon) was some sort of ideal historical end point can, for both theoretical and political reasons, seem rather peculiar or highly problematic today (for a brief outline, see Brooks, 2022), his basic idea can be reformulated as a "vision of human beings as essentially social creatures, whose capacity for freedom is inextricably linked to the norms and institutions of their particular communities" (McBride, 2013, p. 3). This vision has influenced social and political philosophy and theory in numerous ways, especially in the so-called left-Hegelian tradition (for an overview, see Sinnerbrink, 2014).

It is also within this tradition that contemporary recognition theory is primarily situated. While Hegel's work on recognition has occupied many thinkers, for instance existentialists in the mid-twentieth century, its study is now undergoing a renaissance (Fraser, 2003, p. 10), with Charles Taylor's influential essay 'The Politics of Recognition' (1994 [1992]) and Axel Honneth's seminal book *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995 [1992]) seen as playing a significant role in starting this

revival. Hence, recognition theory is often divided into two "currents" that revolve around these authors' theoretical frameworks (McBride, 2013, p. 2). The philosopher Nancy Fraser is also regarded as one of the main recognition theorists, but recognition is only a co-fundamental category in Fraser's theoretical framework alongside the notion of redistribution and (political) representation (e.g., Fraser, 2005, 2008). As a critical theorist herself, Fraser is therefore skeptical of the so-called "recognition turn" of critical theory (Held, 2008) – which is associated with Honneth's writings and position within the Frankfurt School tradition – and she also opposes what she calls the "psychologization" of recognition theory by Taylor and Honneth (Fraser, 2003). I will return to the critique of recognition theory by Fraser and others later, but first I will outline Taylor's and Honneth's frameworks.

2.1.1 Recognition as a vital human need: Taylor's politics of recognition

In relation to the discussion of the meaning of recognition, Taylor and Honneth are also concerned with the sense (or senses) of recognition that take(s) persons as its objects (Ikäheimo, 2017, p. 569).[2] Both authors start from the Hegelian idea outlined above, that people depend on feedback from others and society in general to develop a practical identity. Thus, in his influential essay 'The Politics of Recognition', Taylor (1994, p. 26) refers to recognition as a "vital human need":

> The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.
>
> (Taylor, 1994, p. 25)

While recognition – in this interpretation – can be regarded as an anthropological constant, Taylor also argues that it has only come to be seen as a central motive for political struggles as a result of two interrelated historical developments. The first is the collapse of premodern social hierarchies and the central idea of honor, which has gradually been replaced with an idea of dignity. The notion

[2] The recognition literature discusses to what extent for example groups, nation states and even animals and inanimate nature can be 'recognized' (for a brief overview, see Iser, 2019, sec. 1.2).

of dignity is "now used in a universalist or egalitarian sense, where we talk of the inherent 'dignity of human beings,' or of citizen dignity" (p. 27). The second historical development in Taylor's account is the emergence of a new understanding of individual identity at the end of the eighteenth century, which he terms "the ideal of authenticity" (p. 28). The ideal of authenticity involves the idea that all people have the right and possibility to discover and articulate their originality and particular identity; that is, to define oneself and one's ideas of right and wrong. Taylor argues that this is expressed in the modern objectives of self-fulfillment and self-realization on an individual level (p. 31), but also, mentioning that the German philosopher Herder thought of it on the level of a people (in German: Volk), that he can see in it "the seminal idea of modern nationalism, in both benign and malignant forms" (p. 31). However, while the ideal of authenticity highlights "inwardness" in terms of identity construction, Taylor underlines the idea that in order to understand the close relation between recognition and identity we have to realize that "there is no such thing as inward generation, monologically understood" (p. 32). He thinks that mainstream modern philosophy has overlooked the "fundamentally dialogical character" of human life:

> We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expressions (…) People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us – what George Herbert Mead called "significant others".
>
> (Taylor, 1994, p. 32)

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is important to note that this idea of communication is central for recognition theory. Again, this is related to its Hegelian heritage, and the idea that human beings are "essentially social creatures" (McBride, 2013, p. 3). Taylor (1994) points out that this dependence on others did not arise with "the age of authenticity" (p. 34). Rather, the gradual replacement of previous social hierarchies (honor) with the idea of dignity, and the establishment of the ideal of authenticity, made recognition something that needed to be achieved:

> [T]he need is now acknowledged for the first time. In premodern times, people didn't speak of "identity" and "recognition" – not because these people didn't have (what we call) identities, or because these people didn't depend on recognition, but rather because these were then too unproblematic to be thematized as such.
>
> (Taylor, 1994, p. 35).

Taylor describes how ideas of recognition are now central to our understanding of identity formation in both private (what Taylor calls intimate) and public spheres (p. 37) and, moreover, he mentions that feminist theories in particular have tried to show the links between recognition struggles in these spheres (p. 37). Thus, Taylor's main point is that *politics* of equal recognition have come to play a central role in contemporary societies. This is something which is often exemplified with reference to the "new" social movements which originated in the 1960s and 1970s, and the phenomena of so-called identity politics which occur across the political spectrum (cf. Fraser, 2003; Fukuyama, 2018). According to Taylor (1994), the politics of equal recognition has developed into two different versions: the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference. The former refers to "a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the contents of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements" (p. 37). In contrast, the politics of difference demands recognition for "the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else" (p. 38). In Taylor's words, "it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity" (p. 38). It is also the occupation with the politics of difference and recognition of cultural minorities that explain why Taylor situated his text within the subject of multiculturalism (Taylor et al., 1994). However, this is also where it becomes possible to distinguish the two main currents of recognition theory from one another.

While Honneth broadly agrees with Taylor's account of identity and modernity in many of his writings (e.g., Honneth, 2007a, p. 42), he seems to be skeptical of the distinction between a politics of equal dignity and a politics of difference. Thus, Honneth argues that struggles for (legal) equality and struggles for recognition of (cultural) difference have continuously been interwoven with each other in everyday life, as well as in both past and current resistance movements, for at least the last 200-300 years (2003a, pp. 122–124). For example, he has described the idea of a phenomenon of identity politics as a "sociological artifact" (Honneth, 2003, p. 125). Instead, drawing on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth interprets the historical development of (Western) modernity as a gradual, yet uneven, struggle to realize *social freedom*. That is, that individual autonomy is realized in relations of mutual recognition within various social practices and institutions of society

(Honneth, 2014). I will return to Honneth's conceptualization of freedom in Chapter 3 to develop my own conceptual framework but, in the following, I will focus specifically on the initial development of Honneth's recognition theory.

2.1.2 The grammar of social conflicts: Honneth's recognition theory

Overlapping Taylor's multiculturalist strand, Honneth's theory of recognition offers a philosophical account of what he calls "the grammar of social conflicts", which is also the subtitle of his main work *The Struggle for Recognition*. In this book, Honneth proposes "a critical social theory (...) according to which processes of societal change are to be explained with reference to the normative claims that are structurally inherent in relations of mutual recognition" (Honneth, 1995, p. 23). Honneth draws more explicitly and meticulously on Hegel's (early) philosophy than Taylor. Thus, in a theoretical development of Hegel's tripartite distinction between the societal spheres of family life, civic society and the state, and drawing on the social psychology of George Herbert Mead, Honneth argues that all people need mutual recognition in the form of love/care, rights/respect and solidarity/esteem to develop and maintain the corresponding practical relations-to-self (i.e., self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) that constitute positive self-realization.

In this framework, love refers to the "strong emotional attachments" which are involved in primary relationships that are constituted as models of "friendships, parent-child relationships, as well as erotic relationships between lovers" (p.95). Closely following Donald Winnicott's object-relations theory and Jessica Benjamin's recognition-theoretical developments in this regard, Honneth (pp. 95-107) outlines how individuals in their early childhood develop "'a capacity to be alone', which itself can arise only out of a basic confidence in the care of a loved one" (p. 103). Thus, Honneth describes how the (infant) child learns to "strike a balance between symbiosis and self-assertion" (p.98) in the relationships with primary caretakers, and the successful establishment of this balance provides the basis for later relationships of emotional attachment. Honneth compares this form of emotional attachment to Hegel's understanding of love as "being oneself in another" (p. 96, 105), and thus describes love as a specific form of mutual recognition "that prepares the ground for a type of relation-to-self in which subjects mutually acquire basic confidence in themselves" (p. 107).

While in *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth conceptualizes love on the basis of insights from social psychology, his conceptual development of respect and esteem takes the form of a historical reconstruction. Honneth argues that respect refers to a form of mutual recognition which has been established with the emergence of "the universalistic principles of post-conventional morality" (p. 109), manifested as equal legal rights in what he calls "post-traditional law" (p. 108). Honneth writes that "with the transition to modernity, individual rights have become detached from concrete role expectations because they must, from that point on, be ascribed in principle to every human individual as a free being" (p. 109). In contrast to earlier forms of "tradition-bound" (p. 110) legal hierarchies, this "new" legal order is only valid if the individuals it includes recognize each other as "free and equal beings" (p. 108) who have "the capacity to make reasonable, autonomous decisions regarding moral questions" (p. 114). According to Honneth, this form of legal respect allows the individual to develop a relation-to-self that he terms *self-respect*: "since possessing rights means being able to raise socially accepted claims, they provide one with a legitimate way of making clear to oneself that one is respected by everyone else" (p. 120). Importantly, Honneth emphasizes the cultural and historical *specificity* of respect when he describes how individual rights (civil liberties, political rights and social rights) have continuously been extended and expanded through social struggles, either in regards the scope of their content or the inclusion of more members of society. Nevertheless, he also points out the establishment of *universal* human rights and – echoing Taylor's historical account – he argues that, in modern catalogues of human rights, human dignity has "attained universal currency" (p. 125). Respect can therefore be understood as a form of recognition that revolves around the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals. It points to the moral importance of treating other persons as autonomous agents deserving of equal consideration and fair treatment, something which has become a fundamental aspect of social justice and plays a crucial role in the development of individual self-respect.

The aura of universality in the idea of rights/respect is also what separates this form of recognition from the one that Honneth terms *solidarity*. In Honneth's interpretation, Hegel's philosophy and Mead's social psychology are largely in agreement about the function of this additional form of mutual recognition: "in order to be able to acquire an undistorted relation-to-self, human subjects always need – over and above the experience of affectionate care and legal recognition – a form of

social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities" (p. 121). However, the "content" of social esteem is also highly culturally and historically contextualized. Thus, in close parallel with his outline of the historical development of respect as a form of recognition, Honneth describes how the notion of "honor" – which was traditionally linked with the ability of people to conduct themselves according to their predetermined group social status, and take pride in that group's societal function or contribution – has not only been replaced by legal rights (respect), but also by a more individualized form of social esteem in the "public arena" (p. 126).[3] Again, this historical analysis is very similar to Taylor's but, whereas Taylor focuses on the recognition of (group) difference per se, Honneth argues that the modern organization of social esteem "measures" difference "by the degree to which [individuals] appear to be in a position to contribute to the realization of societal goals" (p. 122). This is also why he uses the term solidarity in order to indicate the (ideal) mutuality of social esteem, where autonomous subjects "view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis" (p. 129). Thus, having one's identity and contribution recognized as "valuable" by other members of society is also a central part of a positive self-realization:

> We can meaningfully term this type of practical relation-to-self (for which, in everyday speech, the expression 'feeling of self-worth' predominates) 'self-esteem' (…) To the extent to which every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of societal solidarity.
>
> (pp. 128-129)

Importantly, and just like he did with regards to the struggles around individual rights, Honneth underlines that what count as "societal goals" (a given society's value-horizon) is "permanently subject to cultural conflict" (p. 126). This brings us back to Honneth's formulation that one of the main purposes of his theory is to explain social change.

According to Honneth, the three forms of mutual recognition and the corresponding relations-to-self are not only the structuring logic for processes of individuation and socialization, but also

[3] Honneth describes how honor in this historical process becomes universalized as dignity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, becomes privatized as subjectively defined integrity, which means that social esteem becomes detached from both legal rights and the moral qualities of personality (Honneth, 1995, p. 126).

normative claims for freedom and social justice (which he unfolds and modifies in later works such as *Freedoms Right*). Therefore, in accordance with Taylor's account, Honneth outlines how certain forms of disrespect that *also* correspond to the three forms of relations-to-self – the violation of the body, the denial of rights and the denigration of ways of live – can limit, distort or damage people's identity-formation and individual autonomy (Honneth, 1995, Chapter 6). Later, in a formulation that philosopher Douglas Giles (2020, p. 8) has called the clearest summary of the project, Honneth explained the implications for social change involved in experiences of disrespect, when these are articulated as normative claims for recognition:

> Essentially, my idea amounts to the hypothesis that all social integration depends on reliable forms of mutual recognition, whose insufficiencies and deficits are always tied to feelings of misrecognition, which, in turn, can be regarded as the engine of social change.
>
> (Honneth, 2003b, p. 243)

For Honneth, this idea does not only provide the basis for a theoretical explanation of social change but should also function as "the guiding thread of critical theory" (Honneth, 1995, p. 144). Thus, the central thesis of his framework, which is implicitly present in the quote above, is "that the moral force within lived social reality that is responsible for development and progress is a struggle for recognition" (p. 143). Shortly, I will address how this "engine of social change" relates to media in a broad sense and how it is affected by processes of mediatization. To prepare for this discussion, I will first provide an outline of some of the dominant critiques and clarifications of recognition theory.

2.1.3 Critiques and clarifications

The Hegelian roots and the grand-theoretical ambitions and propositions of recognition theory have fostered strong debates in social and political philosophy and many other research fields. This has resulted in an eclectic collection of research literature that involves various critiques and further developments of its theoretical foundations (e.g., Fraser & Honneth, 2003b; Giles, 2020; Honneth, 2002, 2008; Honneth & Rancière, 2016; McBride, 2013; McBride & Seglow, 2009; Petherbridge, 2011, 2013; Zurn, 2015). In the following, I will focus on some of these critiques and clarifications in

preparation for a discussion of the relation between processes of recognition (and disrespect) and media(tization).

First of all, Honneth's idea of misrecognition or disrespect as the engine of social change (which I described above), rests on the assumption that the different forms of recognition and disrespect are counterparts. Thus, love, respect and esteem are not permanent and ahistorical phenomena, but rather formal principles involving a so-called *surplus of validity* which are invoked in culturally and historically based struggles for recognition:

> Each principle of recognition has a specific surplus of validity whose normative significance is expressed by the constant struggle over its appropriate application and interpretation. Within each sphere, it is always possible to set a moral dialectic of the general and the particular in motion: Claims are made for a particular perspective (need, life-situation, contribution) that has not yet found appropriate consideration by appeal to a general recognition principle (love, law, achievement).
>
> (2003a, p. 186)

When specific recognition struggles are "successful", according to Honneth, social change takes place via the two processes of *individualization and social inclusion*:

> One the one hand, we see here a process of individualization, i.e., the increase of opportunities to legitimately articulate parts of one's personality; on the other hand, we see a process of social inclusion, i.e., the expanding inclusion of subjects into the circle of full members of society.
>
> (2003a, pp. 184–185)

However, the assumptions involved in this idea have given rise to some of the major critiques of recognition theory, which revolves around the point that the theoretical frameworks of Taylor and Honneth have inadequate or even problematic accounts of power. This overall critique has many aspects, but it generally asserts that recognition theory overlooks structures, systems or relations of power that (re)produce or maintain social orders of domination and subordination that are based exactly on ideas and hierarchies of how people are "recognised". In Fraser's and Honneth's (2003b) famous political-theoretical exchange over the normative foundations of critical theory, Fraser (2003) argues that Honneth's focus on recognition as the primary source of injustice neglects the

role of economic inequality in contemporary societies, and that we need to consider redistribution as well as recognition in our efforts to achieve justice. In Fraser's account, recognition is therefore not a matter of self-realization or identity, but rather a matter of justice "aimed not at repairing psychical damage but rather at overcoming subordination" which means "to deinstitutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it" (p. 30). According to Fraser, this idea of justice as parity of participation has the advantages that it allows for value-pluralism because it does not involve a single, universal idea of the good life; it "eschews psychologization" (p. 31) because misrecognition can be unjust whether or not it "distorts the subjectivity of the oppressed" (p. 32); it avoids the position that everybody has an equal right to social esteem (p. 32); and it allows for an theoretical integration of recognition and redistribution as moral demands (p. 33). Honneth (2003a) responds to Fraser's critique by arguing that claims for redistribution are, in the end, claims for recognition too, and that critical theory should not only be able to criticise the status quo but also engage with "the kind of moral-psychological considerations Fraser seeks to avoid" (Honneth, 2003a, p. 125), in order to identify the social discontent with existing economic and cultural structures that has not yet been articulated by established social movements.

Closely related to this debate, the critique of recognition theory's account of power also involves the argument that it does not consider the culturally complex, intersectional, and changeable character of identity. Thus, recognition as a normative ideal has been criticized for reifying identities, as people are coerced to conform with certain expectations or characteristics within groups or communities to receive recognition (e.g., Appiah, 1994; Markell, 2003). As Patchen Markell writes in *Bound by Recognition*:

> many of the relationships established and maintained through recognition are unjust, often severely so. If recognition makes the social world intelligible, it often does so by stratifying it, subordinating some people and elevating others to positions of privilege or dominance.
>
> (2003, pp. 1-2)

Similarly, Amy Allen (2010) follows a line of thinking established by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Althusser, Foucault and Butler, arguing that Honneth's theory of recognition does not provide a

satisfactory account of ideological power mechanisms that do not necessarily produce any struggles – e.g., subordinating gender norms or other social demands, which might be passed along from parent to child. Overlapping these questions of *subjection* (Butler, 1997), Lois McNay (2008) draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to emphasize how the power relations of recognition processes go way beyond the *interactional* practices and struggles discussed by Taylor and Honneth, and underlines how power relations are embodied and socially structured. Also writing from a similar, Bourdieu-inspired perspective, Cillian McBride (2013) points out that struggles for recognition are essentially struggles for authority, arguing that the dominant recognition-theoretical frameworks maintain a "recognition deficit model" which assumes that certain people or groups must struggle for recognition from those who have the power to give or refuse it. Indeed, Balaton-Chrimes and Stead (2017) set out how this idea of recognition deficits has often been the "structuring logic" of social struggles:

> Faced with ongoing grievances by women and minority groups, or indeed by new grievances seemingly emergent through recognition claims and struggles, the response of both scholars and activists has often been to advocate for *more*, or *better* recognition largely within existing political communities and structures, or in ways that might transform those structures, but not exit or reject them.
>
> (p. 6)

As a response to these kinds of critiques, Honneth (2007b) has conceded that he originally treated recognition as the opposite of subjection and domination. Correspondingly, he has proposed a distinction between morally justified and *ideological* recognition, where the latter refers to those "forms of recognition that must be regarded as being false or unjustified because they do not have the function of promoting personal autonomy, but rather of engendering attitudes that conform to practices of domination" (Honneth, 2007b, p. 325). In his development of this distinction, it is important to notice how Honneth also differentiates between intersubjective recognition and recognition via social institutions (Honneth, 2007b, pp. 334–336; for a thorough discussion, see Ikäheimo, 2017). In this context, Honneth briefly mentions how the mass media, much like churches and parliaments, have maintained dominant gender roles, for example by making emotional appeals to the "good" mother or housewife (pp. 325-326). Indeed, the fundamental question of whether processes of recognition (re)produce modes of domination and subordination finds a parallel in an

almost field-defining occupation within media theory about the role media plays in the (re)production of power structures and social norms (for the theoretical origin of this, see Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997 [1947]) influential critique of the culture industry).

To take account of the above debates, I rely on Douglas Giles' (2020) fairly recent remodeling of central concepts in Honneth's recognition theory. Hence, some of Giles' conceptualizations will function as important theoretical cornerstones in this dissertation. First of all, Giles regards Honneth's tripartite, Hegelian understanding of recognition as being too strongly demarcated (Giles, 2020, pp. 20–55), and, in accordance with the above critique, he also argues that misrecognition is not the opposite of recognition: "The social norms themselves may be at fault either in being intrinsically biased against some members of society or in inadequately reflecting individuals' attributes and needs" (p. 12). Instead, (mis)recognition should be understood as individuals' multidimensional engagements with norms and other individuals. For example, Giles regards normative discrimination, as well as the subordinating or ideological forms of recognition mentioned above, as *engagement with* norms that lead to misrecognition, just as he outlines different forms of both intentional and unintentional *disengagement from* certain norms and other individuals as misrecognition (i.e., nonrecognition).

While these different types of engagement and disengagement serve as a basis for my understanding of recognition, they will not play a major role in my analysis. In contrast, Giles' rethinking of what it means to struggle for recognition plays a pivotal role in this dissertation. Giles takes issue "with the tendency in recognition theory, not just in Honneth, to consider struggles for recognition predominantly as collective political movements for legal justice" (Giles, 2020, p. 15). In doing so, he is establishing a distinction between *affirmational* and *transformational* struggles for recognition (pp. 209–215). The former refers to "the ongoing efforts of individuals to seek recognition that constructs and affirms their personal identities and their place in society" (p. 210), while the latter encapsulates "responses to circumstances or instances of misrecognition that seek to rectify perceived injustices and restore healthy recognition relations" (p. 211). With this distinction, Giles seeks to explain how the everyday struggles and attempts to "fit in, belong, and to be accepted" (p. 212) are different from, for example, political struggles, which are based on

experiences of misrecognition and disrespect. In addition, Giles argues that transformational struggles are not always carried out in social movements, but often involve individual agency in everyday life. Drawing a distinction between affirmational and transformational struggles also means that if people experience mutual recognition within subcultures or so-called counter-publics, they might not find a reason to struggle for recognition from society more broadly, even in the face of misrecognition and disrespect (Giles, 2020, pp. 237–250). According to Giles, this argument is important in relation to the recognition-deficit model because it helps us avoid "the condescending view that for members of subaltern groups to develop positive relations-to-self, they must seek recognition from dominant groups" (Giles, 2020, p. 242). In the development of my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) and my analysis (Chapters 5 and 6), I will return to Giles' conceptualization of these two forms of struggles. In the next section, I discuss the conceptual relationship between recognition and media(tization).

2.2 Recognition and media(tization)

So far, I have outlined how I understand the concept of recognition. In this section, I turn to the question of how deep mediatization constitutes and changes recognition processes and struggles. As I have stated in both the introduction and at the beginning of this chapter, the main premise of this dissertation is the idea that social and communicative processes and forms are being transformed by "our increasing reliance on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, pp. 3-4). As also mentioned above, I consider recognition to be a "fundamental mechanism" (Ingram, 2006, p. 229) of social and communicative processes. Therefore, the next step is to clarify what *mediation* of recognition (and disrespect) might entail, as this then allows me to describe how recognition processes and struggles are transforming as we become more dependent on new forms of mediation in times of deep mediatization. To unfold this clarification, I will start by utilizing Klaus Bruhn Jensen's (2020) typology which defines three degrees of media.

2.2.1 Recognition and media

To begin with, I understand mediation as "communication and interaction through media in concrete situations" (Hjarvard, 2016, p. 21; translation in Schrøder, 2017, p. 95), although it has also

been given more complex definitions that overlap with the notion of mediatization (cf., Livingstone, 2009; Silverstone, 2005; Williams, 2011). If we start with the simple definition above, the next question becomes: what is media? Jensen (2020) distinguishes three so-called degrees of media. Media of the first degree is "human bodies and their extensions in tools" (Jensen, 2020, p. 5), which is also "the media" that Axel Honneth has in mind when he seeks to define elementary social recognition, writing:

> (…) recognition of a person comes about only with the help of media that, by virtue of their symbiotic structure, are modelled on the expressive bodily gestures with which human beings confirm their social validity to one another (…) Only those who see themselves as having been taken cognizance of positively in the mirror of the expressive behavioural modes of their counterparts know themselves to be socially recognized in an elementary form.
>
> (2001, pp. 119–120)

In this sense, recognition (and disrespect) is "mediated" in the context of what is often termed face-to-face communication (oral interaction, facial expressions, gestures, etc.). The ontological affinity between the notions of communication, mediation and recognition is so close in this interpretation that they might be difficult to unravel. Honneth's understanding of communication, and thus his conceptual work on recognition, relies strongly on the writings of social theorists such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, who were part of analytical currents in sociology that theorized (interpersonal) communication as a central part of social life and regarded it as a key research interest. Roger Silverstone has eloquently summarized this understanding of communication:

> In this early twentieth-century work communication was, essentially, a social psychological, possibly also a philosophical, term. It was seen to begin and end with a concern for the individual, and with the individual's place in relation to his or her capacity to connect with others. It was theorized and analyzed as a crucial component of social life (Dewey, 1958), the formation of self (Mead, 1964 [1932]) and the enabling of community (Park, 1972). 'Communication of all affairs … the most wonderful' (Dewey, 1958: 166), requires assuming the attitude of the other individual as well as calling it out in the other and in turn assumes and requires reciprocity (Mead, 1964 [1932]: 254). It is the medium through which the social becomes both possible and manifest; natural language is its paradigm.
>
> (2005, p. 188)

Following this understanding of communication, recognition (and disrespect) is always already mediated. This can perhaps also help explain why recognition theory has found its way into media and communication research at a time where, with digital media, "communication has come full circle to the sort of interactive and multimodal forms of interchange that characterize face-to-face settings" (Jensen, 2020, p. 9), and where even the written language used in everyday life is often full of a range of emojis and other symbols mimicking facial expressions and bodily gestures. However, it is crucial to stress that when using the terms of media and mediation (of recognition), I *do not* refer to media of the first degree. Instead, I reserve these terms to media of the second and third degrees, to which I now turn my attention.

Indeed, face-to-face communication is probably not what most people associate with the notion of media. Instead, what Jensen (2020) terms media of the second degree – the mass media – is arguably more familiar: "(…) the various analog technologies – from printed books and newspapers to film, radio, and television – all of which took shape as one-to-many media institutions and practices of communication" (p. 7). To some extent, the distinction between media of the first and the second degree corresponds to the distinction mentioned above between intersubjective recognition and recognition via social institutions (e.g., Honneth, 2007b, pp. 334–336). In fact, in his historical reconstruction of various social institutions of mutual recognition, Honneth (2014, pp. 255-304) includes the public sphere which he understands – in a Habermasian fashion – as almost analogous with the mass media.

In relation to the mass media, the mediation of recognition (and disrespect) refers to something that can be described in terms of the well-known notion of *media representation* (for an influential conceptualization, see Hall et al., 2013). Media representation is often used in relation to the (quantitative and qualitative) representation of (for instance) particular genders, minorities, subcultures and ways of life in the media (Andreassen & Nielsen, 2015). However, it is important to note that recognition and disrespect are not only mediated "directly" via mass media. The latter also *premediates* social expectations and experiences (Jansson, 2015, pp. 86–87), which points to the above-mentioned role that mass media and its representation of social life plays in the (re)production of power structures, as well as in people's struggles over different forms of cultural

and social capital, and their positions in social spaces (see Bourdieu, 2006). Thus, as we shall also see below, the relationship between (mass) media representation and recognition, misrecognition, non-recognition and disrespect has been a focal point within studies taking place at the emerging intersection between recognition theory and media and communication research (e.g., Cottle, 2007; Maia, 2014; Malik, 2014; Perez Portilla, 2018). In the same way, Honneth (2014, pp. 255–304) touches on issues of media representation and the mass media in a broader discussion of the democratic public sphere, which he regards as a so-called social institution of mutual recognition (I will return to Honneth's conceptions of social institutions in Chapter 3).

Less common in the recognition-theoretical literature, however, is media of the third degree. This is digital media or, in the words of Jensen, "networked media" or "meta-media" (2020, pp. 9–10). It joins together features from both face-to-face communication and mass media:

> As means of expression, digital media join text, image, and sound in some new and many old genres, as inherited from mass media as well as face-to-face interaction: narratives, debates, games, and so on. As modes of interaction, digital media integrate one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many forms of communication. Beyond stationary work stations and portable personal computers, smartphones and tablets have become decisive meta-media serving as access points to other media, to the internet as such, and to a proliferating range of communicative resources embedded in everyday life.
>
> (2020, pp. 9–10)

These "new" means of expression and modes of interaction permeate and (re)configure more and more social domains and practices (Hepp et al., 2018) as digital media and the internet become embedded and embodied in everyday life (Hine, 2015). Thus, processes of recognition (and disrespect) also become increasingly *technologically* mediated. The (dis)likes and comments of everyday social media use are perhaps intuitive examples. But, on a more general level, the intersection of such mundane recognition practices and technological affordances is part of what André Jansson has called a "social re-location" of media: "In addition to their traditional position between people and various organizational entities (including media institutions) that characterized the mass media landscape, media technologies are now to a greater extent located *between people*" (Jansson, 2015, p. 82). As Jansson emphasizes, this development represents more than a

"technological shift" where digital media integrate or co-exist with the mass media as well as traditional forms of interpersonal media (such as the telephone or the postal system): "It also denotes a cultural shift through which more and more areas of social life become saturated with and dependent on processes of mediation" (p. 81). According to Jansson, this shift marks "a new stage in the history of mediatization" (p. 81), and he argues that a "defining instance" of this contemporary stage is a "culture of interveillance" (p. 82). Interveillance broadly refers to media users' everyday digital and datafied practices of monitoring themselves and others, which signifies an overall dialectical aspect of mediatization "where striving for recognition coalesces with social simulations that bind individuals closer to technological and commercial structures of dependence" (p. 82).

In the last section of this chapter, I will elaborate on Jansson's analysis, which not only represents one of the main starting points for understanding how processes of mediatization relate to recognition, but also touches on a recognition-theoretical understanding of freedom that I will place at the center of my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) and analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). However, before I return to this elaboration, I will provide a more general introduction to mediatization research and the understanding of mediatization that underlies Jansson's analysis.

2.2.2 What is mediatization?

So far, I have used the notion of mediatization with reference to Couldry and Hepp's definition. That is, as "a shorthand for all the transformations of communicative and social processes, and the social and practical forms built from them, which follow from our increasing reliance on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 3–4). This idea of mediatization is, of course, built on certain assumptions which need to be explicated as part of establishing the theoretical foundations of this dissertation.

First of all, Couldry and Hepp's use of the word "shorthand" is indicative of the scholarly debates that have emerged as mediatization research has developed. The English term "mediatization" (understood in much the same way as Couldry and Hepp use it) gained traction within media and communication research from the 2000s onwards. However, for many years, the center of debate in this emergent area of research was the term's relationships to earlier – and more or less different

– uses of mediatization (Baudrillard, 1976; Fornäs, 1995; Habermas, 1984; Hannerz, 1990; Manheim, 1933), as well as other similar terms such as *medialization* (Asp, 1990), *mediazation* (Thompson, 1995), and especially *mediation* (e.g., Martín-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 2005). These debates included overlapping semantic, translational and conceptual issues, especially about which term to use (for overviews, see Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2014). When the international scholarly debate gradually cleared up the semantic and translational issues, they settled on the *term* mediatization as a general reference to "the interrelation between the change of media and communication, on the one hand, and the change of culture and society on the other" (Hepp & Krotz, 2014, p. 3). Then, the parallel conceptual work of sorting out the different *understandings* of the term came into the foreground (alongside interrelated attempts to apply or ground the term in empirically focused studies). This work has often involved an identification of different "strands" (Bolin, 2014), "traditions" (Couldry & Hepp, 2013) or "perspectives" (Lundby, 2014) of mediatization research, whereof the distinction between an institutionalist/institutional tradition and a cultural/social-constructivist tradition has been influential (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Ekström et al., 2016; Kaun & Fast, 2014).

In an outline of these two traditions, Couldry and Hepp explain that the institutionalist tradition grew out of an understanding – mainly within journalism studies and political communication – that media is "an independent social institution" (2013, p. 196). From this perspective, mediatization is regarded as the processes involved when other social institutions or fields (e.g., politics or religion) are transformed on the basis of *media logic(s)* (p. 196). According to Hjarvard, who is often associated with the institutionalist tradition, media logics "refers to the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). In comparison, Couldry and Hepp (2013, p. 196, see also 2017) relate the social-constructivist tradition (within which they themselves are situated) to the seminal work by Berger and Luckmann (1966), and to the following understanding of mediatization:

> The term ''mediatization'' here is designed to capture both how the communicative construction of reality is manifested within certain media processes and how, in turn, specific features of certain media have a contextualized ''consequence'' for the overall process whereby sociocultural reality is constructed in and through communication.

> The theorization of these media-specific forms for constructing sociocultural reality is more open than in the concept of ‘‘media logic,’’ emphasizing the complexity of media as institutions and technologies.
>
> (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 196)

It is possible to sense the disagreements between the two traditions in this quote. But, in their outline, Couldry and Hepp (2013) point out how the traditions had come closer together through the production of collaborative publications. Furthermore, from 2014 to 2016 there was a debate in the journal *Media, Culture and Society* (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, 2015; Hepp et al., 2015; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016), which Kim Schrøder has eloquently summarized using the following metaphor: “the united ‘inside’ front formed by knights from different camps [defended the castle] against ‘outside’ hostile parties” (Schrøder, 2017, p. 90). In part, the ongoing synthesizing work was also a rapprochement as a result of this debate. Arguably, the culmination of the efforts to bring the traditions closer together came with a series of publications between 2011 and 2016 (Ekström et al., 2016; Fornäs & Kaun, 2011; Kaun & Fast, 2014), which were based on work done by a sector committee set up by the Swedish Foundation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (In Swedish: Stiftelsen Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). In the most recent of these publications, Ekström, Fornäs, Jansson and Jerslev present this encompassing description of the term mediatization:

> [Mediatization] serves as a synthesizing formula to cover interrelated processes such as the growth in number, diversity and reach of communication media; their multiplying efficiency in terms of speed, storage and penetrating capacity; the increasing portion of people’s daily lifetime spent on media uses; the growing influence of media institutions and industries and the allegedly growing general significance of media texts and technologies in widening spheres and fields of life, society and culture. In all cultural sub-fields, heightened media presence seems to change the conditions for the making, dissemination and use of sounds, images and texts, with ambiguous implications for aesthetics, industries, education, policy and publicness. Ordinary everyday life too is affected, not least by online networks of social media.
>
> (2016, p. 1091)

The broadness of this description brings us back to Couldry and Hepp (2017)’s formulation of mediatization as a “shorthand”. Indeed, Couldry and Hepp’s definition of mediatization is in line with Ekström et al.’s overall argument that the term should not be understood as referring to either a unitary approach, a grand theory or a paradigm, but rather to “a meta-process whose complexity

and contextual manifestations require a research agenda that invites a spectrum of diverse theories and analyses focusing on media-related transformations in society" (Ekström et al., 2016, p. 1093). This also aligns with some of the initial conceptualizations of mediatization that compare it to other meta-processes such as globalization, commercialization and individualization (Krotz, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2008; Schulz, 2004).

Since this broad and open conceptualization still leaves the term vulnerable to the critique that it is "a concept of no difference" (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014), Ekström et al. suggest three tasks for mediatization research: "(1) *historizing* investigations of temporal transformation processes, (2) *specifying* differences between different media circuits and between different contexts and (3) searching for *measurable* scales of mediatization, which would allow for meaningful comparisons" (Ekström et al., 2016, p. 1105). These proposed tasks can generally be seen as a call for an empirical corroboration of the otherwise theoretically taken-for-granted meta-process. There are some promising studies within the mediatization literature that have responded accordingly. For instance, Bengtsson, Fast, Jansson and Lindell (2021) have launched a survey-based longitudinal study in Sweden to examine the development of media users' perceived reliance on media to fulfil basic desires. None of these proposed tasks for mediatization research are the *explicit* focus of this dissertation, although I do hope to contribute to some aspects of the specificity task with my empirically grounded discussion of recognition processes and struggles (Chapters 5 and 6). As mentioned in the introduction, I am more occupied with the media-theoretical issue of "how far putative changes in the character of communication bear on social justice, or prospects for a good life for all" (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008, p. 1) and particularly the emerging manifestation of this issue within mediatization research (e.g., Hepp, 2020, Chapter 7). This also means that this dissertation rests on some of the already established *theoretical* assumptions about the historicity, specificity and measurability of mediatization processes.

In this dissertation, these assumptions are intrinsically tied up with the notion of *deep* mediatization that also figures in its title. Deep mediatization is conceptualized by Couldry and Hepp in *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (2017), where we also find the above-mentioned definition of mediatization that I rely on. In terms of the three tasks proposed by Ekström et al., the very idea of

deep mediatization – although it is theoretically developed – can be described as an effort to historize mediatization as a meta-process in a manner which also accentuates the need for specificity and measurability. In examining media and communication history since the 16th century, Couldry and Hepp identify three successive (but overlapping) *waves of mediatization* – mechanization, electrification and digitalization – and they suggest that we are now experiencing a fourth wave in the form of datafication (2017, Chapter 3).

Couldry and Hepp relate these waves of mediatization to certain media-technological innovations (see Figure 2 below), but they distinguish their historical account from medium theory (e.g., Innis, 1950; McLuhan, 1962) and other sociological interpretations of the dissemination of media (e.g., Luhmann, 2012) by focusing on the composite and overlapping changes of media as an *environment*:

> If we look more carefully at what changes over time, it is not a matter of the revolutionary emergence of any one kind of medium at particular points in history. Rather, what changes over time is the *aggregate* of accessible communications media, and the role that (in their *inter*relations) they play in moulding the social world.
>
> (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 39)

In close relation to the three proposed tasks for mediatization research, Couldry and Hepp emphasize that the waves of mediatization and this "molding" of the social world must be examined from a transcultural perspective. This should consider how different kinds of media (technologies) have been diffused and appropriated in very different ways within different cultural and social settings, by different social classes and at different points in history. However, they argue that the very idea of mediatization can be expressed in one basic way: "the embedding of technologically based means of communication in the practices of everyday life is a long-term process that deepened dramatically over the past 150 years" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 37). It is also this idea of a "deepening" of this process that provides the basis for the notion of deep mediatization: "the latest wave(s) of digitalization and datafication correspond to phases of *deep* mediatization, because they are associated with a much more intense embedding of media in social processes than ever before" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 34, emphasis in original).

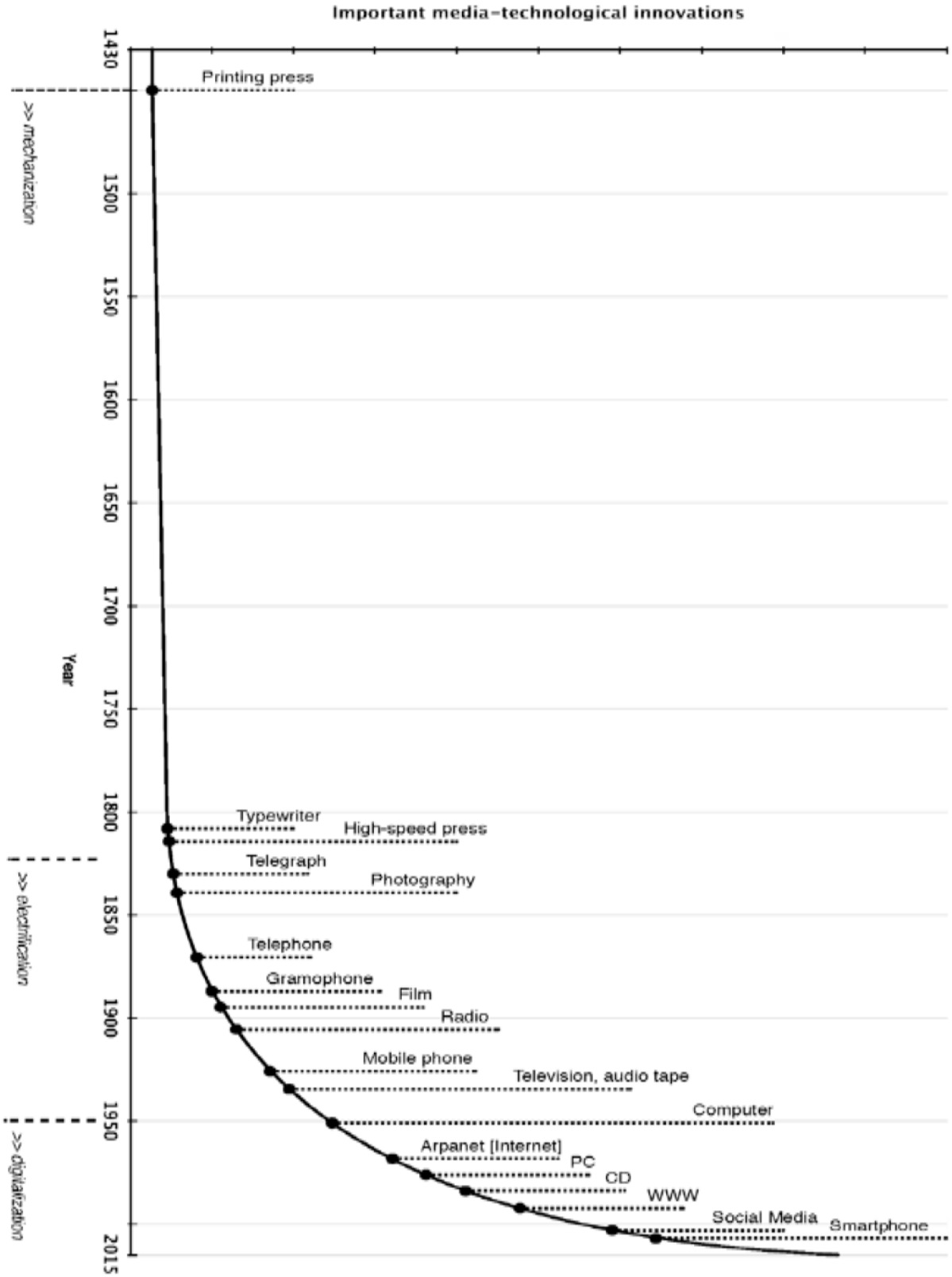

Figure 2: Adopted from Couldry and Hepp (2017, p. 41)

To analyze this embedding, Couldry and Hepp differentiate between quantitative and qualitative dimensions of mediatization:

> In its quantitative dimensions, mediatization refers to the increasing temporal, spatial and social spread of mediated communications; over time we have become more and more use to communicating across distance via media in an increasing range of contexts. But mediatization also refers to qualitative dimensions, that is, to the social and cultural difference that mediated communications make at higher levels of organizational complexity.
>
> (2017, p. 35)

Couldry and Hepp touch on the quantitative dimensions of deep mediatization in *The Meditated Construction of Reality* (for a further specification, see Hepp, 2020, pp. 40–52; Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018, p. 19), but they generally focus on the qualitative dimensions; that is, media-related changes of the social order. Their wide-ranging analysis of these changes incorporates discussions of categories such as time, space, data, the self and collectivities, and moves way beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet they conclude their work with a discussion of "unresolved normative questions" of deep mediatization, which is the primary focus of my analysis. In fact, they draw on Honneth (2008) – and others – to tentatively identify problems with the legitimacy of the emerging social orders in today's world which, they argue, revolve around "a deep tension between convenience and autonomy, between force and mutual recognition, that we do not yet know how to resolve" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 223). In this way, they point towards the normative discussion I will address in this dissertation:

> A problem for any social order that hopes to carry some measure of legitimacy over the longer term comes when our spaces and processes of mutual recognition get themselves blurred with the imperatives of private interests to generate profit *from* those very same spaces and processes. The problem is not the profit motive as such, but the blurring of its motivated constructions of 'the social' with the forms of life that, as beings who value autonomy, we need ourselves and others to lead.
>
> (p. 223)

This blurring of processes of mutual recognition with the imperatives of private interests from – in particular – corporate social media platforms, along with the more abstract question of how the present social order affects the conditions for freedom (i.e., individual autonomy), are exactly what I will examine from different perspectives in accordance with my research question of how

mediatization constitutes and changes, and limits or enhances, processes of and struggles for social recognition. In the following section, I will end this chapter with an outline of the emerging academic intersection between recognition theory and media and communication research. This outline leads to the discussion of freedom in times of deep mediatization which, in turn, is the premise I use to establish my conceptual framework in Chapter 3.

2.2.3 Recognition and mediatization

Since the late 2000s, recognition theory has gradually found its way into media and communication research (with John Downey's (2008) suggestion that recognition theory could be brought into media studies to renew ideology critique being the earliest text at the crossroad between the two research areas). In recent years, what was first a novel interest to a few has begun to gain more formal appreciation, and it centers around the term *mediated recognition*. This term was the title for a thematic panel at the ICA conference in 2018, an ICA preconference in 2019, and a special issue of *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research* published in the autumn of 2022. This recent academic activity has also given rise to important overviews of the existing literature within media and communication research that includes theoretical concepts and themes relating to recognition (for extended accounts, see Campanella, 2022; Driessens & Nærland, 2022). These overviews indicate how a large part of the existing literature revolves around the relationship between media representation and recognition. More specifically, it is centered on research interest about "how media representations, in a variety of genres and institutional and national contexts, may afford recognition of various marginalized groups, or conversely misrecognition" (Dahl & Nærland, 2022, p. 574). This includes studies that primarily examine how representations of marginalized or minority groups manifest discursively *in* various media genres and formats (Cottle, 2007; Faimau, 2013; Maia, 2014, pt. 1; Maia & Vimieiro, 2015; Malik, 2014; Perez Portilla, 2018); how media users' struggles for and practices of media representation play out via, for instance, digital and social media (Georgiou, 2019; Lorenzana, 2016; Maia, 2014, pt. 2; Maia & Garcêz, 2014) or communication campaigns (Edwards, 2018; Vatnøy & Wheatley, 2022); or how media users interpret and negotiate various media representations as expressions of (mis)recognition (Dahl & Nærland, 2022; Muscat, 2019; Nærland, 2017).

In close relation to these analyses of media representation, recognition theory has also been utilized or served as the philosophical underpinning for studies that center around both the limiting and enhancing role of media for values of *voice* and *listening* in cultural and political life (Bonini Baldini, 2019; Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2009, 2010; Georgiou, 2018; MacNamara, 2013). For instance, Nick Couldry (2010) draws on Honneth's idea of recognition to establish a vision for democratic politics and social justice, where the value of voice stands as the key feature. This allows him to both criticize the way mainstream (mass) media amplify and normalize neoliberal values that undermine voice as well as identify the potentials of the internet and digital media for more people to be seen and heard in public (which I will elaborate in Chapter 6). In continuation of this, Couldry and colleagues have also placed recognition theory as the theoretical foundation in examinations of the potential of digital storytelling and narrative exchange for citizenship, public engagement and community building (Couldry et al., 2014, 2015; Dickens et al., 2015; Fotopoulou & Couldry, 2015; Stephansen & Couldry, 2014), although the concept of recognition is not extensively unfolded in these instances.

In generalized terms, all of these above-mentioned studies focus on how recognition and disrespect are mediated. Hence the term mediated recognition, which Driessens and Nærland (2022) define as "recognition through, by and in media and communication technologies" (p. 510) in the introduction to the recent special issue from *Communications*. Driessens and Nærland emphasize that this definition does not assume that mediation is "neutral" (p. 510). Indeed, the mediation of recognition (via, for example, mass media or digital media) certainly changes the processes and forms of recognition (and disrespect) that otherwise characterize individuals' *non-mediated* engagement with each other, or with social norms and institutions, at least in a very elementary sense. Nevertheless, as Driessens and Nærland also note, the simple fact that mediation changes recognition in various ways does not necessarily mean that "new" processes of mediation (of recognition) represent fundamental socio-cultural change.

However, the latter interpretation comes in fact very close to the basic premise of this dissertation (as I have presented it so far). Recalling Couldry and Hepp's (2017, pp. 3-4) definition of mediatization, this basic premise is the idea that our increased *reliance* on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation has transformed social processes and forms, notably

recognition struggles and processes. This idea relies on the few – but significant – touchpoints that some of the main work concerned with deep mediatization share with recognition theory (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 222–223; Hepp, 2020, p. 170), and especially on work that is situated at the emerging intersection between recognition theory and media and communication research. Some of these studies explicitly bring recognition theory in dialogue with mediatization research and its underlying interest in social change (Campanella, 2018; Fast & Jansson, 2019; Hjarvard, 2013; Jansson, 2015). Others cannot be located within mediatization research as such, but they still address questions of (mis)recognition in relation to the fourth wave of mediatization; that is, in relation to processes of datafication (Campanella, 2022; Davies, 2021; B. N. Jacobsen, 2021; Magalhães & Yu, 2022). In a methodological interplay with my conceptual framework and my fieldwork (which I will describe further in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, respectively) these studies provide the basis for my analysis of two structural transformations of recognition processes in times of deep mediatization, which I address under the headlines of a *re-orientation of the self* and a *visibilization of the self* (Chapters 5 and 6). To elaborate on the theoretical aspects from the studies that ground these analyses, I will start by returning to Jansson's (2015) argument that a defining instance of the contemporary stage of mediatization is a culture of interveillance.

According to Jansson (2015), the notion of interveillance captures "the social embeddedness of contemporary surveillance processes, typically governed by commercial forces, while at the same time recognising the non-hierarchical and non-systematic nature of most social monitoring processes occurring in everyday life" (p. 81). Thus, the notion of interveillance refers to the way individuals increasingly monitor themselves and others via media practices which, in turn, is both conditioned and exploited by tech companies (especially dominant social media platforms) through industrial logics of surveillance and mechanisms of datafication in order to commoditize social life for profit maximization (see also Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Fuchs, 2021; Zuboff, 2019). However, Jansson (2015) points out that this development cannot solely be explained with reference to the industrial logics of tech industries but, rather, it must be understood as part of the broader socio-cultural transformations of mediatization, where the culture of interveillance "responds to the *social deficit of recognition* that characterises highly individualized societies" (p. 82, emphasis in original). Thus, Jansson draws on Honneth's recognition theory – especially his analyses of the

paradoxes of individualization and the importance of recognition for group formation (Honneth, 2012b, Chapters 9, 12) – to explain that while processes of individualization in modernity potentially set people free from oppressive social hierarchies and ethical standards of traditional institutions in terms of their articulation of identity and authenticity (as we also saw above in Taylor's and Honneth's historical accounts), this has also led to a more open-ended quest for recognition where "it becomes increasingly important for the individual to achieve recognition within the peer group" (Jansson, 2015, p. 86). Following Honneth's concept of organized self-realization, Jansson argues that social media companies – along with a range of other actors – exploit this quest for recognition in order to legitimize and bind people to technological and economic systems where "recognition is constantly at stake, but never achieved" (p. 87), and that:

> self-realization becomes ideologically normalized as a biographical goal. Genuinely dialogical processes of recognition are undermined and replaced by standardized patterns of identity-seeking and simulated forms of recognition that serve the goal of legitimizing and further integrating individuals into the capitalist system. Authenticity and autonomy transmute into their opposites, simulation and conformism, and individuals may ultimately find their lives devoid of meaning.
>
> (Jansson, 2015, p. 86)

According to Jansson, it is from these conditions that the culture of interveillance arises, and he points out that it is those simulated forms of recognition and connectedness that characterize dominant social media and their "increasingly significant role in normalizing partly new ways of defining social relations and senses of self" (p. 87). He emphasizes that this does not mean that all forms of interaction via social media are "of an ideological nature", and notes that different media practices are certainly part of "deeper relations of recognition" with reference to love, friendship and community building (p. 87). However, his distinction between simulated forms of recognition and connectedness vis-à-vis genuinely dialogical processes of recognition implies a difference between the forms of communication and social relations that generally characterize social media platforms *and* those forms which are not mediated (via these platforms). As we shall see, this distinction is important for the analysis in this dissertation, but Jansson does not elaborate on it.

Thus, to further explicate this difference and how it relates to Jansson's overall argument – that interveillance practices have become increasingly central for defining social relations and senses of self – I rely on Hepp's (2020, pp. 166–173) notion of the *re-orientation of the self* in times of deep mediatization. Importantly, Hepp builds this notion on the basis of the analyses of interveillance that Jansson and his colleague Miyase Christensen have provided (Christensen & Jansson, 2015; Jansson, 2015), and it therefore refers to the same phenomena where "mutual observation through digital media is also about seeking the recognition of others, expressing recognition to others, and developing the self along these lines" (Hepp, 2020, p. 170). However, the very idea of a re-orientation more clearly foregrounds the individual's turn "away" from social institutions, and their move towards interveillance practices and increased media dependence to find resources for the construction of the self and experiences of recognition. As we saw above, this is exactly the link that Jansson establishes between mediatization and individualization. Thus, like Jansson, Hepp is pointing out how this might relieve people "from the inherited identity-forming structures such as kinship relations, the church and class" (p. 169) but, moreover, that the re-orientation towards media technologies and platforms leads to practices of identity formation that are so intertwined with the collection of data by private companies that it "has been criticised as the colonization of everyday life by an advanced digital economy as well as the spread of the dominant neoliberal discourse on self-improvement and self-surveillance" (pp. 160–161).

The tension that economic interests and discourses installs within processes of mediated recognition is also the one that (as I mentioned above) Couldry and Hepp (2017, p. 223) locate in their discussion of the normative questions of deep mediatization. This appears in different ways in the intersection between recognition theory and discussions of the consequences of the latest waves of mediatization. Thus, Bruno Campanella (2018) has argued that the complex coalescence of media's increasing influence in everyday life with the (individualizing) demands on subjects to construct productive, flexible, competitive and entrepreneurial identities within an economy of attention have made intersubjective recognition "contingent on practices that presupposes continuous efforts to garner media visibility" (p. 12), with reality television and microcelebrities as characteristic examples. More recently, Campanella (2022) has used the term *datafied recognition* to emphasize the importance of examining how digital infrastructures and algorithmic systems

structure and modify this media visibility and dynamics of recognition. This is also the main focus in Jacobsen's (2021) discussion of *regimes of recognition* (see also Amoore, 2020) in relation to his analysis of Twitter's so-called deep saliency algorithm. Jacobsen argues that such algorithms are indicative of social media platforms' capacity to arbitrate recognizability and thus decide who and what are "seen, recognised and made to matter" (p. 1). Indeed, this power "highlights the underlying desire of social media platforms to algorithmically shape and organize people's parameters of attention, and in turn, create subjects that are productive, predictable and perceptually 'consistent'" (Jacobsen, 2021, p. 13).

Under these circumstances, where digital platforms are able to capture and reduce almost everything to "data" and at the same time govern visibility and recognizability, the struggle for recognition within the public sphere becomes a struggle for reactions that generate visibility and accumulate reputation over time (Davies, 2021). According to Davies, this is the trap of platform capitalism because it turns the distribution of esteem recognition into "a type of inter-capitalist competition" (p. 97), where "a few nodes receive an abundance of connectivity and engagement, while the vast majority receive very little" (p. 96). This is different from the normative idea of bourgeois civil society and the public sphere where, at least in principle, "strangers encounter each other as equals" (p. 95). Thus, Davies associates the condition of rivalry and inequality which exists within the reputation economy of platform capitalism with the intensification of identity politics:

> Platforms represent a watershed in the moral and cultural contests of modernity. They not only transform relations of production, but re-format how status and esteem are socially distributed. They are refashioning struggles for recognition no less decisively than the birth of print media did. At the same time, their logic is such that their principal effect is to generalize a feeling of misrecognition—heightening the urgency with which people seek recognition, but never satisfying this need. One effect of this process is the rise of groups who *feel* relatively deprived, to the point of political insurrection.
>
> (p. 98)

While this dissertation will not explicitly address the discussions around identity politics within recognition theory (e.g., Fraser, 2003), it is important to notice how the underlying mechanism of the transformation that Davies describes here – the promise of a recognition that is never fulfilled

– was also present in the outline of interveillance culture and the re-orientation of the self. Thus, both the need for recognition from close social relations and the struggles for "public" recognition – whether for economic or political purposes – are characterized by this fundamental tension in a time of deep mediatization. My analysis therefore starts from the question of how the re-orientation of the self and the dynamics of (in)visibility, respectively, have transformed affirmational (Chapter 5) and transformational (Chapter 6) recognition struggles. With Honneth's recognition theory in mind (see above), it is apparent that these questions essentially revolve around a discussion of the conditions for freedom and social justice in today's deeply mediatized world. As Jansson (2015) precisely formulates it in his analysis of interveillance culture:

> Mediatization is thus a complex transformative force that integrates both a liberating potential, the prospects of greater autonomy and new avenues towards social recognition enabled by media, and new forms of dependence that in different ways restrict the prospects of liberation.
>
> (p. 88)

However, while recognition theory - and especially Honneth's framework – are increasingly utilized in media and communication theory, Honneth's *Freedom's Right* (which contains his most extensive conceptualization of freedom, along with his proposal for a comprehensive theory of justice) has only recently been operationalized within media and communication research in a study by Magalhães and Yu (2022). This brings me to the next chapter, where I will draw on both of these resources to establish a conceptual framework that will provide the basis for my later analysis (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

3 Conceptual Framework: A Theory of Social Justice as Media Analysis

> Of all the ethical values prevailing and competing for dominance in modern society, only one has been capable of leaving a truly lasting impression on our institutional order: freedom, i.e., the autonomy of the individual.
>
> (Honneth, 2014, p. 15).

At the end of the previous chapter, I outlined the intersection between recognition theory and media and communication research and concluded by foregrounding André Jansson's (2015) description of mediatization as "a complex transformative force that integrates both a liberating potential, the prospects of greater autonomy and new avenues towards social recognition enabled by media, and new forms of dependence that in different ways restrict the prospects of liberation" (p. 88). In this chapter, I will establish a conceptual framework that clarifies and substantiates the underlying recognition-related concept of freedom in Jansson's quote and, via the concepts of privacy and agency, link this concept of freedom to specific discussions in media and communication research. This framework will support my empirically based analysis of how contemporary mediatization processes enhance and limit recognition processes and struggles (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). Moreover, it underpins my analysis of how existing normative proposals within mediatization research and public debates more broadly – i.e., of how to counter the media-related developments in today's world that restrict or undermine freedom – can be conceptually connected and become more nuanced (Chapter 7).

The main elements of this framework come from Axel Honneth's book *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*. In this book, Honneth reinterprets or re-actualizes Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.* He builds a social-philosophical theory of justice that sketches the historical background and relations of three dominant ideas of freedom (i.e., individual autonomy) within (Western) modernity and, by means of social theory, tries to characterize how these ideas have been institutionalized in different spheres and practices of mutual recognition in society. As I explained in the previous chapter, Axel Honneth is one of the most influential recognition theorists, and it is often his writings that are referred to or utilized in studies within media and communication research, a field which is increasingly interested in recognition theory. Nevertheless, his analysis in *Freedom's Right* has almost never been operationalized or discussed in relation to studies of media

and technology (development). This is despite the fact that it represents one of the few works within the recognition-theoretical research literature that actually overlaps with certain areas of media studies, as it discusses both the mass media and the internet's (historical) significance, and the impact they have in the political/public sphere. An important exception, however, is a recent article by Magalhães and Yu (2022). Drawing on Honneth's concepts of justice and freedom, they argue that corporate social media platforms stifle and deny autonomy in different ways, and thus produce what they call 'social unfreedom', and therefore their article will also be an important point of reference in the construction of my conceptual framework (although my framework also proposes adjustments to, and diverges from, the arguments in this article, as well as Honneth's theory of justice more generally).

3.1 Honneth's theory of social justice

In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth argues that Kantian and Lockian theories of justice dominate contemporary political philosophy, which means that conceptions of justice – i.e., how to assess the moral legitimacy of social orders – are generated "in isolation from the norms [Sittlichkeit] that prevail in given practices and institutions, and are then 'applied' secondarily to social reality" (p. 1). In contrast, Honneth follows Hegel to suggest that these institutionalized ethical norms should be the starting point for a theory of justice. In other words, such a theory should be based on what Honneth calls *social analysis*. Honneth thus proposes a theory of justice *as* social analysis, which aims to overcome "the traditional division of labor assumed by traditional conceptions of justice between the social sciences and normative theory, between empirical disciplines and philosophical analysis" (p. 5). With the softening of this traditional division, it is possible to see a central role for media and communication research, which in fact already appears prepared for this endeavor due to its interdisciplinary constitution.

Honneth bases his own approach to a theory of justice as social analysis on four premises. First, he draws on Talcott Parsons to argue that all social orders or societies legitimize and reproduce themselves on the basis of shared ethical values, which must be "worth striving for" (p. 4). That is, they must be just or "right" in Hegel's terminology: "[Hegel] gave the name 'Right' to those elements of social reality that, by virtue of enabling and realizing individual freedom, possessed both

substance and legitimacy" (p. 2). In this way, Honneth locates freedom – understood as individual autonomy – as *the point* of justice (p. 18). His second premise is that a theory of justice should use the already institutionalized values and ideals that enable and realize individual autonomy as "the normative point of reference" (p. 4). In order to carry out such a social analysis that has freedom as a normative point of reference, Honneth suggests a methodological procedure of so-called *normative reconstruction*, which he identifies in Hegel's philosophy and places as the third premise of a theory of justice as social analysis: "Given institutions and practices will be analysed in terms of their normative achievements and recounted in order of their significance for the social embodiment and realization of socially legitimated values" (p. 6). However, as Honneth himself points out, this sort of analysis is risky as it might be affected by critique of the kind Hegel received after his death; in this case, that Hegel's conceptualization of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) was meant as an argument for a preservation of the dominant order. Honneth is therefore keen to establish the fourth premise – that a normative reconstruction should always offer room for a critique of social reality:

> The point cannot be merely to uncover and reconstruct instances of already existing ethical life, rather it must also be possible to criticize these findings in light of embodied values (…) [W]hat we criticize is the fact that an institution we regard as 'ethical' could embody the values that serve as an overarching guideline for the reconstruction of ethical life in a better, more perfect or comprehensive way.
>
> (p. 9)

As already described, Honneth considers freedom – understood as individual autonomy – to be the overarching guideline for such a *reconstructive criticism*, or the point of justice in his Hegelian framework: "That which is 'just' is that which protects, fosters or realizes the autonomy of all members of society" (p. 18). However, there have been many different interpretations of the conceptual meaning of freedom, which have involved thinkers and theorists from a range of disciplines as well as "social movements that seek to publicly articulate their specific experience of discrimination, degradation and exclusion" (p. 18). Hence, Honneth's entire theory of justice depends on a closer conceptualization of freedom. Correspondingly, in *Freedom's Right*, he identifies three "core conceptions" or models of freedom in (Western) modernity that he terms *negative freedom*, *reflexive freedom* and *social freedom*.

I will unfold these conceptions below. But first, it is important to point out that one of Honneth's main arguments is that negative and reflexive freedoms merely represent ideas of individual freedom that allow individual subjects to *retreat* or detach from their lifeworld (i.e., their social interaction and attachments) in different ways. These ideas have nevertheless been institutionalized in so-called systems of action that Honneth goes on to describe as *legal freedom* and *moral freedom,* respectively: "The institution of legal freedom should give individuals the chance, regulated by the rule of law, to suspend ethical decisions for a certain time in order to assess what it is they desire; the institution of moral freedom grants them opportunities to reject certain demands on the basis of justifiable reasons" (p. 123). This also means that these two forms of freedom only represent "possibilities of freedom"; that is, the opportunities for subjects to examine or commit to their life aims. However, the possibilities of freedom do not help to *realize* these aims. According to Honneth, they can only be realized – i.e., achieved in reality – if people experience social freedom. Social freedom – as he conceptualizes it – is composed of individuals' practices of mutual recognition and mutual fulfilment of each other's aims and desires within a system of action that is constituted by social institutions (e.g., family life and the public sphere). With these basic premises and preliminary descriptions in place, I will now unfold Honneth's three conceptions of freedom.

3.1.1 From negative freedom to legal freedom

In the words of Honneth, negative freedom is the idea "that the freedom of the individual consists in pursuing one's own interests unhindered by 'external' obstacles" (p. 23), something that he calls a "minimalist" idea of freedom. He argues that an influential conceptualization of this can be found in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, while its development can be traced through works by (for instance) John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Robert Nozick, and even Jean-Paul Sartre. Thus, negative freedom maintains a "dominance in the history of ideas" (p. 22), plays a central – albeit different – role in various social-contract theories and represents "a deep-seated intuition of modern individualism" (p. 23). For "the radical individualists of the twentieth century", Honneth writes, this idea has even led to an interpretation where "freedom means being able to achieve as many egocentric, entirely selfish life aims as reconcilable with the freedom of one's fellow citizens" (p. 25). In general, the conception of negative freedom focuses solely on the "'external' liberation of action" (p. 28). This means that it does not involve the idea that the individual subject must have

"the ability to select the aims it wishes to achieve in the world" (p. 28), which, in turn, is fundamental to the conception of reflexive freedom (as we shall see below).

As mentioned above, Honneth argues that the idea of negative freedom has been institutionalized in a system of action that he terms legal freedom. The core of legal freedom "consists in a sphere of individual privacy" (p. 81), which basically means a range of "subjective rights guaranteed by the state, which grant [individuals] a space in which they can explore their preferences and intentions" (p. 71). Hence, legal freedom can be seen as the historical embodiment – within the modern legal system – of liberal rights associated with the conception of negative freedom, especially the right to property. Honneth explains how the initial manifestation of negative liberties into the law – which was achieved through various social and political struggles – has subsequently been supplemented and expanded with positive liberties, as well as new categories of social and political rights, also via struggles for recognition (pp. 73-80). All of these subjective rights, such as freedom of movement, religion, speech, opinion, sexual expression, etc., have continuously established the basis for a "legally guaranteed private autonomy" (p. 71). He writes that:

> Private autonomy, which is socially founded on liberal rights and social rights, thus brought forth a specific type of individual freedom in modern societies: Externally, individuals gained the right, guaranteed by the state, to be safe from any interference on the part of the state or other actors; internally, subjects were granted a sphere in which they could examine their life aims in total privacy.
>
> (Honneth, 2014, p. 81).

Thus, Honneth understands this sphere of privacy as a protective space, where individuals can "retreat from all social obligations and attachments and, in an unburdened state of self-reflection, rethink and define their individual preferences and value orientations" (p. 81). However, the fact that legal freedom "only" secures the possibility to retreat from the lifeworld also indicates what Honneth calls the limitations of this form of freedom.

Although legal freedom is an institutionalized system of action, which is thus regulated by norms of mutual recognition, this simply means that people respect each other as "legal subjects", "strategic actors" or "legal personalities". That is: "They recognize each other reciprocally, in Hegel's terms, as

persons who are entitled to decide for themselves which purposes they choose to pursue within the law" (p. 82). Thus, in the sphere of privacy, individuals can "weigh, examine and experiment with their life aims" (p. 83) without having to explain their motives or intentions. But this also means that they cannot realize these aims:

> Subjects that make their decisions on the basis of legal freedom cannot take into consideration whether their decisions can be accepted by their partners in interaction; they are instead encouraged and even obligated to retreat behind a protective barrier and decide for themselves what is good and right for their own life.
>
> (p. 84)

In order to realize their life aims and ideas of what is good, individuals must move beyond the sphere of privacy: "After all, in order to assess our life aims and to arrive at a true understanding of what constitutes the good, we must take up a stance that includes others as ethically motivated subjects, either mentally or actually, in our own calculations" (p. 83). Therefore, while legal freedom secures the space for monological self-definition, it does not "represent a sphere or a space of individual *self-realization*" (p. 85, my emphasis). In other words, to realize the freedom secured by subjective rights, individuals depend on what Honneth – in a Habermasion fashion – calls "a network of communicative action" (p. 83). He provides a range of examples which illustrate the relation between subjective rights and this network of social attachments and obligations:

> (…) the legal protection of minorities, the legal guarantee of the freedom of contract or the legal protection of privacy all enable a kind of social praxis whose existence and prosperity depend on non-legal relations or feelings of commitment to pre-legal norms. The members of social minorities can only profit from the legal ban on discrimination if they can sustain their own culture with the aid of cooperative practices; actors on the market can only enjoy the freedom of contract if they also recognize their obligation to respect certain arrangements, conventions and norms. And individuals can only exercise their legally guaranteed right to privacy if they can rely on the communicative background of a lifeworld that itself has not come about as a result of legal processes.
>
> (p. 86)

If people do not want to engage with the (moral) demands of non-legal relations and participate in cooperative practices and communicative action, they can only invoke their rights to retreat – actually or symbolically – into the sphere of privacy, thereby postponing ethical decisions (i.e., find

out whether their life aims and ideas of the good can be realized in social reality). This leads to the almost paradoxical situation that "the law promotes attitudes and practices that block the exercise of the kind of freedom it enables" (p. 83).

Central to Honneth's argument is the idea that, if legal freedom is misunderstood and pursued as the entire idea of freedom, it can lead to so-called social pathologies (pp. 86-94). For Honneth, the latter refers to social developments which prevent people from reflexively grasping and thus participating in "important forms of social cooperation" (p. 86) which, he argues, is slightly different from social injustices where people are unnecessarily excluded from (or restricted in) their social participation. This is not the place to unfold Honneth's entire conceptualization of what constitutes a social pathology (see Honneth, 2007a, Chapter 1), but it is important to note that he identifies two such pathologies in relation to legal freedom. One of these involves the tendency to reduce freedom to the sum of individual rights and a related pervasion of the language of law into public discourse. This means that individuals come to see themselves solely as strategic actors with legal claims and, as a result, social disputes and conflicts are increasingly understood and articulated in legal terms:

> A stance originally intended as a legitimate means of temporarily refusing lifeworld obligations thus becomes the mode of everyday action; instead of basing our actions on reasons that our partners in interaction can agree to, we merely implement purely private calculations and purposes. This turns the opportunity offered by the law in the form of negative freedom into a style of life.
>
> (Honneth, 2014, p. 91)

In addition to this pathology, where individual rights are seen as freedom itself – which turns people into legal personalities within the lifeworld, who are not interested in solving problems communicatively – Honneth points out that the opportunity to retreat from the lifeworld also leads to a different social pathology where, in today's world, individuals continuously avoid social attachments and commitments and just "drift along": "In these cases, legally allowed behavioral options are not viewed as the entirety of freedom, but as the postponement and interruption of all communicative demands" (p. 93). Honneth admits that it is difficult to capture social pathologies with sociological analytical tools, and he therefore relies on novels, films and works of art to find expressions of the symptoms of the two outlined pathologies associated with legal freedom. But, as

we shall see below, Magalhães and Yu (2022, p. 560) recognize the tendency to regard persons as the sum of legal claims in the written policies of social media platforms, and my own ethnographically inspired analysis (Chapter 5) points to a tendency towards the second of these pathologies. However, before I expand on these points, I will continue to outline Honneth's conceptions of freedom.

3.1.2 From reflexive freedom to moral freedom

Whereas the idea of negative freedom focuses on the external liberation of action, the idea of reflexive freedom in Honneth's outline focuses on the subject's relationship-to-self: "according to this notion, individuals are free if their actions are solely guided by their own intentions" (2014, p. 29). From this idea, Honneth sets out two conceptions of freedom, both of which he sees (roughly) formulated in Rousseau's writings on free will (although he argues that the overall idea in fact reaches back to Aristotle). Honneth refers to these two conceptions via the notions of *self-determination* (moral autonomy) and *self-realization* (authenticity). Again, he primarily associates these two interpretations with two thinkers – Kant and Herder – but he also traces their subsequent reinterpretations and conceptual corrections. For instance, he observes that Herder's idea (i.e., self-realization as a liberation or discovery of a natural and given personality core) has largely been replaced with the modern idea that a person's self is socially constructed (pp. 35-36). Similarly, he notes that Kant's notion of self-determination, for instance, would later be "reformulated in intersubjectivist terms" (p. 35) by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas in a speech-theoretical turn in which "individuals gain autonomy by being socialized into a communicative community in which they learn to regard themselves as addressees of the universal norms they bring about in cooperation with others" (p. 35) (i.e., the communicative discourse model). In spite of the theoretical differences and varying complexities of these interpretations of reflexive freedom, Honneth argues that they all share a "formal commonality" in their associated ideas of justice: "they all differ from the conception of justice linked to the idea of negative freedom by focusing on cooperation rather than a social system founded on individual self-interest" (p. 40).

Thus, while legal freedom can be understood as an institutionalization of the idea of negative freedom in the form of subjective rights that secure private autonomy, Honneth argues that reflexive freedom has been institutionalized as moral freedom that secures moral autonomy.

However, unlike private autonomy – which is guaranteed by the state via the law – moral freedom is only "a weakly institutionalized cultural pattern" (Honneth, 2014, p. 96); that is, a form of freedom that "encompasses all the social life-spheres for which the political authorities have laid down no rules or norms" (pp. 104-105). Drawing on Kant, Korsgaard and Habermas, Honneth argues that the concept of *self-legislation* is at the heart of moral autonomy (p. 100). Despite different interpretations, this concept is "based on the Kantian idea that in conflict situations we detach ourselves from all existing attachments and obligations in order to determine our action anew in light of universalizable reasons" (p. 103). This means that moral freedom rests on the idea that individuals are free to reject norms or demands that cannot be articulated as "universal" moral laws *and* to suggest proposals for such universalizing norms themselves.[4] According to Honneth, who focuses on so-called liberal-democratic societies, this "pairing of radical detachment *and* general consensus" (pp. 103-104) is secured by historically established cultural norms of moral self-legislation:

> Just as was true of the idea of legal freedom, the moral conception of freedom has become an integral part of the institutional structure of modern societies; it not only enables subjects to view themselves as capable of rejecting existing relations as 'irrational', but also grants them the intellectual capacity to go beyond given systems of norms in a justified fashion. Individuals who, according to traditional conceptions of morality, are tied to the concrete ethical norms of their lifeworld, are now, thanks to the notion of moral self-legislation, empowered in the name of freedom to adopt a perspective from which they can oppose existing norms and constructively propose new systems of norms.
>
> (p. 104)

Thus, just like private autonomy, moral autonomy represents a form of retreat from the lifeworld, but in a markedly different form: "Whoever exercises moral freedom seeks to gain reflexive distance in order to *reconnect* to a social praxis, in a publicly justified way, that has faced him or her with unreasonable or irreconcilable demands" (p. 112, my emphasis). In other words, individuals must be ready to provide the reasons for their self-determined actions and moral decisions to others, which also indicates the form of mutual recognition that characterizes moral freedom as a system of action. We saw earlier that legal freedom is dependent on a form of mutual recognition, where

[4] This idea is almost synonymous with Kant's influential notion of the categorial imperative.

people regard each other as legal subjects who are free to determine their life aims without interference from others within the confines of the law. In comparison, Honneth argues, the cultural institutionalization of moral freedom or self-legislation involves a form of *moral respect* where people recognize each other as being able to obey moral laws or principles, which in turn allows individuals to regard themselves as able to distinguish between right and wrong and take up the perspective of others (pp. 106-107). According to Honneth, this social praxis of intersubjective justification "imbues moral freedom with a transformative power that legal freedom does not have" (p. 112). He delivers a very clear comparison of the two:

> Whereas in the case of subjective rights we retreat from our ethical life context in order to gain the freedom to determine our personal life aims, in the stance of moral freedom we can contribute to the transformation of the given society in the sense that the universality of this freedom permits us to publicly question given interpretations of norms in the lifeworld (…) [I]n the reflexive moratorium represented by moral self-legislation we must arrive at intersubjectively justifiable solutions to conflicts, which means that our individual decisions always have effects on others. The value of moral freedom thus goes beyond that of legal freedom: The former merely entitles us to change our lives without being disturbed by others, while the latter entitles us to exercise influence on the public interpretation of moral norms.
>
> (pp. 112-113)

Thus, in contrast to legal freedom, moral freedom does not promote individual attitudes that block the exercise of the freedom it entails. Nevertheless, this form of freedom also has limitations or boundaries. These limitations amount to what Honneth calls the "impossibility of arriving at a point from which we could pass unbiased judgement on the universalizability of our reasons for action through a process of moral deliberation" (p. 108). Honneth argues that people are already "biased" in their moral perspective because they are embedded in social roles that involve certain rules, norms and obligations – such as friendship and parent-child relations – which can never be entirely put aside in moral discourse: "all moral discourse presupposes elementary forms of mutual recognition that are so constitutive of the social environment that they cannot be questioned or suspended by its members" (p. 112).

In continuation of this point, Honneth explains how moral freedom can also lead to two different social pathologies if this form of freedom is misunderstood as "the illusion of being unsituated" (p.

113). One of these social pathologies, which he calls *uninhibited moralism*, is where people are, for example, willing to give up on personal relationships without hesitation in the case of moral conflict because they "perceive themselves as legislators over the entire world" (p. 114). He calls the other, similar social pathology of moral freedom *morally motivated terrorism*, where a (perhaps legitimate) moral questioning of an existing social order turns into a questioning of all social rules, and eventually results in "delusions of grandeur and revolutionary violence" (p. 119). Here, he provides the example of the life story of Ulrike Meinhof of the German Red Army Faction; according to Honneth, this case represents a move from moral freedom into pathology. These pathologies will not play a significant role in this dissertation, but the fact that subjects are always (already) part of a social life context – consisting of social attachments and obligations – points towards the last of Honneth's conceptions of freedom, which I will address in the next section.

3.1.3 Social freedom and relational autonomy

In Honneth's framework, the idea of social freedom can be regarded as an "institutional expansion" (Honneth, 2014, p. 40) of reflexive freedom. This basically means that, while reflexive freedom posits that "we are only free to the extent that we are capable of directing our actions towards aims we have set autonomously, or towards desires that we have uncovered authentically" (p. 43), social freedom adds the criteria that these aims and desires should be able to be realized within the social world. This, in Honneth's Hegelian interpretation, makes social institutions and practices of mutual recognition (e.g., families and the public sphere) an integral part of the concept of freedom:

> [The] 'reality' of freedom is only given if we encounter each other in mutual recognition and can understand our own actions as a condition for the fulfilment of other's aims. Under this condition, we can experience the realization of our intentions as something that is entirely unforced and thus 'free'.
>
> (p. 124)

Thus, while negative and reflexive freedoms are institutionalized as legal freedom and moral freedom, respectively, Honneth writes that both of these types of freedom:

> (…) feed off a social life-praxis that not only precedes them, but provides the basis for their right to exist in the first place: Only because we have already entered into everyday obligations and have already developed social

> attachments or find ourselves in particular communities do we need the legal and moral freedom to detach from the associated demands or to examine them reflexively.
>
> (p. 123)

It is within this social life-praxis that freedom can be realized. In contrast to legal and moral freedoms, social freedom is therefore institutionalized in systems of social practices that constitute "a kind of action that the subjects involved can only carry out cooperatively or together" (p. 125). According to Honneth, such systems correspond to what Parsons called *relational institutions*, and Hegel called *ethical spheres*. Honneth goes on to argue that, today, these relational institutions can be found in three different institutional spheres: *the institutional sphere of personal relationships* (friendship, intimate relationships and families), *the institutional sphere of the market* (the sphere of consumption and the labor market) and *the institutional sphere of the political public sphere* (the democratic public sphere and the democratic constitutional state). Honneth dedicates the third and final part of *Freedoms Right* to the above-mentioned normative reconstruction of these spheres, tracing their historical development as spheres of social freedom and discussing how they are now risk certain misdevelopments.

This is also where my conceptual framework departs from – and remodels – Honneth's. First of all, I do not consider the market to represent a sphere of social freedom or justice. According to Davies, the question of whether this is the case was actually "the nub of the argument between Honneth and Fraser" (2021, p. 88) in their political-philosophical exchange about how to conceptualize capitalist society (Fraser & Honneth, 2003b). As Davies frames the debate:

> Is the market simply one of many spheres of justice where recognition is fought for, as Honneth and Boltanski have each suggested? Or is it an exceptional and parallel domain of injustice, that has a unique capacity to disempower and injure people, regardless of recognition, as Fraser argued in response?
>
> (2021, pp. 88-89)

This is a very complex debate. Even Honneth admits that it can be difficult to theoretically defend the market as a sphere of social freedom in the light of his own analysis of the market's historical development in *Freedom's Right* and elsewhere, especially in relation to his analyses of

neoliberalism (see the exchange between Fazio, 2019; and Honneth, 2019, pp. 698–700). I argue that the market does not rests on the principles of cooperation and mutual recognition that define social freedom.

Secondly, in my framework, I link together Honneth's conceptions of freedom more closely than he did. Specifically, I argue that the *realization* of freedom (social freedom) is actually the realization of private autonomy within the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships (via affirmational processes of recognition) *and* the realization of moral autonomy within the institutional sphere of the political public sphere (via transformational processes of recognition), respectively. As this definition indicates, I borrow Giles' (2020) notions of affirmational and transformational recognition struggles (see Section 2.1.3) in order to describe these processes of realization. Recalling Giles' definitions, affirmational struggles refer to "the ongoing efforts of individuals to seek recognition that constructs and affirms their personal identities and their place in society" (2020, p. 210), while transformational struggles are "responses to circumstances or instances of misrecognition that seek to rectify perceived injustices and restore healthy recognition relations" (p. 211). Thus, I argue that the processes of self-definition that take places in the legally guaranteed sphere of privacy are realized as social freedom when individuals' attempts to "fit in, belong and be accepted" (p. 212) are affirmed within the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, these affirmational struggles can be seen as a part of "the constant general condition of being a social individual" (p. 211). Furthermore, I argue that what Honneth calls the "transformative power" of moral freedom is equivalent to Giles' definition of a transformational struggle, as it is "a specific response to a specific situation – a moral struggle to correct a perceived injustice or heal a moral injury" (Giles, 2020, p. 211). Here, individuals cross the line from (usually interpersonal) affirmational recognition struggles in their communities and in their interpersonal relationships and move into the public sphere in order to take part in "political resistance or various other forms of social action" (p. 245).

To elaborate on these theoretical connections, it is important to note that Honneth has assigned a notion of autonomy to both legal and moral freedom. Thus, Honneth argues that legal freedom secures private autonomy, and that moral freedom secures moral autonomy for the individual.

However, he does not associate social freedom with a particular type of autonomy. Here, I suggest that it is possible to apply feminist philosopher Catriona Mackenzie's (2019) conceptualization of *relational autonomy.* Mackenzie contrasts relational autonomy with a libertarian idea of autonomy where freedom is solely understood as negative freedom/liberty. Like Honneth, Mackenzie is very critical of the theoretical and societal consequences of such a "minimal" interpretation of freedom. Thus, in Mackenzie's account, individual autonomy includes "three conceptually distinct, but causally interdependent dimensions or axes: *self-determination*, *self-governance* and *self-authorization*" (2019, p. 147, my emphasis). Mackenzie also underlines that autonomy is a scalar concept: "A person can be self-determining, self-governing and self-authorizing to differing degrees, both at a time and over the course of her life. Autonomy is thus not an all or nothing matter" (p. 148). In this framework, self-determination is defined as a *status* and self-governance is defined as a *capacity*, while self-authorization foregrounds that both of these are conditioned by social relations of recognition (p. 147).

Mackenzie suggests that the status-axis of autonomy – i.e., self-determination – results from "external, structural conditions for individual autonomy" (p. 148). This understanding of self-determination is different from Honneth's understanding (where self-determination is associated with the ability to choose one's own aims and thus moral freedom), but it is instead compatible with Honneth's conception of legal freedom, the conditions of which Mackenzie identifies as subjective rights. She includes social and political rights as well as – with reference to Raz (1986) – the availability of so-called significant options of goods and opportunities in the social environment (see also Mackenzie, 2014).

In terms of the capacity-axis of autonomy – i.e., self-governance – Mackenzie provides the following definition:

> To be self-governing is to be able to make and enact choices that express or cohere with one's identity, commitments and values. Self-governance requires knowing who one is and what one values (authenticity), as well as mastery of a complex repertoire of reflective and other skills required to enact one's commitments and values (competence).
>
> (p. 149)

According to Mackenzie, this involves "a wide range of emotional, imaginative and critically reflective skills, such as capacities to interpret and regulate one's own emotions, to imaginatively envisage alternative ways of acting, and to challenge social norms and values" (p. 149). In my interpretation, this definition of self-governance corresponds with Honneth's conceptualization of moral freedom (and especially the synonymous concept of self-legislation).

Finally, Mackenzie's argument that autonomy – both as status and capacity – depends on social relations of recognition can be aligned with Honneth's notion of social freedom. Mackenzie argues, in a way that is strikingly similar to Honneth's (1995) original theoretical framework, that relations of mutual recognition allow the individual to develop self-trust, self-respect and self-esteem. In Mackenzie's terminology, these are "self-evaluative attitudes" that constitute the last axis of autonomy – i.e., self-authorization – which "involves regarding oneself as authorized to determine the direction of one's life, to take ownership of, or responsibility for, one's decisions, actions and values, and as able to account for oneself to others" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149). In other words, self-authorization involves regarding oneself as authorized to self-determination and self-governance; that is, legal freedom and moral freedom. The importance of mutual recognition for freedom is thus a cardinal point in Mackenzie's idea of relation autonomy.

Idea of freedom	Negative freedom	Reflexive freedom	Social freedom
Manifestation of freedom	Legal freedom	Moral freedom	Mutual recognition
Form of autonomy	Private autonomy	Moral autonomy	Relational autonomy
Relation to self	Self-determination	Self-governance	Self-authorization

Table 1: Aligning the terminologies of Honneth and Mackenzie

This conceptual affinity between Honneth's and Mackenzie's frameworks makes it possible to merge their terminologies (see Table 1). From this perspective, to be self-determined (the status-axis of autonomy) is to be self-authorized as a person with the rights to a space or sphere of privacy in which one can examine and experiment with one's self-definitions and life aims, without interference from others. And to be self-governing (the capacity-axis of autonomy) is to be self-

authorized as a person with the moral capacity to reflexively determine and justify one's desires, aims and actions. Thus, to realize – in both senses of the word – these dimensions of autonomy, both social institutions and practices of mutual recognition are required.

This concludes my outline of the different models of freedom which will be continuous reference points throughout the rest of this dissertation. In the next section, I will sketch how the different ideas of freedom relate to specific discussions in media and communication research in general, and in particular to discussions of deep mediatization.

3.2 Analyzing deep mediatization and freedom

How can we connect Honneth's recognition-theoretical approach to social justice and his conceptions of freedom to media and communication research or, more specifically, to current discussions of the social consequences of the latest wave of mediatization (i.e., in relation to processes such as digitalization and datafication)? Of course, many analyses within media and communication research relate (more or less directly) to discussions of freedom and, in these cases, Honneth's conceptual framework can certainly help to analytically articulate and distinguish between different understandings of freedom that are (explicitly or implicitly) present in various debates in media and technology-related studies (see Chapter 7). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Magalhães and Yu (2022) have taken an important first step to begin such an endeavor. Focusing on corporate social media platforms and datafication systems, they argue that Honneth's framework can help provide "a comprehensive and hopefully coherent conceptualization of what injustice means in the context of social media" (p. 554). They suggest that the diverse proposals to understand and mitigate such injustices from various media-related research fields and approaches[5] can be brought together via Honneth's theory of justice: "We aim to offer another layer of conceptual clarity to these approaches, using Honneth's theory to name different types of unfreedom as well as systematize the associations between them" (p. 556). In the following, I will

[5] Magalhães and Yu (2022) mention "breaking up the market-dominating firms; preventing algorithmic amplification of falsehoods and hate speech; regulating content-moderation mechanisms; mitigating biases affecting machine learning systems; establishing stricter limits to how data are collected and users' attention is captured, and; making platforms truly knowable to users and policymakers" (pp. 553-554).

therefore utilize Magalhães and Yu's analysis as a reference point for connecting Honneth's framework to the ethical discussions that arise from processes of deep mediatization.

3.2.1 From privacy to private autonomy

Magalhães and Yu (2022) mention that there is an "oceanic literature on how digital technologies erode rights" (p. 555). They argue that, among these harms, the central way social media deny legal freedom "regards platforms' disrespect of user's privacy and property rights" (p. 558), and they identify the former as being the one which is most discussed. Indeed, the notion of *privacy* has become central to both academic and political debates about the consequences of deep mediatization processes, to the extent that – as Andrew McStay argues in his book *Privacy and the Media* – "privacy may very well be *the* critical topic of media and society today" (2017, p. 1, emphasis in original). Furthermore, in a discussion of the threat of so-called data colonialism to human autonomy, Couldry and Mejias mention that privacy is "the term through which debates over autonomy normally reach a wider public" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 155). The reason for this centrality of privacy in media and technology debates is related to the multiplicity of processes that are broadly referred to as datafication, as well as the risks and practices of surveillance – by both state and corporate actors – that are associated with these processes. Here, the traditional association of surveillance with state practices is still appropriate when we are talking about global incidences – e.g., the Snowden revelations, or the 2021 scandal about the Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli firm NSO Group – as well as examples of authoritarian regimes that operationalize media technologies to monitor, for instance, minority groups, individual opposition politicians, human rights activists, artists, and system critics. Honneth has also noted the risks of these digital and datafied practices in relation to the rights associated with private autonomy, remarking that "with the revolution in communications technology (…) there has obviously been a major expansion of the freedom to shape our own lives, as well as a continuous improvement in the ability of the state to control that freedom" (2014, p. 77). Honneth does not elaborate on this statement, but the media and technology-based abilities of the state also include infrastructures of mass surveillance – e.g., the Chinese social credit system – a range of practices such as internet shutdowns, and systems for automated dissemination of information (for an overview, see *Freedom on the Net*, 2022).

However, Honneth seems to overlook the dominant role played by capitalism and commercial actors in the prevalent forms of digital monitoring and data tracking used in contemporary societies. Seminal conceptualizations of this complex problem include Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) notion of surveillance capitalism, as well as the aforementioned concept of data colonialism formulated by Couldry and Mejias (2019). Again, major scandals such as the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal have publicized the general situation, but the extent of surveillance capitalism reaches far beyond the data tracking of users on social media. For example, this mode of capitalism influences and shapes public institutions and state-citizen relations in welfare states (Dencik, 2022) and non-governmental sectors such as the so-called "humanitarian sector" (Madianou, 2019), thus reinforcing existing structures of domination such as neoliberal responsibilization (Denzik, 2022) and colonialism (Madianou, 2019).

Couldry and Mejias' analysis of data colonialism is highly relevant for this dissertation, and in particular my attempts to link Honneth's framework to deep mediatization debates. Not only because their analysis – to some extent – overlaps with the mediatization literature (an area in which Couldry is a central figure), but because they specifically discuss human autonomy on the basis of a Hegelian understanding of freedom. As I have outlined in my presentation of Honneth's concept of legal freedom, the subjective rights that are meant to secure private autonomy reach way beyond the right to privacy in its narrowest sense. Working from a Hegelian starting point, Couldry and Mejias (2019) also encapsulate a broader understanding of autonomy, pointing out that the threat of data colonialism:

> (…) goes much deeper than whether by some appropriate legal fiction we do or do not cede ownership of data to the individuals to whom the data relates. The issue goes deeper even than the damage done by particular discriminations that flow from the data's use (…). The deepest problem is the violence that the *very fact* of data collection through surveillance does to the minimal integrity of the self. We derive this latter notion from the concept of autonomy.
>
> (p. 156, original emphasis)

Following Hegel's (1977 [1807], 1991 [1821]) and Enrique Dussel's (Dussel, 2000, 1985) ideas of freedom, as well as Beate Rössler's (2005) definition of autonomy, Couldry and Mejias (2019) define

this notion – i.e., of the minimal integrity of the self – as "the boundedness that constitutes a self *as a self*" (p. 156, original emphasis). This includes, first and foremost, *the space of the self*, which refers to both the space of physical control around the body, but also an individual's "horizon of action and imagination" (p. 156). Accordingly, the space of the self "can be understood as the open space in which any given individual experiences, reflects, and prepares to settle on her course of action" (p. 156). In these explanations of the concept, it becomes clear that the space of the self is almost identical to Honneth's conception of the sphere of individual privacy. As we have already seen, Honneth understands this sphere of privacy as a protective space into which legal subjects can "retreat from all social obligations and attachments and, in an unburdened state of self-reflection, rethink and define their individual preferences and value orientations" (Honneth, 2014, p. 81). Similarly, Couldry and Mejias (2019) – drawing on Rössler's (2005) writing in *The Value of Privacy* – further define the space of the self as one that involves "processes of self-description, self-definition, self-discovery, or indeed self-invention", which depend on "a person bringing herself face-to-face with herself in conditions in which she can be really sure that she is protected from the eyes of anyone else" (Rössler, 2005, quoted in Couldry and & Mejias, 2019, p. 165).

I argue that the idea of freedom entailed in Couldry and Mejias's descriptions can be characterized as legal freedom or private autonomy. However, Couldry and Mejias maintain that their notion of the minimal integrity of the self incorporates Hegel's broader conception of freedom (i.e., social freedom), but that it also "goes far beyond Hegel" (p. 163); yet, in their discussion of the threat of data colonialism to human autonomy, they do not further discuss other definitions and interpretations of autonomy. They do so intentionally and focus instead on the risks and harms of data surveillance (p. 163-176), returning to the notion of privacy to evaluate existing privacy laws in the U.S., EU and elsewhere in order to examine the potential for building a stronger legal framework (p. 176-184). Therefore, they only briefly point towards the importance of social institutions and processes (of recognition) for realizing the individual's autonomy (p. 157; 163). In a similar way, they warn against "aggressively individualistic" (p. 155) interpretations of freedom, but they do not explore it further in this context. Thereby, their definition of the minimal integrity of the self is almost presented *as freedom itself*, which is an understanding that certainly does not go "far beyond Hegel". If anything, it is only an element of Hegel's – and by extension, Honneth's - conception of

freedom. This means that although Couldry and Mejias point us towards a broader understanding of privacy than, for example, the idea of control over personal information, they do not move that far away from the individualistic notions of privacy that characterize modern data privacy rules – e.g., the General Data Protection Regulation in the EU and similar legal frameworks (Hartzog, 2021, p. 1683).

However, if we combine Couldry's and Mejias' notion of the space of the self with the idea of social freedom and relational autonomy that I outlined above, it is possible to see that an individual's private autonomy or self-determination to form self-definitions and self-inventions in the space of the self are dependent on mutual recognition in order to be (self)authorized and realized socially. As such, these self-definitions and self-inventions become relational or social, which is evident in the fact that we often "share" the space of the self with others. We refer colloquially to our "private lives" and often mean our lives with family, friends and partners. And although legal freedom secures our right to retreat, literally or symbolically, to a "room of one's own" (to draw on Virginia Woolf's (1929) eminent metaphor), we sometimes even share our most personal thoughts and the physical space around our body with our most intimate relations. Even if we keep something (e.g., thoughts or possessions) "private" from the close relations we live with (e.g., our parents or our kids), we might share those things with other close relations (e.g., friends or partners). This means that the space of the self often overlaps with what Honneth calls the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships.

Thus, for the central question of privacy in media and communication research (and media regulation), the ideas of social freedom and relational autonomy point towards the task that privacy scholar Woodrow Hartzog – with reference to Daniel Solove's extensive work on privacy – has simply formulated as "shifting our focus away from questions about what privacy is and toward the different problems we want our privacy-based rules to address and the specific values we want them to serve" (Hatzog, 2021, p. 1688). According to Hartzog, this shift (which he argues is already taking place among theorists and lawmakers) must involve notions of privacy that:

> (…) are aimed at disrupting power disparities between people and companies, protecting individuals from harassment and manipulation, or seeking a collective wellbeing for a diverse population in which many people,

> including women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and others, are particularly vulnerable to information systems.
>
> (pp. 1683-1684)

Such a shift towards questions of collective wellbeing in terms of privacy might also help to cut the Gordian knot that, according to Magalhães and Yu, faces "most theorizations of datafication's moral troubles" as the "enormous gap between the utterly negative image painted by critics and the much more ambiguous impressions of being a user of platforms (2022, p. 567). Thus, when a recent report by Pew Research Center (2022) uncovered that US teens feel they have very little control over – but also very little concern about – the information social media companies collect about them, and generally think that social media have had a positive impact on their lives, broader and relational understandings of autonomy can make sure that these young people's concerns about freedom and their immanent critiques are not overlooked as a result of a narrow conception of privacy. We see in the same report, for example, that teens believe social media have a mostly negative effect on their peers, and that "half of 15- to 17-year-old girls say they often or sometimes decide not to post something on social media because they worry others might use it to embarrass them" (p. 7). Shifting the conversation from one focused on the moral troubles of datafication to one which raises questions about social freedom allows everyone – both media researchers and users of platforms – to discuss their concerns for collective wellbeing. Moreover, as I will argue in the final section of Chapter 3, this is not only relevant to discussions about privacy, but also in relation to the central notion of agency in media and communication research.

3.2.2 From agency to moral autonomy

Like violations of privacy are central to the way social media deny legal freedom in Magalhães' and Yu's (2022) Honneth-inspired analysis, they argue that opacity and manipulation are characteristic of the way platforms stifle moral freedom (self-legislation/self-governance). In terms of opacity, they write:

> While rational Kantian self-legislation is defined as accessible to all, and not requiring particularly powerful cognitive abilities, it surely depends on basic and proper information about what is going on in the external world – knowledge of events, individuals, and processes. Without these elements, individuals are materially prevented from understanding which normative demands are imposed on them, which structures they need to critically reflect on

> before acting, who are the others that might be included in their calculation of universality, which norms they might decide to disobey in rational and thus free fashion, and so forth. But how can users be expected to reject a normative order that is largely hidden from their view?
>
> (pp. 561-562)

According to Magalhães and Yu, this obscurity of the conditions for reflexivity about oneself and the world stands in an ironic contrast to the promises of self-discovery by social media companies, which want to characterize their platforms as places to realize exactly authenticity and life aims. Thus, Magalhães and Yu also criticize the way platforms are designed to manipulate users' aims: "Data, machine learning systems, interfaces and physical devices are deliberately analyzed and meticulously constructed to exploit our biases, emotional states, and impulses" (p, 562). Magalhães and Yu acknowledge that critics like themselves might exaggerate the power of media platforms in this regard, but they emphasize that "[u]sers need not want *exactly* what platforms expect them to want, to have their moral freedom corrupted by manipulation attempts: they are inherently harmful, regardless of how effective this is" (p. 562, emphasis in original). As it is possible to see in these critiques, self-legislation or self-governance – i.e., the ability to "make and enact choices that express or cohere with one's identity, commitments and values" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149) – is closely related to the notion of agency (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149).

Like the notion of privacy, the notion of agency is placed in the midst of today's discussions about media and technology. But unlike privacy, which has arguably been increasingly actualized within media and communication research as a result of the latest wave of mediatization, questions of agency have been a central part of the broad research field since it was established. In an influential article that discusses "audiences in the age of datafication", Sonia Livingstone (2019) revisits the history of audience research to illustrate how one of the consistent themes of media studies more generally has been the tensions between – and the oscillating emphases on – media power vis-à-vis audience agency:

> When public and intellectual concerns over state, commercial, or media power are high, and when new media technologies emerge, critical attention is rightly drawn to the media's ideological influence on and/or economic exploitation of audiences. In more equitable times, critical recognition of ordinary people's agency and values in engaging creatively with and through media texts and technologies in diverse lifeworld contexts comes to the fore.

(Livingstone, pp. 170-171)

Further, in a precise summary of the present situation and current media environment, Livingstone argues that:

> In today's heady climate of media panics—over so-called fake news, election hacking, Internet and smartphone addiction, the algorithmic amplification of hate speech, viral scams, filter bubbles and echo chambers, discriminatory data profiling and data breaches, the crisis in quality journalism, the demise of face-to-face conversation, and a host of digital anxieties about youth—fears about audience gullibility, ignorance, and exploitation are again heightened in popular and academic debate.
>
> (p. 171)

As this quote (quite skeptically) illustrates, agency – like privacy – is broadly considered to be threatened in today's world. But how is agency defined in this context? Livingstone answers indirectly when she encourages media researchers to "attend to the conditions of meaning-making, to amplify audiences' voices in the interest of social justice, and to imagine *with them* alternative futures" (p. 175, emphasis in original). This focus on meaning-making, voice and imagination is very similar to the conceptualization of so-called *communicative agency* which Ytre-Arne and Das (2021) have recently presented, based on certain foundational meanings of agency in communication scholarship, reception theory and sociology. According to Ytre-Arne and Das, audiences' communicative agency is thus *interpretative*, *relational* and, as it is challenged by datafication, increasingly *prospective*.

The interpretative aspect of communicative agency refers to media users' capability to engage with and even negotiate, resist or reject the intended meanings and workings of media (content) and technologies. The relational aspect draws especially on Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and the idea that agency is related to structure; that is, agency is determined by certain structural conditions (e.g., social contexts and related power dynamics) but, at the same time, it reproduces, reworks or reinforces those conditions. Finally, the prospective aspect of communicative agency is a response to the challenges of receding transparency and increasing uncertainty involved in media users' attempts to interpret and affect everyday processes of

communication in the light of datafication (the opacity that Magalhães and Yu mention). In the face of these challenges, Ytre-Arne and Das underline that:

> Audiences often know that their engagements leave traces that form patterns and feedback loops, but also that the full extent of these are beyond transparency, rendering the prediction of outcomes of communicative exchanges less apparent. Uncertain visions of future outcomes – whether hopeful, or apprehensive, critical or instrumental – thereby underpin the idea of agency as prospective.
>
> (2021, p. 14)

These outlined approaches to agency are perhaps best illustrated by Elihu Katz's (1959) seminal suggestion that (mass) media research should change its fundamental question from "what do the media do to people?" to "what do people do with the media?". In very generalized terms, dominant traditions – e.g., media effects research, critical theory and political economy – have often been associated with research interests in line with the former question, while other traditions such as cultural studies, reception research and audience research have been associated with the latter. Of course, lots of media and communication research has included combinations of specific assumptions, theories and methods from these (and other) research traditions, but analyses of media-related developments continue to emphasize either media power or audience agency (Livingstone, 2019) or to understand media and communication as either an agent of change or an environment for change (Mihelj & Stanyer, 2019). In this context, mediatization research has been presented as an approach that explicitly attempts to combine these overall lines of thinking to "move agency and social practice into the foreground" (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018, p. 26).[6] For instance, Hepp argues that mediatization should be explored from "an actors' point of view":

> Mediatization is not a process that just 'happens'. While this process involves a variety of technologies and some of the most complex infrastructures in history, it remains one made by humans who give it meaning: *individual actors* as single humans, *corporative actors* as organizations, companies and state agencies as well as *collective actors* as communities or social movements.
>
> (2020, p. 10)

[6] Although audience researchers have warned mediatization researchers not to underestimate or leave out the experiences and dynamics of audiences (e.g., Livingstone, 2019; Schrøder, 2017).

Thus, the recognition-theoretical approach to media and communication research that I propose draws on mediatization research to encapsulate *both* of Katz's (1959) mainly descriptive questions but also follows Honneth's (2014) methodology of using this "social analysis" (i.e., media analysis) as a basis for a normative discussion of justice; that is, the good life (in times of deep mediatization). From this perspective, the discussion of agency becomes a discussion of moral freedom or moral autonomy.

The similitude between agency and moral autonomy is illustrated by returning to Ytre-Arne and Das and their conceptualization of communicative agency, which they define more specifically as "capabilities to effect power potentials through interpretative engagements in everyday processes of communication, in relation to structures that take part in the same communicative processes" (2020, p. 785). It is important to note that this definition relates to the interpretative and relational aspects of communicative agency as described above, because the prospective aspect of communicative agency is related to the way datafication challenges the agentic capabilities described by this definition. The definition of communicative agency by Ytre-Arne and Das provides a useful conceptual bridge between the discussions of agency within media and communication research and Honneth's (2014) conceptualization of moral autonomy, as the notion of communicative agency clearly resonates with Honneth's idea that moral autonomy is the capacity of individuals to oppose existing norms or propose new ones. Whether we use Ytre-Arne and Das' formulation of effecting power potentials or Honneth's corresponding formulation of going beyond given systems of norms, it is nevertheless important to emphasize that, just like private autonomy, this moral autonomy (or agency) only represents a possibility of freedom, not the realization of freedom. Thus, in her conceptualization of self-governance that I have juxtaposed with moral autonomy, Mackenzie (2019) reminds us that we should not understand "individual agents and the capacities that underpin our agency in socially atomistic terms, that is, in abstraction from social relationships and the broader social environment" (p. 149). Indeed, Magalhães' and Yu' (2022) discussion of how the opacity and manipulation of social media platforms stifle self-legislation as well as Ytre-Arne's and Das' (2020) description of how communicative agency is challenged by datafication indirectly indicate how "self-governance is a socially constituted capacity, which can only be developed and exercised with extensive interpersonal, social and institutional scaffolding"

(Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149). As I will discuss in Section 7.2, analyses of individual autonomy in times of deep mediatization that start from what Mackenzie calls *methodological individualism* might therefore reduce communicative agency to a question of the media literacy of the individual, but a starting point that rests on the ideas of social freedom and relational autonomy moves the focus to the condition of the institutional sphere of the political public sphere (Honneth, 2014). This will also be the focus of my analysis (Chapter 6) together with the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships (Chapter 5) that I related to the discussion of privacy above. Before I can conduct this analysis, however, I will first outline my methodological approach in Chapter 4, which has provided the empirically grounding for the theory of justice as media analysis that I tried to establish in this chapter.

4 Methodology: Recognizing Recognition

My fieldwork began on March 4, 2020. My fieldwork ended exactly a week later, when the Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen announced a nationwide lockdown, the first of many in Denmark and around the globe as the COVID-19 pandemic spread from person to person, and from continent to continent.

My fieldwork was reorganized as a case study in October 2020. I write fieldwork because digital and audience ethnography (e.g., Carey & Mierzejewska, 2018; Hine, 2015; Miller, 2018; Pink et al., 2016) was my original methodological starting point. And although "digital" might predominantly point towards online field sites, ethnographic research of mediated communication has moved away from a time where "pioneering cyberethnographers studied field sites on the Internet because they appeared to offer different conditions from the offline world" (Hine, 2015, p. 22). Hence, from the outset, my fieldwork revolved around the ideas that "recognizing continuities between online and offline contexts and taking circumstances into consideration are essential when trying to understand mediated practices" (boyd, 2015, p. 83), and that an online/offline boundary should not be treated "as a principled limit for ethnographic field sites" (Hine, 2015, p. 53). Thus, in preparation for my PhD project in general (and my fieldwork in particular) I made a cooperation agreement with a Danish NGO that works with activities run for and by children and adolescents in what the official Danish authorities call exposed residential areas. Although the COVID-19 lockdowns meant that I was not able to work in cooperation with the NGO, I will briefly sketch the three main reasons for the cooperation agreement, since these still determined my recruitment of interlocutors. However, since the NGO did not play a considerable role in my fieldwork – and also out of consideration for the pseudonymization of my interlocutors – I will not provide detailed information about the NGO and its activities.

Firstly, the NGO could function as a gatekeeper for a large and geographically varied group of young people in one of the world's most digitized countries. In Denmark, more than 90% of the population up to the age of 70 are online every day (Kulturministeriet [The Ministry of Culture], 2021, p. 15). For the 19–34-year-olds the number was 97% in 2020, and although the numbers dropped from 97% to 92% for the 12-18-year-olds from 2019 to 2020, the numbers have been consistently over

90% for both age groups since 2015 (p. 16). And the young Danes are not only frequent users, but also spend many hours on the internet. For example, the 15-24-year-olds spend in average around 12 hours online on a weekly basis (p. 16), and many of these hours are spend on social media platforms. Thus, 99% percent of the 12-18-year-olds and 97% of the 19-34-year-olds have at least one social media profile (p. 26), and among the 15-34-year-olds 82% use social media every day (p. 25). These age groups are often at the center of societal debates about the consequences of media development for well-being and identity development (Johansen & Larsen, 2019).

Secondly, the specific group of young people who volunteer with the NGO often live in or around residential areas where the NGO organizes activities, and many also have an ethnic minority background. The fact that these residential areas have also been at the center of various political debates in Denmark meant that, even without determining that my study would focus on specific recognition struggles, I knew that entering via the NGO would give me the opportunity to focus on recognition struggles and processes in this context, as I imagined the young volunteers likely had experiences of, and opinions about, representations of themselves and their neighborhoods on different media and platforms. Finally, I saw some practical advantages in establishing a field site centered on the organization and its activities. Again, since I did not want to commit myself completely to certain recognition struggles and processes in advance, I needed a context in which I could meet young media users and get to know them, and to learn about their media use and experiences around social recognition and disrespect. In this safe environment, I could then locate relevant interlocutors who would like to talk more about their experiences of, and thoughts about, these (quite personal) topics, and who would be willing to invite me into their everyday lives. I considered the activities in the residential areas and in the NGO's headquarters as this safe setting.

Finally, I had been given permission by the NGO to run a workshop about media and recognition at one of their events, which was open to more than 100 young volunteers. I had planned for it to be the starting point for a more quantitative form of investigation, which could supplement ethnography's traditional focus on participant observation and different interview formats.

All the considerations outlined above – i.e., regarding the field site and my participation – were part of the preparations I made before my first day 'in the field'. On 4 March 2020, I visited a city in the western part of Denmark to take part in an introductory event for new volunteers in the NGO. This was intended to start my ethnographic work of establishing rapport (Bernard, 2011, pp. 277–278). I was supposed to participate in a couple of these events in the following weeks but, of course, everything was thrown up in the air when the first Danish lockdown was announced. All activities in the NGO were initially postponed and then, eventually, cancelled. I had only spent one day in the field which, interestingly, turned out to be a lifeline for my research project.

As most other people did, I started to work from home over the following months. I often worked in the laundry room of my apartment complex, as there was no peace or space to be found in our two-room apartment (my two small children, my wife and I were in lockdown together). My wife and I took turns taking care of our children, who at that time were aged two and three, as I tried to keep up with a PhD course about digital ethnography (which had been moved online) and figure out what to with my project. In the middle of this bizarre and incomprehensible (global) situation, I saw two necessary adjustments for my work. First of all, I needed to re-arrange the fieldwork *period*. In fact, this opened up new opportunities from the start. I placed a greater emphasis on the workshop I was supposed to arrange for the NGO's event in the fall of 2020 and started to couple it with ideas from utopian action research (e.g., B. S. Nielsen & Nielsen, 2016). I even contacted another organization which conducts workshops for teenagers about a range of youth-related societal issues and was given permission to run my workshop as a part of their activities. However, one lockdown followed another, and all the activities of both organizations were cancelled (again) in the fall of 2020.

Secondly, I also had to change the scale and format of my fieldwork. I realized that I probably had to work with a smaller number of interlocutors to get started, and that the ethnographic cornerstone of participatory observation would not be in the methodological foreground, at least not to begin with. In April 2020, I therefore arranged an online meeting with some of the young volunteers I met at the introductory event in March. This meeting was supposed to function as a prototype for the workshop I wanted to carry out later in the year, and also became my primary

arena for recruiting interlocutors. Thus, when my plans to rearrange the activities started to fall apart in the fall of 2020, I once again reached out to this little group. I asked if they would be willing to participate in my project as individual interlocutors without the NGO's activities providing the context, a process which would start with online qualitative interviews. Three of the participants from the online workshop in April eventually joined the research project. And, since the NGO's activities no longer functioned as the starting point, I also took the opportunity to invite a fourth interlocutor with a particularly relevant profile for a study about media and recognition, who I had met and recruited at a public library (I will give a closer introduction of the interlocutors below).

Based on the online pilot workshop in April 2020 and the initial interviews with my four interlocutors, I started to conceive the empirical element of my research project as a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In this case study, I have still been able to carry out many of the interview formats and exercises that I had originally planned, and I have also done some (participatory) observation. In the following, I will outline the methodological starting points (i.e., my understanding of ethnography and case study) as well as the practical starting points (i.e., my interlocutors and specific methods), both of which guided my fieldwork.

4.1 Ethnography as the methodological starting point

In my attempt to examine and unfold the role of media (use) for recognition processes and struggles among young people in times of deep mediatization, ethnography's general emphasis on studying people's (everyday) life worlds seemed well-suited to contribute to a theory of justice as social analysis (see Chapter 3). It sits within the broader emphasis of critical theory in the Frankfurt School tradition which is concerned with studying the totality of society in its historical specificity (H. K. Nielsen, 2020), something which is also a guiding principle in Honneth's recognition-theoretical framework. And, although the normative inclination of critical theory is not embedded in ethnographic methodology per se, the combination of critical theory and ethnographic methodology is well-established within the humanities and social science (H. K. Nielsen, 2020, p. 487).[7]

[7] Although approaches sometimes designated as *critical ethnography* (e.g., Madison, 2020; Thomas, 1993) do not incorporate critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School tradition.

However, a methodological section on ethnography can easily run into definitional quicksand at the very beginning. What, for instance, is the difference between ethnography and anthropology? Is ethnography a discipline, a product, a format, or a method? And what about all those little adjectives that are often added before the noun "ethnography", such as "critical" or "digital"? Typical of the academic literature, the answers to these questions are many, differentiated and sometimes even contradictory. As such, I will only engage with the discipline-historical and semantic debates that surrounds these – and other related – issues to a limited extent.

Instead, my starting point has been an understanding of ethnography along the lines of Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) account in *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. By describing the focus of their book, they indirectly define ethnography as an approach which is "primarily concerned with field research involving a range of methods, with participant observation being given particular emphasis" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. x). Accordingly, in their understanding of ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson focus on what "ethnographers actually do":

> (…) ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.
>
> (2007, pp. 2-3)

In these terms, ethnography can be understood as a particular kind of fieldwork, different from – yet similar to – fieldwork within for instance archaeology, linguistics, botany and geography (Hastrup, 2020, p. 67). It involves different techniques or underlying methods, especially relating to participant observation, in order to gather empirical material. However, as Kirsten Hastrup (2020) argues in relation to the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork, the approach is not particularly well-suited to collect "data" in a conventional understanding of the term (p. 65), as the quote by Hammersley and Atkinson above might seem to suggest. Instead, the strength lies in its usefulness for creating knowledge about "all those things that goes on between people – and between people and society" (Hastrup, 2020, p. 65, my translation); in other words, a broad epistemological focus on intersubjective relations and sociality, something which ethnography shares with recognition

theory. More specifically, Hastrup explains that fieldwork creates a unique ethnographic material, which she defines as:

> (…) detailed and experiential descriptions of the life in the field, including those reflections over specific events or utterances that you inevitably already make from day one. Of course, this material is never entirely 'raw' because it is coloured by both the researcher's knowledge interest and by his or her position in the field.
>
> (2020, p. 65, my translation)

In my research project, "day one" occurred many times. Not only due to the flexible and unpredictable nature of ethnographic fieldwork in general, but especially because the global COVID-19 pandemic and its local consequences ruptured my plans and the process. However, despite the re-organization and reinterpretation of my fieldwork as a case study, the purpose of my empirical investigations has always been to create this kind of unique ethnographical material, as it allows me to address the research question of how deep mediatization constitutes and changes, and limits or enhances, recognition processes and struggles. Next, I want to elaborate my tentative understanding of ethnography to explain how I have worked more specifically. In Section 4.2, I outline how I interpret the central praxis of *thick description* within ethnographic methodology (which Hastrup also indicates in the quote above), and in particular how it relates to the particular approach of digital ethnography. In Section 4.3, I describe what I mean by case study and how the specific case that I examine in this dissertation both aligns with and differs from the (Danish) youth research tradition within media and communication research. In Section 4.4, I introduce my interlocutors. Finally, in Section 4.5, I introduce the concrete techniques and methods I have utilized.

4.2 The thickness of thick description

This research interest of this dissertation is situated within a discussion of justice and the good life at the intersection of mediatization research and recognition theory (critical theory). However, neither of these research areas or theoretical approaches entail nor call for specific research *methods*. Thus, from a methodological perspective, I follow the idea that critical theory should be seen as a "theoretical space for reflection" (teoretisk refleksionsrum in Danish) (H. K. Nielsen, 2020, p. 471) which, in order to study the totality of society in its historical specificity, must always in dialogue with empirical material. For instance, in his main work about recognition, Honneth (1995,

see especially part II) continuously formulates his attempts to "check", "ground" and "support" his theory empirically.[8]

In terms of this dissertation's "empirical grounding", I wanted to establish a similar dialogue between a theoretical synthesis (of recognition theory and media(tization) theory) and an analysis of media users' practices and reflections with regard to processes of recognition and disrespect. As indicated above, I found ethnography's overall occupation with the intersubjective and so-called lived experiences well-suited for studying the normative claims of my interlocutors, as well as the everyday expressions and emotional aspects of their practices and personal reflections. While ethnography is a broad term for a multiplicity of observational methodologies across many research fields, there is an overall agreement (M. H. Jacobsen & Jensen, 2018, p. 15) about ethnography's usefulness for providing what Clifford Geertz seminally conceptualized as *thick description*:

> From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description."
>
> (Geertz, 1973, p. 6)

Geertz famously described culture "an assemblage of texts" (Geertz, 1973, p. 448) and in his seminal essay on thick description he argues that the main point of ethnographic research is to "find one's feed" in a certain cultural context and carry out the difficult task of *conversing* (in a widened sense of this term) with people in order to (get their help to) interpret the "flow of social discourse" as well as "rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms" (Geertz, 1973, p. 20), that is, fix it as thick descriptions. In this sense, thick descriptions are many-layered interpretations that includes both the ethnographers' and their interlocutors' understandings of the given context. As Norman K. Denzin explain in a definitional outline of thick description:

[8] In fact, one of his main contributions in *The Struggle for Recognition* is to show how findings from empirical studies support Hegel's philosophical theses on recognition.

> Thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. It enacts what it describes. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard, made visible.
>
> (2001, p. 100)

As stated above, I understand ethnography along the lines of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) (which is the textbook way, at least according to Geertz), but I interpret the dialectic interplay of theory and ethnographic methodology as a means to achieve the form of thick description that Denzin describes here. However, this interpretation diverges from, or maybe even contrasts with, Denzin's understanding of how thick descriptions are constructed. Indeed, Denzin understands thick description as *performative writing*, which includes "first-person narratives, poetry, performance texts, fiction stories, literary nonfiction, layered accounts, writing-stories, responsive readings, personal memoirs, and cultural criticism" (p. 100). Thus, he categorizes much of the writing in social science as *thin description*, because researchers "slight description in order to give thick, detailed, theoretical accounts of events or processes" (104). I do agree that the techniques mentioned by Denzin can sometimes help achieve the characteristics of Denzin's own outline of thick description quoted above. However, I don't think these techniques constitute a necessary condition for presenting "detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships", inserting "history into experience", or establishing "the significance of an experience or sequence of events for the person or persons in question" (to quote Denzin's own formulations). Instead, I argue that thick description is more a question of analysis than of (style of) writing, although of course the two cannot be entirely separated.

Nevertheless, Denzin's characterization of thick description displays many of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that ethnography shares with critical theory – and which originates in both approaches' opposition to positivism (Putnam et al., 1993, p. 233). They both regard research as a form of representation rather than observation and verification of (objective) facts, and they focus on the interpretation of meaning as socially and intersubjectively constructed, as well as involving multiple views of social reality. Furthermore, in the quote above, we see a focus on a

dialectic, holistic, historically contextualized and processual perspective, which is also often highlighted in accounts of critical theory (e.g., H. K. Nielsen, 2020, pp. 471–476). With the attentiveness to "the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals", outlined in Denzin's quote above, something akin to Honneth's phenomenological ideas of recognition and disrespect can also be observed. This points towards the complementarity of recognition theory and ethnography. However, as Marianna Teixeira (2017) has pointed out in a review of Honneth's "sociological roots and deficits", this complementarity was most obvious in Honneth's early writings and the development of his main work *The Struggle for Recognition*, while his later works and especially *Freedoms Right* (which is central to this dissertation) do not pay the same attention to social actors and their moral experiences and interpretations. She writes:

> The theoretical shift carried out by Honneth in the 20 years that separate one book from the other can thus be seen as a change from the hermeneutical "Why?" to the functionalist "What for?" regarding society's moral infrastructure. The starting question, "Why do certain normative ideals or values compel individuals and groups to engage in social struggles?", is replaced in Freedom's Right by: "What normative ideals or values are functional to social reproduction?"
>
> (p. 606)

To bridge the difference that has occurred with Honneth's theoretical shift, Teixeira proposes an approach that "requires an effective dialogue between the social theorist and the social actor, so that theory-making can be conceived of as an activity that is intersubjective—and thereby dynamic and processual—in a strong sense" (p. 606). According to Teixeira, this involves a process of *biographical reconstruction* which is "carried out by the social actors themselves in a dialogue with an observer—in this case, the social theorist—who asks them to narratively recount their life stories, their struggles and desires" (p. 607), which entails that the theorist is also always a participant, and, importantly, that the participant is also always an observer "in that she creates articulate narratives for her life experiences" (p. 608). I argue that this approach shares a fundamental intention with Geertz' (1973) strong focus on gaining access to people's own conceptual world to converse with them and thereby bring forth thick descriptions together. At least, this has been the methodological starting point of my ethnographic approach in order to work towards the form of dialogue or cooperation that Teixeira sees as an adjustment to Honneth's methodology of normative

reconstruction (outlined in the previous chapter). This is also why I have continuously considered the young participants in my study as *interlocutors* and do not use the more traditional notion "informants".

So, how can such thick descriptions of mediated recognition processes and struggles be carried out? In her book *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday,* Christine Hine (2015) lays out some steps for how ethnography can be conducted in "pursuit of 'thick descriptions' to suit the conditions of contemporary society" (p. 1). In Hine's view, ethnography has shown its merits "as a method for getting to the heart of meaning and enabling us to understand, in the round and in depth, how people make sense of their lives" (p. 1), and she argues that ethnography's characteristic as a highly adaptive "boot-strapping" method is well-suited and highly necessary for "the age of internet". However, it needs some "creative adaption", since mediated communication poses general challenges for the ethnographic method and ways of understanding:

> Whatever it is that people do, an ethnographer would generally want to be observing them doing it, and wherever possible doing it with them. Embracing mediated communication means, however, accepting the limits to perception that various forms of mediation confer, and accommodating some consequent loss of ability to develop a holistic and detailed understanding. Doing ethnography through mediated interactions can mean the loss of a secure sense of a geographically based object of study, or involve abandoning the notion that one studies a defined social group or community, depending on how the patterns of communication cross geographic spaces and social boundaries.
>
> (Hine, 2015, pp. 4-5)

While Hine points out that it has never been possible to grasp the entirety of a situation or context, with ethnography of mediated communication it is certainly often difficult to focus on a particular geographical place or location, which, in turn, relates to challenges of sustaining a prolonged immersion in a field. One of the fundamental ways Hine seeks to meet these challenges is to rely on the idea of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). Georg Marcus suggested multi-sited ethnography as a new approach to study global cultural flows and practices, which challenged the traditional idea of fixed field sites as it called for the inclusion of multiple locations, actors, and networks to study cultural phenomena: "Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited

ethnography research" (Marcus, 1995, p. 97). Marcus thus identifies different techniques of how to follow persons, things, metaphors, stories, lives and conflicts. According to Hine (2015, pp. 61-65), multi-sited fieldwork (in combination with other approaches) is very suitable for digital ethnography, because it enables researchers to follow the digital traces of individuals and communities across multiple online platforms, thus creating a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of digital cultures.

My starting point was also to view my fieldwork as multi-sited, which, however, I already knew beforehand would entail certain challenges because, as danah boyd observes, it is almost impossible to move and to follow people and content unhindered between different (online and offline) environments and contexts (D. boyd, 2015, p. 84). This built-in challenge became even greater with the various COVID-19 lockdowns because I virtually 'lost' all the geographically located field sites which were given by the activities in the NGO, and I had to consider whether I should focus exclusively on online field sites. In this context, danah boyd's (2015) approach to the methodological challenges of ethnography was decisive for my project. Thus, boyd, who has done extensive research on teens and their use of media and technology, writes: "To address the methodological challenge of doing multi-sited fieldwork without being able to move seamlessly between field sites, I decided to organize my ethnographic project around a set of discrete field sites, linked by social media" (p. 85). Following Jenna Burrel (2009), boyd terms this a *networked field site*, which means that different field sites are integrated by a common phenomenon, in this case social media. It can be understood as a "network composed of fixed and moving points including spaces, people, and objects" (Burell, 2009, p. 189).

Starting from this perspective, I have built my field site from a range of such fixed and moving points: the homes and rooms of my interlocutors or the places they hang out outside their homes; the setup and interface of their devices and screens; the many platforms and websites they use; the content they produce and consume; and the traces they leave from their production and interaction. Moving around in this network, I have, for example, conversed with some of my interlocutors both online and sitting next to them while they were playing computer games; I have interviewed one of my interlocutors via Zoom while she was on her daily train ride home from her university; I have done

online observation of one of my interlocutors playing computer games with one of his friends; I have visited and explored the digital platforms and media products my interlocutors use and talk about; and all of my interlocutors have given me "tours" around the digital landscapes of their mobile phones, computers and PlayStations (as mentioned, I will introduce my interlocutors and my specific methods in sections 4.4 and 4.5). In this way, I have tried to follow the four components of ethnographic fieldwork that boyd has establish from studying teens engagement with social media sites:

> 1) immersion in teen pop culture and subculture; 2) participant-observation and content analysis of teens' online traces on social media sites; 3) participant-observation and "deep hanging out" in physical spaces where teens gather; and 4) semistructured face-to-face ethnographic interviews.
>
> (boyd, 2015, p. 85)

However, boyd's general research agenda "focuses on how technology fits into the everyday lives of teenagers" (p. 81), that is, how teenagers' cultural logics and understandings of the world shape their relations with technology. While my research question certainly overlaps with this research interest to some extent, it focuses more specifically on recognition processes and struggles. In the following section, I therefore want to explain how I regard my ethnographic fieldwork as a case study of these specific recognition processes and struggles.

4.3 The case of the case study

Following the above methodological reflections, I can now return to describing the development of my project. As I stated at the beginning of the chapter, my overall research interest in studying the role of deep mediatization for recognition processes and struggles had, from the outset, led me to decide on an empirical focus on young Danish media users. Moreover, my contact with and access to the NGO also opened up the possibility of studying specific recognition struggles in relation to young residents in exposed residential areas. However, as I also described, the many cancellations and re-arrangements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic eventually removed my fieldwork from the boundedness of this organizational context. This narrowed my study to a few interlocutors and modulated the usually central role of participant observation in ethnographic research but,

paradoxically, losing this context also sharpened my focus because I was left with the young people's media use, or rather the young people themselves, as the dominant parameter.

My research question revolves around examining recognition *processes*, which are not easy to identify as particular cases (Stake, 1995, p. 2). So, when I no longer had to connect the young people's media use to loosely assumed recognition struggles and processes associated with exposed residential areas in the construction of my research object and my field site (which in fact also implied a certain unethical essentialization of group identity), I could more clearly focus on the unique persons I had met in the field – and persons are, in contrast to processes, obvious cases within case study research (Stake, 1995, p. 2). In other words, this allowed me to see more clearly the "case" of my study, something which I had already (unconsciously) constructed while designing my PhD project; that is, by choosing young media users in Denmark as the empirical focus. Realizing this, I started to conceive of my project as an ethnographic case study. In a certain sense, all ethnographic fieldworks are case studies, but what do I mean by "case study" in this specific context?

My understanding of case study research is based on Bent Flyvbjerg's (2006) hugely influential writings on the matter. From this perspective, I consider the experiences and reflections of my four interlocutors as constitutive of a so-called *extreme case*. Flyvbjerg writes that extreme case "can be well-suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way" (p. 229). The basic point or premise of this dissertation, which I have established in the previous chapters, is that recognition processes and struggles are being transformed in times of deep mediatization. Hence, to get that point across and explore it in further detail, my starting point has not only been to recruit interlocutors from a deeply mediatized context (i.e., Danes) but also to – eventually – recruit interlocutors within this context who indicate to an "extreme" degree the technologically-based mediation of social life (i.e., in terms of the amount of time they spend on and with media), where processes of and struggles for recognition are fundamental mechanisms. Furthermore, from this basic premise of the dissertation arises the discussion of media and freedom that I have outlined in the previous chapters. Specifically, this revolves around the problem that the processes of deep mediatization represents a liberating potential but, at the same time, they also create new forms of

dependence that might undermine autonomy and mutual recognition (Jansson, 2015). Here, the extreme case is especially useful for describing the depth of such a problem. As Flyvbjerg explains:

> When the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. This is because the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied. In addition, from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur.
>
> (2006, p. 229)

As I have mentioned above, it is exactly the basic social mechanism of recognition (and disrespect) in times of deep mediatization that I wanted to "activate" with my PhD project in order to discuss the "deeper causes" of the chancing conditions for recognition processes and struggles. Since "everybody cares about recognition" (Mcbride, 2013, p. 1) in a fundamental sense, everybody could potentially have become an interlocutor in my project. However, my case study rests on the assumption that the extent and depth of my interlocutors' media use can reveal more information about mediated recognition processes and struggles.

Situating my case in this way also means that my study overlaps with the overall (phenomenological) interest in children's and young people's media use that characterizes a specific – yet diverse – tradition within media and communication research (for overviews, see Drotner, 2018; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). In a Danish context, Stine Liv Johansen and Malene Charlotte Larsen (2019) have provided an excellent introduction to this research field in their book *Børn, Unge og Medier* (*Children, Young People and the Media*). While they underline that do not cover all aspects of this broad topic, they discuss certain overall characteristics of children's and young people's media practices under the headlines 'Media and the Praxis of Play'; 'Social Relations'; 'Identity and Self-presentation'; and 'Children and Young People in a Datafied Society' (my translations), with all but the first being important attention points for my case study. Significantly, Johansen and Larsen use mediatization research as an overall framework for understanding these characteristics, and they argue that mediatization "can be seen as a basic condition for children's and young people's lives

today” (p. 24, my translation). Thus, with an attention to processes of deep mediatization, Johansen and Larsen outline how media developments in recent years have meant that young people are not only consumers of media but that, to a greater extent, they have also become producers of media, although they might not necessarily see themselves in that way; "They are just preoccupied with their interests and use the internet to cultivate them" (p. 33). With reference to Bruns (2008), Johansen and Larsen point to how young people’s “participation in such media practices is motivated by the ability to contribute to the common good as well as the possibility of recognition and social capital” (Johansen & Larsen, 2019, p. 32, my translation). Yet they also mention how this development has led to online communities and dynamics which produce and distribute hurtful and offensive user generated content, a topic which has been heavily debated in the public arena (p. 33). Furthermore, Johansen and Larsen describe how media practices moving from web to mobile and from text-based to image-based communication involve issues relating to availability and visibility, which are also related to the increased commercialization and datafication associated with the business models of social media companies (2019, pp. 33–38; Chapter 6). This problematization corresponds largely with the themes I have outlined – in different ways – in Chapters 2 and 3. However, it is important to note that Johansen and Larsen warn against so-called moral panics (Cohen, 1972) or media panics (Drotner, 1999) in the public debate which have, historically, accompanied discussions of children's and young people's media use (Johansen & Larsen, 2019, pp. 11–20). Instead, they call for a balance in the research field between:

> on the one hand a media-centric and technology-deterministic approach that overestimates dangers and influences and does not consider the context in which the media is used, and on the other hand a cultural-deterministic approach that sees children and young people as unaffected and, conversely, neglects the dangers and influences that may be associated with media use.
>
> (p. 14, my translation)

In a Danish context, the debate about this balance is very much alive, as popular scientific publications, such as physician Imran Rashid’s *Sluk: Kunsten at Overleve i en Digital Verden* (*Switch Off: The Art of Surviving in a Digital World*) have delivered fierce critiques of how technology affects children and youth, which sometimes contrasts the more cautious assessments by media scholars (Johansen & Larsen, 2019, p. 14), who tend to start from an audience perspective. In this

dissertation, I do not directly engage with this particular debate about young people and well-being. However, it has been an attention point in the conversations with my interlocutors, and I consider it to be integrated in my overall discussion of freedom and justice. Furthermore, while my analysis can hopefully contribute with qualitative inputs and nuances to the *general* research interest in media and young people, my main intention has been to interpret my interlocutors' media practices from the particular perspective of recognition theory and moreover, as outlined in this chapter, to converse with them about questions of the good life in a deeply mediatized world.

4.4 Introduction of interlocutors

During my fieldwork I carried out various interviews, exercises and observations with four interlocutors (see Tables 2 and 3 below) between October 2020 to January 2022. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I first met three of my interlocutors – Ahn, David and Maarika – on my first day of fieldwork in March 2020, at the introductory event for new volunteers in the Danish NGO I was collaborating with at the time. All of them were participating as experienced volunteers, who would help new volunteers get started in their roles. Together with two other experienced volunteers, Ahn, David and Maarika were part of the online pilot workshop I did in April 2020 and, subsequently, they agreed to be part of the new set-up of my fieldwork in the fall of 2020.

Table 2: List of interlocutors

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age (during fieldwork)**	**Primary guide to**
David	M	29	Twitch
Nikolaj	M	15	Discord
Maarika	F	22	TikTok
Ahn	F	18	Instagram

My fourth interlocutor, Nikolaj, joined the project at the end of November 2020 in a quite unorthodox way. I met him at a public library, where I was working on my PhD project and he and his tutor were practicing German. Engaged in small-talk, Nikolaj was telling his tutor that he spends an incredible amount of time on the internet where, among other things, he participates in the furry fandom, a subculture interested in anthropomorphic animal characters that appear in, for instance, cartoons. The community gathers on the internet and at so-called furry conventions, especially in

the US, and many of the community's members identify as "furries". This means that they develop a character-personality, a fursona, which they materialize in drawings or even costumes known as fursuits that represent their character. During their small-talk, Nikolaj told his tutor that he identified as a furry. The combination of this very particular identity formation (and the related experiences of recognition and disrespect he also touched upon), as well as his extensive use of the internet, caught my (research) interest. I introduced myself, apologized for eavesdropping, told them about my research project and asked if Nikolaj would be interested in taking part. He seemed very interested, and I got his contact information. Two days later, I wrote him an email together with a consent declaration for him and his parents to sign (he was not of legal age at this point). He answered the same evening with the consent declaration signed by his father, and we started to arrange the first interview.

From the pilot workshop – which Ahn, David and Maarika participated in – I had a (tentative) impression of their media repertoires and their favorite media platforms and practices, although their media use was "inherently cross-media" (Schrøder, 2011). Thus, when I invited them to participate in the case study, I introduced the idea that each of them could function as a primary "guide" and gatekeeper to the digital platform on which they spent most of their time, and that I would then "follow" them from there (i.e., in accordance with the principles of multi-sited ethnography, as described above). Thus, Ahn became a primary guide to Instagram, David to Twitch, Maarika to TikTok and, when Nikolaj joined, he became a guide to Discord. This approach has allowed me to examine how the differences and similarities of particular experiences of, and reflections about, recognition and disrespect play out across some of the most popular platforms for socializing and gaming among young media users. In the two following chapters, I will unfold my interlocutors' experiences and reflections, and relate them to the discussion of social freedom in times of deep mediatization that I have outlined in the previous chapters. To provide a contextualizing basis for this analysis, I will give a brief biographical introduction to each of my four interlocutors in the table below. The table is reproduced from a research article I have published (Pedersen, 2022, p. 10) with certain adjustments.

Table 3: Brief bios of interlocutors

David	**Nikolaj**
David lives in his own apartment in a town in the Central Denmark Region. His main interests are computer and PlayStation games, and he spends many hours gaming every day. He also likes to just hang out online and socialize with friends, especially on Twitch, where he also has his own channel. David cannot work due to suffering minor brain damage at birth that led to certain impairments (spasticity in his hands, epilepsy and limited sight on one of his eyes). He thus dedicates a lot of time to volunteering in the NGO where I first met him, meeting up with his long-time municipal support person, and visiting his mother who lives nearby. At the pilot workshop, David told me about experiences of being bullied throughout his childhood, which is part of the reason why he volunteers to help empower kids from exposed residential areas, and why he also tries to create a room for people to share personal issues in the streaming chats he is a central part of.	Nikolaj is a high school student who lives in the Capital Region of Denmark. His parents are divorced, and he splits his time between his mother's and father's homes. Nikolaj spends as many hours as possible in front of his computer, where he mostly plays computer games and talks with his closest friends, whom he met online. Nikolaj identifies as a *furry* (an anthropomorphic animal) and, in the fall of 2020, he changed his profile pictures on various platforms to a picture of his so-called "fursona" to indicate his identity to his online environments. During my fieldwork, Nikolaj was diagnosed with autism and was allowed to attend school from home when his classmates returned to school after the COVID-19 lockdowns. Nikolaj is thrilled about this, because it is in front of his computer he feels most "like himself". Most often, he chats and plays a range of different games (typically within action, strategy and role-playing genres) with his friends, or follows different conversations on Discord servers.
Maarika	**Ahn**
Maarika lives with her family in the Central Denmark Region. She is a BA student in sociology, but most of her life revolves around her activities as an influencer on different social media channels, mainly TikTok, where she uses her identity as hijabi football freestyler to be a role model, and to counter negative stereotypes about Muslims and female footballers. She tries to find time for her university studies, volunteering in the NGO where I met her, playing on a football team in her spare time, and spending time with her family and friends. However, most of her everyday life is spent practicing football tricks, filming, editing, checking and responding to comments on TikTok because she has become very popular, and she now has more than half a million followers. However, Maarika's social media activities also means that she often has to deal with so-called "haters", who makes derogatory, offensive or even abusive comments.	Ahn lives in her own apartment in a town in the Central Denmark Region. She finished high school and moved away from her mother's home during my fieldwork, and she currently has a student job in the NGO where I met her. Ahn is a skilled, self-taught graphical designer and used to share pictures of her drawings and artworks on Instagram, where she would also receive quite a few commissions. Today, while she still spends time on Instagram, it has become a place where she mostly follows her friends and her interests, especially dancing and hip-hop music. Previously, Ahn also used Instagram to bond with other users, and she even made new friends from England, who she has visited in London. However, when I met her, Ahn had started to reflect upon certain negative impacts of her media dependence and had begun to both remove content, make fewer posts and respond more slowly, both on Instagram and other platforms.

4.5 Specific methods

The main element of my ethnographic work consisted of three different types of interviews. I conducted 2-3 traditional qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all of my four interlocutors. In the first interview, I used the same interview guide as a point of departure regardless of the interlocutor. After this, I adapted the interview guide to the individual interlocutor in the subsequent interviews based of my observations of their media use, which allowed me to follow-up on themes from the previous interviews. However, I have tried to place all the questions/themes in these interviews in relation to three general questions, which have structured the interviews:

1. How do media users associate their use of – and engagement with – media content, such as journalistic genres and social media posts, with emotions of (mis)recognition, nonrecognition and (in)justice?
2. How do digital communicative infrastructures and spatio-temporal characteristics of a given medium or platform constitute and change conditions for, and processes of, recognition?
3. How does the presence of media devices (or content) in social spaces and face-to-face interaction constitute and change conditions for, and processes of, recognition?

In addition to these semi-structured interviews, I also carried out a card sorting exercise, which I have adopted from media studies that use so-called Q methodology (Kobbernagel & Schrøder, 2016; Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010). In this exercise, I asked my interlocutors to place a comprehensive list of 36 cards with the names of various types of media platforms or media genres on a pyramid grid. This allowed them to quantitively indicate which role different types of media play in their everyday lives (see example in Picture 1 below). Thus, the pyramid grid spans from “plays no role in my everyday life” to “plays a big role in my everyday life”. I also provided blank cards, on which the interlocutors could add a media platform, genre, etc., if they felt something was missing. For those cards which they placed as most important to their everyday lives, I asked them to fill in additional information on the back of the card. One of the basic ideas of Q methodology is that the so-called Q-sorts from different participants – displayed via the relational scalar grid (the pyramid) – allow for a statistical factor analysis that can be used to generate a typology of the practices or statements which the method is used to explore. My original intention was to include this card sorting exercise as a part of the workshops I had planned with the NGO, which would have included around 100

young participants and therefore produced a substantial number of Q-sorts to generate a typology. When I was unable to carry out these workshops due to the COVID-19-related lockdowns and cancellations, I decided to stick with the card sorting exercise and use it as elicitation tool (Grant, 2019, Chapter 8) for think-aloud interviews with my interlocutors, as this would allow me to get an overview of their media repertoires. Therefore, the card sorting exercise was the second type of interview I conducted.

The last type of interview was also constructed as a think-aloud exercise. In this case, I visited my interlocutors in their homes or other places that were important in their everyday lives, sat together with them for a couple of hours and got a "guided tour" of their primary devices/screens and the apps, programs, etc., which they have installed and use, with an emphasis on the platforms my interlocutors were primary guides to.

Picture 1: Example of Q-sort

Between all of these interviews, Ahn and Maarika permitted me to visit their social media profiles in order to observe and take screenshots of their content and, on my own, I explored servers and channels on Discord and Twitch based on input from Nikolaj and David. I also spent time exploring

and reading about other platforms and types of media content mentioned by my four interlocutors during the interviews, such as different music tracks, subreddits, webpages, computer games, etc. All of the card sorting exercises and guided tours were carried out face-to-face, while some of the semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Zoom or screen recordings of video chats on Discord. All of the interviews, as well as screenshots and other data material, were first recorded and saved directly on my work phone or computer. They were then moved as soon as possible – after the initial recording, or construction of the data – to a protected drive on the university server of my employer, to which I am the only one with access. My interlocutors (and Nikolaj's father on behalf of Nikolaj, who was not of legal age at the time) all signed an initial declaration of consent which explained the research project in general terms, as well as specifics regarding data registration and processing.

This outline of specific methods concludes my methodological chapter. In the next two chapters, I will draw on the theoretical foundations (Chapter 2) and my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) to analyze and discuss the ethnographic material I have established via the just outlined methodology.

5 Furries, Freestylers and the Re-orientation of the Self: Affirmational Struggles for Recognition

> I love that you have got a platform where you can express yourself. You can post about everything. From drawing to cooking, to doing sports, all sorts of things. There's room for so many things. This has also made room for diversity and difference, it has spread (…) So many bisexuals and gay people post on TikTok. Boys who put on make-up, which in the past was strange, but because TikTok has become such a big platform, it has normalized. You see a lot of people doing that, and that also makes it easier for minorities to step forward, they are less oppressed, because people no longer see it as a 'foreign' thing. It has been recognized, and this recognition is so important for a human being to exist in a society. So, social media has helped very, very much in this regard.
>
> - Maarika

> It *is* my life. The internet is where I feel most like myself. There are many more things that I can joke and talk with people about. If I'm at school, I'm just looking forward to getting home.
>
> - Nikolaj

The quotes above express a widespread idea relating to the liberating potential of deep mediatization: that the processes it involves have provided us with domains where, to paraphrase the reflections by Maarika and Nikolaj, there is room to step forward in order to be and feel more or most like ourselves; that is, to claim and experience social recognition. In the previous chapters, I have covered a range of reasons why this idea – i.e., of media-related recognition potential – will probably be questioned or criticized in academic and popular debates about media and technology. Thus, when faced with quotes like those from Maarika and Nikolaj, an analysis that wants to discuss social freedom on the basis of experiences and reflections by media users very quickly runs into what Magalhães and Yu (2022, p. 567) call "the Gordian knot of most theorizations of datafication's moral troubles" (which I would rephrase to *deep mediatization's moral troubles*). Writing specifically about social media platforms, Magalhães and Yu describe this Gordian knot as "the enormous gap between the utterly negative image painted by critics and the much more ambiguous impressions of being a user of platforms" (p. 567).

As I have already outlined, Magalhães and Yu are the only media scholars who have applied Honneth's (2014) conceptualizations of freedom to media analysis. Additionally, they provide an

excellent premise for my own analysis, as they argue that one of the main reasons for the above-mentioned gap is experiences of intersubjective recognition, much like those expressed by Maarika and Nikolaj. Even if critics like Magalhães and Yu point to the unfreedoms related to or caused by certain media platforms and practices, it should be noted that modern media are so compelling *exactly because* they promise and, to a certain extent, also lead to experiences of genuine recognition. At the same time, however, they also make up "especially powerful datapoints in how platforms try to entice us never to leave their domains" (Magalhães and Yu, 2022, p. 567). Thus, in this chapter and the one following it, I want to take some steps towards cutting the Gordian knot.

In this chapter, I focus on affirmational recognition struggles (Giles, 2020). My overall argument is that, while processes of deep mediatization might indeed lead to increased opportunities "to legitimately articulate parts of one's personality" as well as new forms of social inclusion (Honneth, 2003, pp. 184-185), these processes do not necessarily realize individual autonomy (social freedom). This is not only because – as we have seen in Chapter 2 – affirmational recognition easily transmutes to ideological (Honneth, 2012a) forms, but also because of the importance of social institutions for the realization of freedom. In the following, I want to illustrate the importance of social institutions by exploring and expanding the concept of the re-orientation of the self (Hepp, 2020, pp. 166–173), which I outlined in Chapter 2 as an orientation away from the social institutions of interpersonal relationships towards *mediated* recognition.

Firstly, in Section 5.1, I indicate that although the media practices of my interlocutors are different, they can all help illustrate and nuance different aspects of this re-orientation of the self. Secondly, in Section 5.2, I argue that the re-orientation of the self can be seen as an orientation towards the symbolic and practical resources of the internet for individual self-realization. Thirdly, in Section 5.3, I argue that the re-orientation of the self is also a reorganization of the space of the self (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, pp. 164–168), or the sphere of privacy as Honneth call it (see Chapter 3). This aspect of the re-orientation of the self is characterized by two distinct yet overlapping processes, which I term a *decoupling* of the space of the self and a *replacement* of the space of the self. Finally, in Section 5.4, I discuss how the re-orientation of the self affects the realization of social freedom by

juxtaposing my analysis with Honneth's normative reconstruction of the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships.

5.1 The re-orientation of the self

My four interlocutors represent four different – and of course highly specific – examples of how recognition struggles play out in times of deep mediatization. Within the research discourse of my methodology, they represent an extreme case in terms of the time they spend on their media use. This is the case if they are compared to peers and also in terms of the importance that media practices play in their recognition struggles. Nevertheless, the characteristics and dynamics of their media practices will certainly be familiar to most of their peers and also, in more twisted ways, to the prejudices of older generations. In *this* sense, there is nothing "extreme" about my interlocutors. During my fieldwork, I made a card sorting exercise with them (see example in Picture 1 above), which indicated that the most important media in their everyday lives are social media platforms (for Maarika and Ahn) and gaming platforms (for Nikolaj and David). In this way, they are like millions of other young people who use their phones and computers every day to engage in activities and communities where – to paraphrase Douglas Giles' (2020, p.) definition of affirmational recognition struggles – they feel like they fit in, belong and are accepted. Thus, by describing the everyday media practices that I have observed and discussed with my interlocutors, I hope to illustrate some of the ways that recognition processes and struggles change (more generally) in a deeply mediatized world in order to discuss the consequences of this for individual autonomy.

As mentioned, I will focus on affirmational recognition struggles and their relation to private autonomy in this chapter. Again, the initial quotes are a good starting point. The way Maarika and Nikolaj describe the potential for recognition also points to the way they use media. On the one hand, Maarika talks about the possibilities to "step forward" and says that social media have made "room" for so many things, which indicates a sort of "coming out" process. On the other hand, Nikolaj's contrast between school and home (where his computer is), and his indication of where he feels *most* like himself indicates the way that the internet, in his opinion, has provided a place for retreat; a sort of backstage, to use a well-known sociological metaphor (Goffman, 1958). Nikolaj's media use revolves around Discord, where he communicates within the "closed"

communities of servers or with small groups of friends in “private” video, voice and text chats as they play computer games, while Maarika mostly observes and posts videos, pictures and updates within the semi-public arenas of social media, especially on TikTok.

However, this apparent contrast is not one between transformational and affirmational recognition struggles. Instead, I interpret the everyday practices that both of them refer to in the initial quotes – i.e., doing sports or talking and laughing with friends – as “the ongoing efforts of individuals to seek recognition that constructs and affirms their personal identities and their place in society” (Giles, 2020, p. 210); that is, as everyday affirmational recognition struggles. Thus, the differences in terms of their media use – at least when it comes to their use of different kinds of platforms and the types of communication these platforms afford – uncover different aspects of the *same* transformation of affirmational recognition processes and the way this affects individual autonomy. This transformation can broadly be described via Hepp’s (2020, pp. 166-173) notion of a re-orientation of the self, which I have outlined in Chapter 2. It signifies an orientation away from the intersubjective recognition experienced in the institutional sphere of personal relationships – which is traditionally characterized by more or less fixed role positions and/or physical co-presence – towards mediated recognition. In the following, I explore and expand what this re-orientation of the self involves.

5.2 Relying on the internet

“With the revolution in communications technology”, Honneth writes, “there has obviously been a major expansion of the freedom to shape our own lives” (2014, p. 77). As we have already seen, both media scholars in general and Honneth himself have reservations about this statement, but there certainly is room at the cross-section of recognition theory and media and communication research to argue that “digital media and digital infrastructures provide the means to *recognize* people in new ways as active narrators of their individual lives and the issues they share with others” (Couldry et al. 2014, p. 615, emphasis in original). Indeed, young people like my interlocutors have grown up in a transmedia (Jansson, 2013) and polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013) environment, where the quantitative trends of mediatization (Hepp, 2020, pp. 40-52) have resulted in spatial extensions of the social world through an omnipresence and increased optionality of media. This

has increased the time people spend with media (technologies), made more social practices media-based and also, gradually, has turned ordinary people into producers of media content. In this way, digital media and the internet have amplified the – already significant – role that media practices and content play as reservoirs for material and symbolic resources which allow us to examine and express identities in the course of socialization (see Couldry and Hepp, 2017, pp. 145-161). Maarika, for instance, who was often the only girl in school and in her local community to play football when she was a child, found resources of identification on YouTube, and she says that these have significantly influenced her self-realization:

> As a child, [social media] helped me get inspired. I saw other girls playing football! Later, when freestyle became popular, I also saw many girls do that. And that made me start. If I had not seen those girls doing it, I wouldn't have known that it existed. I will say that without social media, I wouldn't be doing freestyle today. I'm 100 percent sure of that.

As an influencer today, now with more than half a million followers on TikTok alone, Maarika's core narrative of her activities revolves around giving other children the same kinds of mediated experiences. Moreover, she hopes that her Muslim identity will also add another layer of identification, which she did not find in her childhood football role models. We can imagine how Maarika might have found role models or experienced such feelings of affirmational recognition via a book, a music album or a television show, for example. Both before and after the latest waves of mediatization, this has certainly been the case for many people. However, studies of media representation over many years, in many different contexts and across different types of media and genres have shown how various groups and ways of life in society have been mispresented or underrepresented in news, films, etc (e.g., Ellis, 2018; Global Media Monitoring Project, 2020; Hall et al., 2013). Of course, the internet has its own (algorithmic) problems with media representation, but the gist of both Maarika's and Nikolaj's initial quotes is more in line with Honneth's comment on the liberating potential of the internet.

In this way, as I have also illustrated elsewhere (Pedersen, 2022), we can compare Maarika's story to that of Alan Jensen, the first homosexual participant in the Danish version of the reality television program *Farmers Looking for Love*, as it allows us to understand the relationship between the

current media environment and affirmational recognition struggles that my interlocutors express. In an interview with tv2.dk, Alan Jensen talks about the difficulties of "fitting in" as he grew up in the Danish countryside in the 1980s: "I didn't have the internet to rely on back then. In my childhood and youth, I never met a homosexual as far as I know" (Østebø, 2021). It is exactly this idea of having the internet to "rely on" which is also central in the quotes at the start of this chapter, and it becomes even more apparent if we examine Nikolaj's story of "coming out" as a furry. A few months before I met him, he had mustered the courage to change all of his profile pictures on various sites and platforms – including Discord – to a picture of his so-called fursona (see example in Picture 2). Until that point, Nikolaj had just followed the furry fandom community online and through this, he says, he then discovered that he was a furry himself. One day he saw a furry drawing on Reddit and immediately identified with it, and it was this drawing he eventually placed as his profile picture, which revealed his new identity to his online communities.

Picture 2: Example of a typical furry character By Yamavu – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36945695.

As these examples indicate, the online resources for self-description and self-definition are not peripheral to how my interlocutors see themselves. Rather, they are brought into the very core of their personal spaces, understood in the way that Couldry and Mejias (2019, p. 156) define the space of the self. This was also evident when I visited David in his two-room apartment in the western part of Denmark where he lives. One of the first things I noticed when I stepped into his living room were four action figures displayed on the top shelf of his cupboard. David explained to me that two of these figures are the hooded assassins from the action-adventure video game *Assassins' Creed*, one

is a half scale replica of the bionic underarm of the character Snake from the video game *Metal Gear Solid*, and the last is the so-called tank character D.Va (in her pink mech suit) from the video game *Overwatch*. These figures, which are from some of David's favorite games, are almost the only decorative items he has in his apartment. Moreover – and telling of the role they play in signaling identity and belonging within his sphere of privacy – they were placed right next to the pictures of his family members, which hang on the nearest wall.

Adding to the list – i.e., of Maarika's epiphanic childhood experiences with YouTube videos, Nikolaj's coming out story and David's computer games "altar" – Ahn brought stories about how important the internet and digital media had been for her. Specifically, they allowed her to share her graphical artwork (Instagram), to connect with her Vietnamese family and heritage (messaging and video apps) and for exploring her thoughts of changing religious affiliation (mobile apps with theological and practical information about Islam). These observations testify to the profound role played by "new" media (cultures) in providing what Couldry and Hepp (2017, pp. 156-157) term *resources of the self*; that is, resources for self-narration, self-representation and self-maintenance. In fact, Couldry and Hepp argue that we can validly talk of the mediatization of socialization (p. 152) and, in relation to the discussion of freedom, they point out that "at a basic level, the individual simply has a greater scale across space and time on which to pursue and achieve her needs" (p. 146).

However, the significance of these changing resources of the self in combination with the altered spatiality and omnipresence of media also results in a culture of interveillance (Jansson, 2015). As we saw in Chapter 2, this provides the very basis for Hepp's (2020) concept of a re-orientation of the self. Hence, the re-orientation of the self is intimately linked with an increased dependence on digital infrastructures and media practices which, in turn, "act back on the self, increasingly through processes of datafication" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 166). Individuals' interveillance practices of monitoring themselves and others through data doubles (Hepp, 2020, pp. 158-160) entails a fundamental awareness of digital appearance and digital traces. This, according to Couldry and Hepp (2017), changes the way the self is "*in"* the world as well as the self's reflexivity: "The *site of self* is being transformed, and this may be the most important shift in how communications shape social reality in the past decade" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 146, emphasis in original). In their

outline of the mediatization of socialization and the changing resources of the self, Couldry and Hepp draw on existing media and communication research that indicates how this transformation of the site of the self is expressed in a range of media practices, especially among young people. These involves maintaining an online presence (Couldry, 2012, pp. 33–58), turning the self into a brand or a project that must be exhibited (Hogan, 2010) – which often involves a desire for validating interactions (Bucher, 2012; Papacharissi & Easton, 2013), and considerations and insecurities about audiences and the situation in which one communicates and acts (D. boyd, 2008, 2014; Turkle, 2015, 2011) – as well as various practices of self-quantification (Lupton, 2016; Williamson, 2015). Thus, Honneth's point that the revolution in communications technology has expanded the freedom to shape our lives must be seen in the light of the fact that it also ties people closer to media, as Couldry and Hepp (2017) point out: "These potential new transformations carry a price. While apparently enhancing the freedom of the self, they build into the fabric of the self an infrastructural dependency" (p.166). As Couldry and Hepp show, this dependency has "recalibrated individuals' potential relations to social institutions" (p. 148) in the course of socialization which, in turn, increasingly establishes a situation "where the pressure to be part of a 'pervasive sociality' – curated not out of love or affection, but for profit – conflicts with the self's need for freedom" (p. 155). It is this recalibration of individuals' relations to the social institutions of personal relationships that I now turn.

5.3 Missing the space of the self

The re-orientation of the self from social institutions to mediated forms of recognition re-organizes the space of the self. As I argued in Chapter 3, the space of the self (Couldry and Mejias, 2019) often overlaps with what Honneth calls the institutional sphere of personal relationships. This means that we are, paradoxically, often not alone in the space of the self. This is most obvious when we talk about the broader sphere of privacy to refer to our homes or the activities of our "private lives", where our close relations are often around (in one way or another), but, as I also mentioned in Chapter 3, we also sometimes share the physical space around our body and our most personal thoughts and reflections with intimate relations. Of course, our private autonomy or self-determination to carry out processes of examining and establishing our self-definitions and life aims without disturbance from others are inward and monological in the end, but never take place "far

away" from the relational institutions of friendship, family and intimate relations where we can struggle socially to have these self-definitions and life aims affirmed. In other words, they are never far away from their realization as social freedom or relational autonomy via our social institutions of mutual recognition. However, with the re-orientation of the self in times of deep mediatization, we can register different re-arrangements of the overlap between the space of the self and the institutional sphere of personal relationships.

5.3.1 Decoupling

To understand these developments, we can turn to a consistent theme from my interviews with Maarika. During the interviews, Maarika mentioned several times how the many hours she spends on maintaining her TikTok and other social media profiles takes time away from being together with her family and friends. In Maarika's case, this relates to being an influencer, something which demands many hours of (often unpaid) labor every day to (strategically) compete for as many likes, comments, views and followers as possible, which opens the entire research field of digital labor (for an overview, see Chandler & Fuchs, 2019). Maarika shared with me how she has lost friends because of the time she dedicates to her digital labor; how she has an implicit understanding with other friends that she is always looking at her phone when they are together; and how her TikTok-related activities prevent her from being fully dedicated to studying for her BA. She has even made TikTok videos about the downsides of being an influencer, where she emphasizes the feelings of *loneliness* it involves. Maarika connects these feelings of loneliness (intertwined with feelings of exhaustion, that she also expressed occasionally) with the experience of being detached from her personal relationships because of her media practices. Of course, the physical detachment from close relationships can also be related to other kinds of labor and activities that take us away from family, friends and partners in the course of daily life. Nonetheless, Maarika's work as an influencer reminds us of the many hours people spend online every day in various ways, a detachment which can also take place in the co-presence with close relations when people are "on their phones"; for instance, this has been problematized with regards to parents' absence and lack of eye contact with their children (e.g., Raudaskoski et al., 2017).

This detachment from our close relationships is what I call a *decoupling of the space of the self* from the institutional sphere of personal relationships. It goes without saying that the space of the self is

always already decoupled, in a certain sense, from this institutional sphere. Indeed, this is probably essential for the very constitution of the space of the self. As mentioned in Chapter 3, if we share a home with others, we might have or construct "a room of our own" (Woolf, 1929). Beyond the confines of private homes (for those who are lucky to have one), we might also be able to find the "space" to be "alone with our thoughts"; that is, to retreat from social obligations, or to examine and experiment with our self-invention and life aims without the disturbance from others. However, when we scroll through or post on our media feeds and streams while we are together with family and friends (e.g., playing with our kids or hanging out with friends), or even while we sit on the toilet or just before we fall asleep, we not only engage in practices of, for instance, self-measurement, public connection or interveillance. Rather, we re-orientate the self (in varying degrees) from the proximity of personal relations and the sphere of privacy.

This can also be observed from a different perspective in some of Maarika's reflections from the interviews, where she occasionally mentions that she has very little time "for herself". In a certain way, this contrasts with her feelings of loneliness but, at the same time, it underlines how media-related practices decouple the space of the self from the sphere of privacy, and how this sphere is intertwined and associated with the institutional sphere of personal relationships. Even though Maarika takes the train alone almost every day back and forth from her university, the train rides are mostly dedicated to planning her TikTok videos. Many hours are, of course, also spent recording the videos. She also finds time both be a football coach and play on a football team herself. She is therefore often home really late, with little time for herself or her family before she falls asleep. And when she is out recording videos, also on her own, she is often spotted as a microcelebrity by some of her young followers from TikTok. When this happens, they often want to take a picture or play football with her (in fact, this also happened a couple of times during our interviews). Thus, it is important to notice how the decoupling of the space of the self cannot be solely and stereotypically depicted as people staring mindlessly into a screen, unaware of the activities or persons around them (although this definitely characterizes the phenomenon to a certain extent). Instead, Maarika's orientation towards her screen when she researches, records, analyzes or responds to her videos – or simply when she, like everyone else, just checks and scrolls through her feeds during her classes in university or when she hangs out with friends – is embedded in everyday routines as

she moves around, and also involves activities that bring her into face-to-face contact with other people. However, the simple fact that this contact – online or otherwise – often involves social roles and forms of communication other than those which characterize the social obligations and attachments of close personal relationships, also means that it does not establish an *institutional* context for affirmational recognition. For Maarika, the many likes and positive comments on TikTok – and especially the kind private messages on Instagram – mean a lot to her (tellingly, her brief profile text on TikTok refers to her followers as a "family"). But this is a family of now half a million people, most of which Maarika doesn't know, and even those who are her most dedicated followers can be difficult to recognize if they change their profile pictures (something which Maarika explained to me). Thus, the many acts of recognition that Maarika indeed receives from this online family must be juxtaposed with her stories of losing friends, of missing her family and having no time for herself.

Of course, Maarika also communicates with her closest family – and especially with friends and acquaintances – throughout her daily life. And while these interactions and conversations are very often mediated via text-messaging apps or services, they do establish the sort of overlap between the space of the self and the social institutions of family and friendship that I have argued is characteristic of affirmational recognition. Hence, these forms of communication do *not* represent a decoupling of the space of the self. Rather, their mediated disposition points towards another aspect of the re-orientation of the self in times of deep mediatization, which I will address in the following section.

5.3.2 Replacement

Maarika's communication with her close relations points towards another aspect of the re-orientation of the self, which I call a *replacement of the space of the self*. This aspect relates closely to the notion of constructing a data double (Hepp 2020, pp. 158-160) as well as the conception of interveillance culture (Jansson, 2015). Hence, in contrast to the decoupling aspect of the re-orientation of the self, the replacement aspect is signified by media practices where people do not orient themselves "away" from the institutional sphere of personal relationships as such but, rather, seek affirmational recognition from close relations such as friends and families via mediated communication and self-expressions.

This is perhaps best exemplified by some of the conversations I had with Ahn. Between our first two interviews, Ahn had a period "off" Instagram because of some personal issues she was going through in her life. When we talked about this, we had this longer dialogue:

Ahn: The way I use Instagram right now is to show how well I feel [laughing]. Even though it is just to hide how you really feel, you know. So, you put up this façade, which is not showing how you are really doing. If it makes any sense?

Leif: *Try to tell me a little bit more about that.*

Ahn: Well, I feel that the way I'm using Instagram, the things I post and so on… I haven't really made posts, but mostly stories… But, you know, it shows that I'm doing *amazing*, and, you know, you can't know how I really feel, and it's the same way for everyone else. You put up a facade, for example, if I posted that... let me think…what I have posted. For example, I have posted all the good things. I've been out to eat, I've been with my cat or something, like, well, you know... I don't know how to explain it.

Leif: No, but I understand (…) So, what you're talking about is that you share a lot of those things that are nice in your life, but sometimes you may not be feeling as well as it seems. But why do you do it? Why are you sharing these things? You might share a photo and it looks like it's been a good day, but in fact it's been a bad day. How can it be?

Ahn: Well, personally then... it's like a personal thing. I don't know if somebody else thinks like that, but I don't like to kind of show emotions. You know, like... I don't like to seem like someone who is weak... In principle, if you don't dare to show that you are weak, then you are in fact, like, you know, very weak. If you don't dare to show it. But that's just how I feel. I don't like to show it. If I were to post something like... there are someone who are comfortable enough to post that they have been sad, or there are some who write about a bad day. For example, let's just take a small example that isn't so dramatic. If one were to post that there was someone who was kind of racist towards you. I mean, I have experienced something like that, but I just don't want to post about it. I know it's a thing, but it's not something I want to post about.

Leif: Why not? Is it because you think… do you feel like it's too private or what?

Ahn: Yeah, I feel like it's too personal. So, I kind of have a boundary in terms of what I post.

Leif: You mention this thing that there is someone who are comfortable showing if they have been sad or have had some tough experiences, of if some things are hard. And then there is someone like you who has a boundary or

mostly share some kinds of feel-good things. But why is it even necessary? Couldn't one just stop sharing whether one was happy or not happy? Or, while feeling sad, one shows that one is happy – why do you have to share it?

Ahn: I think that the thing about feel-good and something like that is just to keep your Instagram going. In some way or another. If I didn't post anything, I could feel that I was dropping off a little bit, because I still want to, ehm yeah, keep my Instagram going. Even when I had that period [off Instagram]. And there were many people who, like, said to me, "Ahn, you are sleeping [living] under a rock now". And I was like, "Oh yeah, I think I have to pull myself together again".

Leif: (…) What does it mean to keep it going?

Ahn: I think it's just like, "Okay, do actually still exist," you know. Because a lot of people liked my drawings and so on. But I just stopped doing that completely. Well, I haven't really considered it again, but people kind of thought that, "She isn't drawing anymore. She doesn't use her Instagram anymore, so we just unfollow her or something". Well, it not because I care a lot about followers. It's more just to, like, show, "Just wait, soon there will be something that will entertain you" (…)

Leif: Why is it important to entertain people in that way?

Ahn: For me, I just like to entertain people because every time you post something, you get, like, something back, that recognition and, you know (…) for example, I posted a dance video, a short dance video, and I didn't really think it was particularly good, and I didn't expect people to comment. But it just surprises me every time that so many people are showing support, and that's what I like.

There are three important takeaways from Ahn's reflections. First of all, at this point in her life when she had actually "retreated" into her sphere of privacy in general, and away from certain media practices specifically, she felt and was maybe even told by others that she was "sleeping [living] under a rock" and, in a certain sense, didn't "existed". As a result of this, she experienced a sort of pressure to "keep her Instagram going", something which is a key facet of the relation between deep mediatization and struggles for affirmational recognition. As Jansson points out, the newest phase of mediatization is not just a matter of "*more* media within *more* areas of social life" (2015, pp. 87-88). Just like earlier media-related developments – e.g., the rise of the broadcasting era – what allows us to even talk about social and cultural transformations are the conditions when

“media are experienced as more or less indispensable and social life becomes difficult to manage, and indeed to image, without them” (2015, pp. 87-88).

Secondly, Ahn says she doesn’t want to share experiences of disrespect in the semi-public context of Instagram which, in my terminology, would also take her into the realm of transformational recognition struggles. Therefore, Ahn sticks with affirmational struggles to fit in and be accepted, but she also says that she doesn’t share “feelings”, which in turn makes her feel ambivalent and even weak about putting up a façade. These reflections characterized her period off Instagram and immediately after but, at the end of her reflection, we also see her example of sharing a dance video which – as she told me months later – had actually become a more important part of her mediated self-expressions, as these videos represented her mood and identity in a much more sincere way.

Lastly, Ahn says that she doesn’t care much about her number of followers, but more about entertaining people who expect something from her, as well as receiving support and recognition. Ahn’s media use is generally characterized by practices of lurking, as well as daily contact with family and friends through text-messaging apps and sometimes through online games. She has two very close friends who she often spends time with and texts during the day and, in a later interview, she also indicated that it was these friends – who she also knows *outside* of Instagram – who had indicated that she was living under a rock by not posting anything, or by being active in other ways. Taken together, these three takeaways show that the re-orientation of the self towards mediated self-representations replaces the space of the self, which can result in ambivalent feelings of what and how to share in terms of one’s personal moods and activities, as well as when and how to be present “online”. Furthermore, these self-representations are predominantly directed towards (relatively) close relations, who also make up the recognition relations of the non-mediated lifeworld.

For Nikolaj and David, however, similar processes of replacement were less characterized by feelings of ambivalence. Instead, they were experienced more unambiguously as affirmational recognition, because their online communities of small groups of friends almost entirely constitute their spheres of privacy, where they align their personal spaces with (especially) the social institution of

friendship. In Nikolaj's case, this can be illustrated by returning to his quote at the beginning of the chapter, which has been central throughout the analysis. To reiterate, Nikolaj says that the internet is where he feels most like himself and that, when he is in school, he is just looking forward to getting home to his computer. The quote is from the very first interview I did with him, which took place at a time when Nikolaj had recently moved to a new school. During our first conversations, he told me that he spent almost all his breaks sitting by himself with his mobile phone. About his classmates he said: "I don't know them, and they don't know me". Nikolaj seemed to be alright with this situation, however. He explained that he had also been known at his former school as a quiet and reserved type, and although he said that, of course, it would be nice to have just one friend in his new class, he was actually quite satisfied with the circumstances. Instead, he referred to the significant role the internet and his online relationships play in his life. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, which were in place during my fieldwork, Nikolaj was happy that he almost never had to leave his computer chair during the day because his classes had been moved online. Moreover, when he was diagnosed with autism in 2021, he and his parents entered into an agreement with the school that he was allowed to receive tuition from home. Thus, in many ways, it is not an exaggeration when he says that the Internet *is* his life.

This also means that Nikolaj's closest friends are online relations, primarily from the US and the UK. These are people he has never met physically, but with whom he talks with every day and shares weekly online Dungeons and Dragons sessions. Furthermore, his contact with his parents and siblings are also integrated into his online world in different ways. His parents are divorced, so when he is staying with his father, his mother mostly contacts him through the chat function on Discord: "She knows that she can better reach me there than sending a text," he told me. And his major interest in Dungeon and Dragons is also an element of his family life, since he plays online sessions with his father, his siblings and his father's girlfriend.

David's daily life is similar in many ways. As mentioned above, David lives in his own apartment and, although he visits his mother and eats dinner at her place several times a week, volunteers in the NGO through which I recruited him as an interlocutor, and spends time with his father's family once in a while, his primary social engagements in everyday life takes place online or via mediated

communication. David has a group of friends who he met on Twitch (they connected because they all followed or knew the same streamer). This streamer has then created a Snapchat group for his most dedicated followers and, within this group, 5-6 people (including David) are in almost daily contact. David says that this group is like a family and during the live streams on Twitch, and especially in the Snapchat group, they often joke around with each other. But they also share personal feelings and experiences associated with, for instance, getting a divorce, falling in love and mental health issues. David has even opened up to this group about some of the challenges that arise in his life as a result of his disability, which is usually not something that he shares with others.

While it was this “online family” that David talked about most during my fieldwork, he also has a small group of other close friends that he has known online for many years through streaming, with whom he shares an interest in computer games. David's relationship with these friends is another good example of how online relationships can be incredibly important for affirmational recognition. David’s interest in PlayStation games and computer games gives him the opportunity to meet and socialize with other people online but, as a disabled gamer, he has also experienced hostility, toxicity and exclusionary behavior, which is typical of certain online games and environments. For instance, people playing so-called First-Person Shooters (FPS) and Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs) games are often not accepting of David's reduced reaction time. In David’s own words: “They get pissed off (…) Then you are called a fake gamer”. In contrast, David says that his group of friends accept him for who he is, and he feels safe and comfortable with them. Thus, they live out their interest for the abovementioned type of games together and, if needed, David’s friends make sure that other players don’t kick him out of the games and also function as a "social buffer” (Beeston, 2020, p. 122) against hostility.

The close friendships and subcultures around gaming that Nikolaj and David describe create a social inclusion that gives them the opportunity to share feelings and articulate their personality, and their online communities provide a context for their lives for many hours every day. The difference between Nikolaj’s and David’s descriptions, and Ahn's reflections, above is of course largely about different media practices and platforms. However, within my conceptual framework, the difference is also an expression of the fact that, even though posts on Instagram are part of Ahn's broader

private sphere and thus her friendships, she still tries to maintain a private space that lies *outside* her media practices, while David and Nikolaj have "moved" their private spaces online to a greater extent.

Although the replacement of the space of the self that Nikolaj and David experiences largely gives rise to practices of mutual recognition with friendship as a social institution, Nikolaj and David also express certain challenges that separate these mediated friendships from their ideas of non-mediated relational practices. For example, David in particular expressed that he longs to meet his online friends in person, but that previous attempts to make arrangements have never come to fruition. In addition, both Nikolaj and David talked about how their hopes and intentions of building romantic and intimate relationships could not be unfolded (and thereafter maintained) exclusively via mediated practices, although they clearly perceived such practices – and online contexts in general – as the most accessible and realistic starting point from which they might find potential partners. With these final examples of Nikolaj's and David's reflections in mind, I have gradually started to discuss the consequences of the re-orientation of the self for social freedom more broadly, which I will elaborate in the final section below.

5.4 The consequences for social freedom

In the last section of this chapter, I want to outline how the re-orientation of the self, and the transformation of affirmational recognition struggles it entails, presents certain challenges to the institutional sphere of personal relationships and thus the conditions for the realization of social freedom in times of deep mediatization. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Honneth divides his so-called normative reconstruction of this sphere into the three social institutions of friendship, intimate relationships and families. In general, he is very positive towards the historical developments and the present conditions of these institutions in terms of their roles in realizing social freedom. About friendship, he writes: "On the whole, there is little reason to doubt the stability of the modern institution of friendship; in fact, of all personal relationships of our day, it might even be the most resilient in the face of accelerating processes of individualization and flexibilization" (Honneth, 2014, p. 141). With regards to the institution of intimate relationships he argues that, as it has been gradually released from certain social constrains and norms associated with traditional ideas of

sexuality, gender and marriage, this institution has been emancipated and democratized so that it is now "easy to see the significance of the modern form of love for the entire structure of our freedoms" (p. 151). As for the social institution of family life, he points to the progress achieved by social struggles and subsequent legal reforms during the last fifty years, and states that "the modern family is currently on a path of normative development that allows it to train and practice democratic and cooperative forms of interaction better than ever before in its brief history" (p. 174).

However, while Honneth touches on the consequences of certain processes of deep mediatization for the institutional sphere of the political public sphere (the democratic public sphere and the constitutional state), which I will discuss in the next chapter, media-related developments do not play any significant role in his assessment of the conditions for social freedom within the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships. To a certain extent, this contrasts with the analyses within mediatization research of the interveillance culture and the re-orientation of the self (Hepp, 2020; Jansson, 2015) that I have focused on, which indicates that this is one area where mediatization research and recognition theory could benefit from an interdisciplinary perspective. Therefore, in terms of the consequences of the re-orientation of the self for the realization of social freedom, I suggest that a useful starting point is to juxtapose some of the aspects I have described in this chapter with some of the potential misdevelopments that, according to Honneth, face the institutions of friendship, intimate relationships and families in contemporary societies.

As just mentioned, Honneth argues that friendship is the most resilient of all the institutions of personal relationships in today's world. With regards to the re-orientation of the self, this chapter has shown how it is friendship-relations in particular that are developed and maintained via the media practices of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, Honneth mentions certain risks for personal friendships that have been associated with the conditions of working life in contemporary societies:

> Because we experience ever greater pressure to succeed in the workplace, and because the flexibility of working life makes a privatistic orientation toward our own career chances an everyday necessity, we have no opportunity to practice the kind of selfless willingness to express personal sympathy, which is indispensable for maintaining friendships based on trust.
>
> (pp. 141-142)

Honneth emphasizes that little research has been done to substantiate these risks, but notices how those few critical works point to "a tendency to instrumentalize friendships in order to make advantageous connections" (p. 141). It is striking how this very formulation resembles some of the critiques that have been levelled against mediated relations as well (Turkle, 2011, 2015). Hence, in continuation of this critique, the re-orientation of the self might indicate both the resilience of friendship as a relational institution, but also the challenges that face this institution under deeply mediatized circumstances. One the one hand, the mediatization of existing friendships (Maarika and Ahn) and the establishment of new online friendships (Nikolaj and David) seem to make room for the self-articulation and mutuality that places friendship as "a homestead of social freedom" (Honneth, 2014, p. 140). On the other hand, the experiences of putting up a façade (Ahn), the deep (but unfulfilled) wish to meet up with online connections (David) and, in particular, the experience of losing friends due to activities relating to being an influencer (Maarika) seem to run counter to the role obligations needed to realize social freedom within the institution of friendship.

The absolutely central and dominant role that friendships play in the mediated practices of my interlocutors has also meant that both of the other social institutions (i.e., intimate relationships and family life) were rarely mentioned or present as themes in the interviews and observations I did during my fieldwork. Some of the reasons for this are simple (e.g., Ahn was the only one who had a partner at the time) while others are more complex (e.g., mediated spaces are exactly where young people hang out *away* from their parents (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 153)). Nevertheless, it was noticeable how my interlocutors more or less directly associated these social institutions with *non-mediated* practices; David's almost daily dinners with his mother, Nikolaj and David's reflections on the difficulties of finding a partner within their gaming communities and, not least, Maarika's feelings of missing her family due to media (related) activities. Thus, if the re-orientation of the self is quantitively characterized by more hours spent on or with media, the articulation of loneliness in, for instance, Maarika's reflections about media practices vis-à-vis family life also resembles the potential misdevelopments that Honneth registers in relation to both intimate relations and families. For Honneth, however, the cause for concern relating to both of these institutions comes – once again – from the career demands of the capitalistic (labor) market. For instance, and with

reference to sociological studies (Hochschild, 2001; Swidler, 1980), he establishes the following argument about the institution of intimate relationships:

> (…) greater career demands on flexibility, mobility and constant availability have made it more difficult for couples to put into practice the normative rules of socially emancipated intimate relationships. The reciprocal obligations of physical support and care often cannot be fulfilled because the increased demands imposed by the partners' careers prevent them from taking up the corresponding attitudes and stances. What recently has been described as the 'capitalistic' reshaping of subjectivity is probably beginning to conquer the sphere of love as well (…) If that is the case, then the institution of social freedom is in danger of being hollowed out from within.
>
> (Honneth, 2014, pp. 153-154)

Honneth's reference to the capitalistic reshaping of subjectivity is also a key feature of Jansson's (2015) critique of interveillance culture, and Couldry and Mejias' (2019) critique of data colonialism, both of which also draw on a Hegelian understanding of recognition and (inter)subjectivity. Indeed, paraphrasing Honneth, the demands of flexibility, mobility and constant availability in today's working life can certainly be both linked to – and paralleled in – the increased reliance on technologically based processes of mediation that define deep mediatization. As Hartmut Rosa (2010) has outlined, this intertwinement of technological reliance and social demands can also be understood in a broader context of late-modern processes of alienation and acceleration, where "the struggle for recognition changes from position to performance; recognition is no longer a life-time achievement, but more and more a day-to-day business" (p. 60). It is exactly this condition that Honneth and Rosa approach from one direction, which the critique of interveillance culture approach from another. Thus, when Rosa comments on the observation – made by Honneth (e.g., 2004) and other authors like Ehrenberg (1999) – that the late-modern self is experiencing an increased *exhaustion*, he argues that this is "largely (if not solely) attributable to a struggle for recognition which, metaphorically speaking, starts again and again every day, and in which no secure niches or plateaus can be reached any more" (Rosa, 2010, pp. 60–61). To reiterate, this is precisely the critique that is also levelled against the regimes of media visibility in times of deep mediatization (Campanella, 2018; Davies, 2021; Jansson, 2015), which conditions the re-orientation of the self. Thus, Honneth's rather simple argument that the demands of the (labor) market – i.e., to be available and to perform – take *time* away from the interaction and intimacy of the institutional

sphere of personal relationships, can also be directed at the media-based decoupling and replacement of the space of the self from the physical presence of friends and loved ones. Therefore, in the end, the critique of the hollowing out of the social freedom of personal relationships simply rests on what John Durham Peters (1999, p. 269) has called "the irreducibility of touch and time" in his history of the idea of communication. The promises of connectedness and recognition that mediation entails, and that today's tech corporations exploit, must still face this fact of this irreducibility for the importance of communication:

> To view communication as the marriage of true minds underestimates the holiness of the body. Being there still matters, even in an age of full-body simulations. Touch, being the most archaic of all our senses and perhaps the hardest to fake, means that all things being equal, people who care for each other will seek each other's presence (…) Touch and time, the two nonreproducible things we can share, are our only guarantees of sincerity (…) Despite of the stretching done by recording and transmission media, there are important boundaries to the scale and shape of communication.
>
> (Peters, 1999, p. 270-271)

This was perhaps also one of the lessons – a lesson of social freedom – that the worldwide community learned from the COVID-19 lockdowns, during which communication was more technologically mediated than ever before. And, since the sharing of touch and time among people who care for each other is institutionalized as mutual recognition in the sphere of personal relationships, we must also address the re-orientation of the self in times of deep mediatization with the same lesson: *Being there still matters*.

6 Fighters, Followers and the Visibilization of the Self: Transformational Struggles for Recognition

> Somebody has to do it. There are some who shy away from conflict and do not dare to stand up and speak. And when I already [post on social media], why not just do it. Also, if I see someone with the same background as me [being subjected to disrespect], it affects me too. Because I know what they're going through, and I know how degrading it can be to set a good example and still be looked down upon and talked down to (…) I don't think it's a nice role to have either. But I'll have to do the best I can out of the situation I'm in. It really sucks that I have to behave "extra Danish" to be accepted. An ethnic Dane doesn't even have to do a quarter of what I do to get the positive feedback that I get. But it is something you have to do when you are a minority in a country. Even today. It may change in ten to twenty years. I don't know.
>
> - Maarika

> I can be part of forming the next generation and the way they think (…) Generally, it's easier to normalize things on social media (…) you can make such a big difference.
>
> - Maarika

In this chapter, I will focus on transformational struggles for recognition in times of deep mediatization. To reiterate, these are different from the everyday affirmational struggles to fit in, belong and be accepted, as they instead refer to the "responses to circumstances or instances of misrecognition [and disrespect] that seek to rectify perceived injustices and transform recognition relations" (Giles, 2020, p. 211). As I have outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, I draw on Giles' conceptualization that regards transformational struggles as acts of political resistance or other forms of social action. However, this must be understood in a way that transcends what Giles calls the agency problem and the social movements problem of existing recognition theories. According to Giles, recognition theory must develop a better account of how people move from experiences of misrecognition and disrespect to action and struggle, something which includes paying closer attention to the fact that transformational struggles for recognition are not always carried out by social movements (which demand legal respect) but also by individuals on a smaller scale. Thus, my fieldwork and especially my conversations with Maarika – who explicitly attempts to transform recognition relations with her media practices and, in a certain sense, responds to experiences of disrespect on almost a daily basis – is a good starting point for contributing to the wider account that Giles calls for.

As Maarika indicates in the first quote at the start of this chapter, transformational struggles still require the individual to "cross a line"; that is, from the contexts of everyday affirmational struggles into political spheres that are often "outside our community and interpersonal relationships" (Giles, 2020, p. 245). Traditionally, public debate in the mass media has been a proxy for the political or public sphere (Habermas, 1974) and the mass media has therefore been one of the most important sites for transformational recognition struggles in and via media representation. However, as Giles points out, political spheres are often restricted (or even closed) to certain groups (2020, p. 245). In terms of the mass media, for example, this is evident in the way that women and minorities are still often underrepresented in many different ways (Andreassen & Nielsen, 2015). This means that transformational struggles for recognition are also struggles around accessibility to public spheres, and this can therefore be one of the driving forces for the formation of various counter publics (Fraser, 1990), but the potential recognition relations within counter publics or subcultures also means that many people often "opt to struggle for recognition outside a political struggle for transformation of misrecognition" (Giles, 2020, p. 238). However, as the plethora of recent re-conceptualizations within media studies and political communication of Habermas' (1991) original notion of the public sphere[9] reveal, the latest waves of mediatization have resulted in enormous transformations of publicness and the media landscape. In this context, the internet has paved the way for an increased accessibility to – and linkage of – public spheres and various subcultures across the world, and it thus provides different potentials for collective self-legislation. At the same time, as Honneth (2014) argues, these developments also come with the risk that the internet "deprives the public will-formation within a country of the motives of solidarity and the willingness to combat the growing stratification and fracturing of the public" (p. 303).

In this chapter, I rely on this tension in order to discuss transformational recognition struggles and the conditions for the realization of moral autonomy/self-governance. In Section 6.1, I argue that processes of deep mediatization have led to an increased *visibilization of the self* that changes the conditions for transformational recognition struggles. I borrow and expand the concept of

[9] Such as: networked publics (boyd, 2010; Varnelis, 2008), issue publics (Birkbak, 2013), listening publics (Lacey, 2013) calculated publics (Gillespie, 2014), hashtag publics (Rambukkana, 2015), affective publics (Papacharissi, 2016) and data publics (Hartley et al., 2023).

(in)visibilization from Ana Tomažič (2020), which I unfold further in Sections 6.2 and 6.3. First, in Section 6.2, I argue that the liberating potential of deep mediatization for transformational recognition struggles is associated with the idea of *getting a voice* which in fact transmutes to (in)visibilization of the self, because the processes of interaction and social cooperation which are in place do not value voice. Second, in Section 6.3, I focus on social media platforms and argue that the visibilization of the self is a specific consequence of the deeply commercialized and opaque organization of these platforms, which pushes transformational recognition struggles towards struggles for visibility as an end in itself. I explore this aspect of the visibilization of the self via two distinct yet overlapping processes or tensions: a move *from accessibility to notability*, and a move from *will-formation to brand-formation*. Through Maarika's practices, I want to indicate how these processes are experienced as being in tension with her struggle for transformational recognition. Finally, following the structure from the previous chapter, I dedicate Section 6.4 to a discussion of how the visibilization of the self affects the conditions for the realization of social freedom.

6.1 The visibilization of the self

The transformation of recognition processes we are dealing with here is not so much a re-orientation of the self as I discussed in the previous chapter. The latest waves of mediatization certainly involve an orientation away from traditional mass media organizations in terms of, for instance, where people find news, debate, entertainment, etc., but the "orientation" of the self in transformational struggles for recognition is still towards "the public sphere" in a broad sense. However, the public sphere has been reconfigured, with a range of new entry points which are accessed via the internet, which has loosened the gatekeeping function of traditional mass media. In this context, I borrow Ana Tomažič's (2020) term *(in)visibilization* to argue that transformational struggles for recognition – that is, the attempts to socially realize moral autonomy/self-governance – have been increasingly conditioned towards a visibilization of the self in times of deep mediatization.

In a few short research notes, Tomažič (2020) has tried to characterize the rise of the (in)visibilization society. This denote a new social order where "social structures, institutions, and practices of visibilization and invisibilization" – which have continuously been characteristic of the

production and reproduction of “power relations, power abuse, and resulting social inequalities in capitalist societies” – have now become “the main components of contemporary societies” (p. 2). Tomažič's concept is closely linked to deep mediatization processes and also encapsulates various critiques of commercialization and individualization in this regard:

> The digitalization of society and the rise and development of social media means that we now live in a world that not only increasingly allows us, but also forces us to make ourselves more visible – to live in a state of constant audio-visual self-portrayal.
>
> (p. 4)

This dialectical dynamic is, of course, also characteristic of the re-orientation of the self that I have described in Chapter 5, but it emerged most clearly in my interviews with Maarika where she articulated her transformational struggles for recognition and their connection to public spheres. On a more general level, the struggles around (in)visibility can be understood as the changed conditions of recognition that result from the way especially social media platforms establishes regimes of recognition (B. N. Jacobsen, 2021), built around a reputational economy (Campanella, 2018; Davies, 2021), which I outlined in Section 2.2.3, and which I will discuss in the course of this chapter. In what follows, I start by focusing on the liberating possibilities this implies, something which Maarika – although somewhat ambivalently – also expresses in the quotes which open this chapter.

6.2 Getting a voice

In the previous chapter, I described the liberating potentials of deep mediatization for affirmational recognition struggles in a section that was titled ‘Relying on the internet’ (Section 5.2). As such, this corresponding section about the potentials for transformational recognition struggles could well have had the same title, but the media-related transformations of the possibilities to “rectify perceived injustices and transform recognition relations” (Giles, 2020, p. 211) are more aptly framed by the idea of getting a voice. Indeed, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, some of the media and communication research literature focusing on the notion of voice – along with related ideas including “listening” – are also those places where recognition theory has been utilized. For example, in his book *Why Voice Matters* (2010), Nick Couldry draws on recognition theory to

establish his idea of democracy. In this book, an essential element is the critique of the role of traditional (mass) media institutions play in amplifying and normalizing values of neoliberalism, which Couldry regards as "a rationality that denies voice" (Couldry, 2010, p. 135). However, in his search for "post-neoliberal politics" in the final chapter of the book, one of the things that Couldry points to are what he calls "new technologies of voice" (2010, Chapter 7). He argues that these new (media) technologies have the potential to counter the pessimistic view about democracy that he associates with neoliberalism:

> The growth of the internet and the world wide web – the advanced networking of so-called Web 2.0 (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter), the vastly increased opportunities enabled by digitalization for exchanging images, narratives, information and ways of managing data – suggest many ways in which a new public 'is finding and identifying itself'. Has one building-block of neoliberal thinking about the limits of democracy fallen away?
>
> (pp. 139-140)

Although Couldry also mentions his reservations towards this early internet optimism about a "new" public (pp. 143-145) – which certainly seems a little archaic today – he mainly focuses on the potential for new voices to find their ways into public spheres, new possibilities for mutual awareness of these voices, as well as new forms of and spaces for political organization (p. 140). Together, according to Couldry, these possibilities could contribute to "new intensities of listening" which means that "each of us as citizens can, and public bodies including governments arguably must, take account of a vastly increased range of public voices" (pp. 140-141). In Maarika's initial quotes in this chapter, it is clear to see how the hope for these kinds of possibilities still thrives today, despite the crystallization of a stronger critique of neoliberal tech capitalism in both academic and popular discourse.

Yet, in Maarika's quotes, we also sense the limits of this potential. In *Why Voice Matters*, Couldry specifies these limits when he, with reference to John Dewey, points out that: "It is the interactive dimension of voice that is crucial: technological forms enable, but cannot guarantee, this. Voices may multiply, but democracy still fail" (Couldry, 2010, p. 143). The reason for this, Couldry argues, is that voice "is not just the process of giving an account of oneself, but also the value given to that process, the process of *valuing* voice appropriately" (p. 143, emphasis in original). It is possible to

see an example of the problems around such processes in Maarika's quote where she expresses the feeling that, as a minority, she has to make an extra effort to be appreciated by broader society. Thus, Couldry's critique of the problematic or insufficient role of mass media for democracy in contemporary and Maarika's experiences of struggling for recognition come together in Couldry's argument that "the fundamental deficit in neoliberal democracies is, then, not one of voice but of ways of valuing voice, of putting voice to work within processes of social cooperation" (Couldry, 2010, p. 144). It is also this Deweyan idea of social cooperation, first and foremost realized in the institutional sphere of the political public sphere, which is the foundation of both Couldry's (2010) and Honneth's (2014) ideas about democracy. Thus, in the following, I want to unfold how the increasing visibilization of the self in times of deep mediatization runs counter to the ideas of interaction and social cooperation.

6.3 Looking for the public sphere

As I described in the previous chapter, a huge part of Maarika's life revolves around the digital work she does with and on her social media profiles. According to Maarika, the purpose of this work is to realize her goals of establishing herself in the football freestyle field, and as an influencer more generally. She does so simply for enjoyment and perhaps for building a career but, most importantly, to be a role model via her media presence (as well as related activities and events) and to fight stereotypes of (Muslim) women. However, as I want to illustrate in the following, the workings of social media platforms establish a context in which these transformational struggles for recognition become subordinate to her concrete, daily and measurable efforts to create media content that has as wide a reach as possible, and which can ensure a constant growth in followers. As already mentioned, this can be described as a struggle for visibility that certainly overlaps her struggles for recognition but, at the same time, it is conceptually separable and (to some extent) in fact *preconditions* her struggles for recognition (in a similar way to the more traditional struggles for accessibility in the mass media mentioned above). This division into a primary struggle for visibility and a secondary struggle for transformational recognition is also expressed in the opening quote of this chapter, where Maarika says that she can take on the role of "speaking up" against disrespect and injustice because she is *already* visible and publicly present. From my fieldwork, and especially my conversations with Maarika, I have derived two overlapping aspects of this visibilization of the

self in today's media environment which change, and potentially hollow out, transformational struggles for recognition. I will start by outlining the aspect that concerns a process I have called *from accessibility to notability*.

6.3.1 From accessibility to notability

That the struggle for transformational recognition transmutes to a struggle for visibility is expressed in different ways. For Maarika, one of the major goals during the period of our first interviews were her struggle to be "verified" on TikTok and other social media, which some of her followers also contributed to by tagging TikTok's official profile and requesting that she should become verified. In this context, verification refers to the practice of most social media platforms of providing certain profiles with a badge next to the profile name that is, in the words of TikTok's verification guidelines, "a way for people to know that the high-profile accounts they are following are exactly who they say they are". When I did my second interview with Maarika, she was close to reaching 80.000 followers on TikTok, and we talked about her ambitions of becoming verified. I asked Maarika to explain what verification means, and she said:

> So, 'verified' means becoming a public figure (…) It could be a big thing. After all, being a public figure *is* a big thing. I think you reach more people, and you reach more businesses when you have the blue tick. I gave it a try once. It didn't work so well - I don't think I'm big enough yet. But it could be really cool to get it.

Maarika's expression of becoming a public figure is noteworthy. Not only because it hints at the theoretical distinction between the conditions for affirmational and transformational recognition struggles, but also because of the way it illustrates the remnants – and continued influence – of earlier constitutions of public spheres in the mass media era. In fact, the verification requirements set up by most social media platforms includes the criteria that a profile must be "notable", something which is closely tied up with appearances in the news, arguably the predominant media genre within the historical development of mass media (Høyer & Pöttker, 2005). Thus, in TikTok's guidelines, being notable is defined in the following way: "We review accounts that are featured in multiple news sources, and we don't consider press releases and sponsored or paid media" (*Verified Accounts on TikTok*, n.d.). The formulation in the verification guidelines for Facebook and Instagram is almost identical: "We verify accounts that are featured in multiple news sources. We don't

consider paid or promotional content as news sources" (*Verify Your Accounts on Facebook and Instagram*, n.d.) The criterion of notability adds an extra layer to the traditional struggle for accessibility in terms of establishing oneself as a public figure. These requirements are central for understanding the connection between existing and new power structures of (in)visibilization in capitalist societies in relation to struggles for media representation. For instance, an announcement from Instagram in 2021 about the requirements for verification stated that "across Instagram and Facebook we recently expanded our list of news sources to include more diverse outlets including those from additional Black, LGBTQ+, Latinx media, and including more outlets from around the world" (*Understanding Verification on Instagram*, 2021). Such an update can, of course, be partly seen as the result of contemporary recognition struggles, but first and foremost, it demonstrates the enormous power of tech giants to control visibility, something which has only been further emphasized by the very recent practice of Twitter and Meta selling verification badges to users for a monthly fee.

However, the struggle for notability goes way beyond the formal verification process on social media. As the Oxford Dictionary puts it, being notable is "being worthy of attention or notice; remarkable". Hence, Maarika's daily visibility work is not only about constantly producing content, but it is just as much about making sure this content is noticed by the interlocking dynamics of algorithms and other users in order to get as many views, likes and followers as possible. One of her dominant strategies is to follow "trends" on TikTok. Quite simply, this involves using hashtags and music tracks which are popular choices in other users' posts, but also finding certain video formats (e.g., so-called challenges) that she can sometimes directly copy, and other times "translate" into a football context. For example, at one point she saw a video that caricatured different schoolyard personality types and she then translated this into a video in which she caricatured different types of football players, and she asked her followers to indicate who they most resembled when they play football themselves.

This adaption of and *to* trends on TikTok – and within popular culture more broadly – means that Maarika's has to be very strategic in terms of how she presents her traits and opinions. She considers some aspects of this to be relatively unproblematic. For instance, she laughed when I asked her if

she also listens to the music she uses in her videos in private and said that her personal taste in music is often very different from the trending tracks on TikTok. She also implies in her videos that she is a much bigger fan of, for example, the football club Liverpool FC or Cristiano Ronaldo than she actually is. At other times, however, she has more ambivalent feelings towards this strategic self-presentation. This was the case when she won a competition to be part of the social media effort of a very big sporting event in Denmark and was told by the organizers that it should not appear from her TikTok profile during her engagement with the event that she was "so political", as she formulates it. While this restriction on her self-presentation was only indirectly linked to the workings of social media platforms, the demand to be noticeable often creates reflections about authenticity for Maarika. Since she receives sponsorships and occasionally earn some products or small fees by promoting different brands and events, Maarika first and foremost has to manage the trick – as presented by Davies (2021, p. 91) – of "sustain[ing] a sufficiently appealing uncommodified persona that can be deftly commodified for product placement or sponsorship purposes when required". This practice of sustaining a persona involves the task of producing new content almost every day that still appears authentic. When I asked Maarika about this continuous task, she said:

> I enjoy it for the most part. I think it's super cool, and I love the version of myself I've built and formed on TikTok. But it can also be really, really stressful at times. Especially because I am currently studying for a bachelor's degree (…) But then you still have to post on TikTok. Because if I don't post, I'll lose my followers, and then I'll lose everything I've fought for before. So, I can't just say, "now I take a break and then I'm going to focus on my school", just because I have exams, because then I'll lose what I've fought for the month before. So, you know, you kind of have to keep going. Otherwise, you lose it, and it can be stressful. It can be really stressful. Especially in the run up to exams. And my head runs in TikTok 80 percent of the day. Like, if I'm sitting somewhere, even in lectures sometimes when I fall off, I'm sitting thinking about TikTok. What new videos should I make? And I have a book where I just brainstorm all my TikTok ideas. And then I can go out and spend five hours filming them and then all three of them flop and get no views and then I have to delete and haven't posted anything for a day. So, it can also be really, really stressful. But it's just, like, as soon as I get an email saying "hey, we've seen your TikTok, it's very nice, you're so cool", then it kind of makes up for all the stress there is.

These feelings of ambivalence, between recognition and stress, are a result of how authenticity is negotiated in a recognition order "where cultural and moral worth are indicated via digital systems

of rating, feedback and evaluation" (Davies, 2021, p. 91). Indeed, as Davies formulates it with reference to Charles Taylor: "The problem of authenticity, which Taylor viewed as a crucial aspect of the modern self, is increasingly mediated through digital interfaces" (Davies, 2021, p. 91). In this context, Campanella (2018, p. 12) points to Honneth's (2008) notion of *self-reification* and argues that this is the risk that arises when media recognition becomes a "fast track" to a sense of inclusion and self-esteem in a structure where economic interests commodify visibility and thus the individual. Honneth (2008), who exemplify self-reification with reference to job interviews and internet dating services, argues that "the more a subject is exposed to demands for self-portrayal, the more he will tend to experience all of his desires and intentions as arbitrary manipulable things" (p. 83). While this concern was also present in Maarika's reflections, she generally articulated the attitude which initiates the above quote; that her self-portrayal on social media is of course a "version" of herself, which differs from other contexts, such as school or her football practice, but which she sees as a meaningful expression of her self-realization. Thus, immediately after her explanation of the stressful elements in the interview where the above quote is from, she said:

> I just feel like this is what I have to do. I like my studies and all that stuff, but it's super nice with my TikTok to be able to inspire people and help someone who reminds me of me as a child (...) and of course it's even cooler, when companies write that they would like to advertise and things like that. It's just another huge high five you get from there.

While Maarika here emphasize her practices as authentically motivated, from this and the quote further above, it is clear how closely recognition is tied up with notability in Maarika's reasoning. She might not feel that she has to change herself to have her identity and the transformational raison d'être of her TikTok practices acknowledged, but she certainly feels that she has to "keep going" not to "lose" what she has been fighting for and to get even bigger symbolical high fives. Thus, in Maarika's framing of her "fight", the struggle to be a role model cannot be untangled from the struggle to keep her followers and get new ones. Although this gives rise to the discussion of whether social media platforms create inauthentic desires and goals (Magalhães & Yu, 2022, p. 562) or adaptive preference formation and false consciousness (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149), which are considered as part of the constraints that can limit the self-realization aspect of moral freedom, Maarika's notability places her also in a position where she can really use the transformative power

of moral freedom "to exercise influence on the public interpretation of moral norms" (Honneth, 2014, p. 113). However, in what follows, I will discuss how deep mediatization has also changed the conditions for this self-legislation aspect of moral freedom.

6.3.2 From will-formation to brand-formation

Moral freedom “entitles us to exercise influence on the public interpretation of moral norms” (Honneth, 2014, p. 113). In Chapter 3, I argued that the realization of this moral self-legislation takes place through transformational struggles for recognition within the social institution of the public sphere. In general terms, this is a classical Habermasian idea, which Honneth also incorporates in his normative reconstruction of the democratic public sphere. So far in this chapter I have outlined how the acts of gaining access to – or getting a voice in – the public sphere, which has been a central part of historical struggles for recognition, have become more achievable with the rise of the internet, but that the commercialization and platformization of the web have conversely complicated the struggles for access and voice by turning them into unending struggles for visibility. Of course, the very presence of a greater diversity of voices and representations in public establishes *in itself* what Dewey (1969) called a “free circulation of ideas” (p.169) , which can also be interpreted as the underlying premise for Maarika’s effort to combat negative stereotypes via her self-presentation on social media. However, as we saw in the outline of Couldry’s (2010) analysis of voice, the normative idea of the public sphere is that voice must be valued or “put to work” in processes of social cooperation and interaction in order to lead to listening, consensus and compromise. First and foremost, this involves the free exchange of opinions, something which is central in Dewey’s framework and in Habermas’ and Apel’s ideas about the deliberative public and communicative action, which provides the basis for Honneth’s (2014) argument that the political public sphere is an institution of social freedom. Countless studies have discussed both the theoretical and empirical problems of – in particular Habermas’ ideal of – non-coercive will-formation relating to public debate in both mass media and digital media environments (for an overview, see Wessler, 2018).

In the following, I want to approach this discussion of will-formation from Davies’ (2021) argument that platform capitalism has reversed (Habermas’ account of) the historical process of the public sphere. In Davies’ summary of this process, the public sphere gradually evolved from the exchange of opinions in networks of private letter-writing to (mass media-enabled) public discussions

between strangers, which, in turn, established "public opinion" as "a disembodied, autonomous phenomenon" (Davies, 2021, p. 93). According to Davies, the reversal of this process is expressed by the rise of neoliberal *economies of reputation*, where the struggle for recognition has turned into a struggle for reputation on digital platforms, which means that "public discourse is never divorced from the identity and status of the participants, save where identity is deliberately disguised as a political tactic, for trolling" (p. 94). As I outlined in Chapter 2, Davies regards the normative idea of this reputation economy as "a capitalist one of rivalry and inequality" (pp. 95-96), where the (in)visibility regimes of platforms make sure that people compete for reactions and reputation in a context where "merit and esteem never seem fairly distributed" (p. 96). As mentioned, Davies calls this the trap of platform capitalism:

> If, as Taylor argued, modernity's ideal of 'inwardly generated identity' gave a new importance to recognition, the digital public sphere sees an ongoing exposure of the inner self in the struggle to be recognized, but never achieves its goal. Rather than recognition, the self receives mere reaction, and hopefully appreciating reputation.
>
> (Davies, 2021, p. 96)

This also means that users of platforms, especially influencers and microcelebrities, are very conscious of the impressions they are making, and they have to protect their (growing) reputation against certain "reputational risks" whereof the risk of getting "cancelled" is perhaps the greatest threat (Davies, 2021, pp. 94-95). In the previous section, I described some of Maarika's tactics for obtaining reactions and building reputation. But how does this context of reputation management affect her attempt to influence the public interpretation of moral norms (Honneth, 2014, p. 113); that is, her transformational struggle for recognition?

In Maarika's everyday life as an influencer, the environment of instant feedback on social media leads to almost daily pejorative comments from "haters" about her abilities, appearance, religion and behavior – which supports Davies' (2021, p. 96) observation of a general emotion of "resentment" on platforms, which results from the way (in)visibility is distributed. Maarika manages these comments in different ways. Similar to the subcultural communities or relatively closed groups that Nikolaj and David are part of (where occasional haters are blocked almost immediately from the groups or chats), Maarika often just deletes insulting comments (if they have not already

been taken down by the platform for violating terms of use). However, since these comments also substantiate Maarika's claims that the identity positions she represents are misrecognized or disrespected, she sometimes picks out certain comments to engage with. Some of her typical strategies are to use sad, inspirational or funny music tracks or lyrics in her videos, in combination with her body language and sometimes small bits of text, to show how much such comments can hurt or, conversely, that they don't affect her at all by signaling strength or making fun of the sender.

Maarika very clearly says that although she sometimes does get hurt or annoyed by the many disrespectful comments (she is especially tired of the so-called #harampolice, who are people that tell her what she should or should not do as a Muslim woman), she is generally not that emotionally affected by them. She receives many more positive and encouraging comments, and she thus regards the pejorative comments as an unfortunate part of internet culture (the internet has given "stupid people the opportunity to say stupid things", as she says), which experienced users, or at least influencers, are getting used to. Thus, in one of our interviews, she contrasted the almost mundane character of these comments with the racist and abusive incidents she has experienced in physical encounters with strangers, where she felt genuinely shocked and offended. However, Maarika is worried that her many young followers, especially on TikTok, might experience the comments as harmful. Therefore, while she regards her TikTok profile to be too uncontroversial to be cancelled, she is well aware that the comments still represent a reputational risk. Talking about the #harampolice in one of our later interviews, she said:

> When they comment on my videos, for example, that this is a sin or that is haram, then apart from the fact that it's just super condescending (…) another thing is that there might be some children who see it and think, "what the fuck – is it a sin what she's doing?", and then either drop out and don't bother to watch any more – or get demotivated and don't even bother to get started on anything themselves. So, I have a bit of a short fuse there. I just block them. I've gotten to the point where I just delete or block because there's no point in bringing up that fight. They don't get it. There are so many of them.

While this quote exemplifies how these sorts of platform-based discursive struggles around moral norms are far from Honneth's (and Habermas') idea of the public sphere as an institution of social freedom, it also indicates the power of visibility regimes. Maarika is thus particularly worried that

her young followers will stop following or watching, or that they will not find the motivation to start sharing their own self-representations on social media. While in a certain sense this is also the main fear of the corporations who run digital platforms, tech giants have also infamously been criticized for not doing enough to combat hate speech because it drives user engagement and reactions (this was, for instance, the main critique of Facebook and Instagram by whistleblower Frances Haugen). Furthermore, the main interest of platforms is, of course, only to make sure that Maarika keeps posting, and that followers who might be scared away from her profile just watch and follow something else. For Maarika, however, this platform logic translates into a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, she considers haters to pose a reputational risk for both her "brand" (what users can expect on and from her profile) and her user engagement (views, likes, comments, reach). On the other hand, she knows that hateful comments, as well as well-executed responses to these, can also ensure a lot of reactions and thus a broader reach, and she mentions that it is common lingo among influencers to talk about haters as their "biggest fans". In any case, it is the ideas of reputation and (in)visibility that become the guiding principles.

To some extent, Maarika is satisfied that this is the case. Then she mostly has to think about achieving as much visibility as possible and, other than that, she can just focus on football. She has not set up and does not curate her profile as a site for (political) debate because she considers children as her primary target audience. She believes that her visibility can, in and of itself, help to "normalize" the idea that girls (with headscarves) play football – as well as the more general message about gender equality that this entails – without it necessarily having to be perceived as "political". At the same time, Maarika is very used to the fact that her visibilization – in both a qualitative (the visibility of her particular identity) and quantitative (the range of her visibility) sense – is automatically politicized: "I try to focus on the sport, because sport is what this is about. But I have also been told many times that because I'm a minority, wear a scarf and so on, there's already something political about me. So, I cannot separate these things". This also means that Maarika occasionally makes longer video monologues (by TikTok standards) where she takes up certain issues (e.g., the 2021 debate in France about banning the hijab for minors) or responds to some of the racist comments she gets. She also follows certain news topics in the media, such as immigration politics, crime and extremism, in order to prepare counter arguments to accusations she might

experience as a minority. She pays particular attention to much-covered incidents or events, such as Islamist terror attacks around the world or press meetings by the Danish prime minister, because it is often in the immediate wake of such incidents that she has experienced both online and offline abuse.

Again, Maarika points out that this is mostly to protect her young group of followers but, as the initial quotes of this chapter indicates, she has ambivalent feelings about this "political" role. She says that she personally "loves politics" and also feels a strong obligation and motivation to speak up in relation to certain issues once in a while because of the visibility she has already achieved; her competences with and knowledge of social media; and her ambition to be a role model. But the sheer number of negative comments to her videos also creates a strong feeling that she has to make an extra effort to have her identity and values recognized by both Muslim communities and by society at large – and that even this is perhaps not enough. In this way, Maarika's reflections support Davies' (2021) argument that "[platforms'] logic is such that their principal effect is to generalize a feeling of misrecognition – heightening the urgency with which people seek recognition, but never satisfying this need" (p. 98).

This also means that while Maarika ascribes the many disrespectful comments to internet culture in general, as we have seen above, her general feeling of a lack of social inclusion makes her want to engage in critical dialogue with an imagined community of people who are skeptical of her identity. However, Maarika does not find a space for this on TikTok. While it is her impression that political debates take place to a much larger degree in an American context on TikTok, she argues that the Danish userbase is too young to establish the same kind of debate culture. Thus, Maarika feels that "Danish TikTok is much more filled with "hate" and people saying, 'you are ugly' and stuff like that". Moreover, in terms of her own profile, she says that her young followers mostly argue about whether girls can play football or not, or whether boys or girls are "best" in general. Therefore, Maarika sometimes turns to other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook in her attempt to reach other groups: "I want to refute prejudices, and therefore I need to reach those people with prejudices or reach someone who can share [my posts] with them". While this gives Maarika a sort of break from her reputation management on TikTok, this also indicates how she

must instead engage in a new notability struggle elsewhere and how her attempt to affect the interpretation of moral norms is intimately tied up with the formation of a personal brand governed by the logics of reach and interactions.

6.4 The consequences for social freedom

As described in the previous chapter, the re-orientation of the self removes the individual from role obligations within the institutions of personal relationships – obligations that can ensure mutual recognition and the realization of social freedom. Similarly, the profit-driven visibilization of the self might undermine the role obligations associated with transformational recognition struggles in the public sphere as a social institution, and thus – in this context at least – the realization of social freedom. With regards to the re-orientation of the self, I illustrated how processes of deep mediatization were absent in Honneth's analysis of the present conditions for social freedom in relation to friendships, intimate relationships, and the family. In the case of the public sphere, however, the discussion can be accessed more easily because Honneth directly addresses this in relation to some elements of deep mediatization.

Honneth discusses the “internet” in relation to the institution of the public sphere. He argues that, in permitting communication and the exchange of information on a global level, it might counteract stratifying tendencies within national publics by establishing transnational publics but that, because these possibilities are still so unprecedented and uncontrollable, "the consequences for the relationship between nationally bordered publics and transnational publics are entirely unknown" (Honneth, 2014, p. 300). Honneth is of course aware that the internet entails communicative processes that go far beyond discussing "issues that are politically relevant to the public" (p. 300) but, when writing specifically about the "political use of the internet", he provides the following description:

> (…) the political use of the internet has become so broad and so established that there is now an enormous amount of digitally connected publics all across the globe, whose life-span, size and function can vary significantly depending on the occasion.
>
> (pp. 300-301)

According to Honneth, this means that public spaces that are generated around topics or events can disappear after a few days or, conversely, focus so intensively on a topic that the people involved begin to appear "like some indefinable secret society" (consider influential message boards such as 4chan). At the same time, he points out that the political communities that arise in these public spaces are often more delocalized than transnational, because the participants' national background and context appear irrelevant to the debates. Taken together, these trends help to record the main difference between national publics and the internet's public spaces:

> The price for the boundlessness and placelessness of the web-based public is that there are almost no demands on rationality, such as can still be found in the processes of will-formation within the framework of the nation-state; in the latter case, we must still examine our opinions – either in a communication process organized by the media or in face-to-face conversation – with relation to the position taken by either a generalized other or by the concrete conversation partner.
>
> (p. 301)

Honneth points out that there are, of course, communities and places on the internet where the conditions for public will-formation are present, but he argues that his concern is "all the more true for the overflowing internet communities (…) in which the most absurd positions can circulate without comment" (p. 301). Nevertheless, he sees a potential for the internet to help establish transnational publics, just as he – with reference to the Arab Spring (which took place in the years before *Freedoms Right* was published) – mentions the role of the internet in establishing counter-publics *within* national contexts. However, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Honneth also emphasizes that there is a risk that the establishment of transnational publics "deprives the public will-formation within a country of the motives of solidarity and the willingness to combat the growing stratification and fracturing of the public" (p. 303). This means that the positive opportunities brought about by potential transnational publics will stand in direct contrast to "the very political culture in mature democracies that had previously motivated moral efforts to include all citizens in the space of collective self-legislation" (p. 303). Honneth sums up the overall consequence of this digital divide:

> If this is true (…), then a transnationally unconstrained space of democratic opinion and will-formation is developing over the heads of the lower classes threatened by political marginalization – the new 'services proletariat', migrants

> and welfare recipients – that are of no help to them in their plight. This would mean that the social freedom of democratic self-legislation will have increased for one group, the cosmopolitan elite, but it will have decreased for the others because of their lack of access to publicly relevant information and issues.
>
> (pp. 303-304)

How does this relate to the visibilization of the self that I have discussed in this chapter? First of all, such a digital divide – as Honneth describes it – means a (continued) invisibilization of those groups of the population that Honneth mention in the quote above. However, as we see in Maarika's case, the internet can provide possibilities for establishing "new voices in public" (Couldry, 2010), bringing together (transnational) communities and, to a certain extent, creating debate about social norms. However, the transnational community that arises around an influencer like Maarika is just as different from the traditional public sphere (as an institution and practice) as the transnational publics of cosmopolitan elites mentioned by Honneth. From one perspective, this difference – both with regards to form and content – relates to debates about *what* can be considered to be political, publicly relevant or an issue of common concern, and *how* these topics are discussed (see Kaun, 2013). But notwithstanding these discussions – i.e., regardless of whether we are talking about, for example, Maarika's discussions of gender and minority identity on TikTok vis-à-vis more narrowly defined political (and perhaps news-related) debates on a newspaper's website, in a debate forum on a social media platform, or in other online places – it is clear that Honneth's discussion of social freedom in relation to the public sphere as an institution does not directly take into account the effects of the visibilization of the self.

Thus, beyond Honneth's focus on discussing the possibility of establishing inclusive transnational publics, and particularly "a new European culture of public will-formation" (Honneth, 2014, p. 333), one of the main issues regarding the public sphere as an institution of social freedom is the structural transformation that has occurred with the processes of digitalization and datafication, specifically the way social media platforms have "imposed a market-like discipline on the spheres of social and cultural exchange" (Davies, 2021, p. 89). In other words, the discussion of social freedom in relation to the public sphere might be less characterized by the difficulty of establishing a transnational political culture with "rational constraints" (Honneth, 2014, p. 301) and the imagined community for public will-formation, than by the struggle to take this (potential) political culture

out of the hands of the tech giants and other commercial players. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this involves a move beyond the current focus on individual rights within media regulation, as well as beyond calls for individualized ideas of media literacy, to consider platform cooperativism and public service internet models.

However, the struggle to secure the processes of will-formation within the public sphere is not only a matter of establishing the proper institutional conditions. It also depends on the corresponding conditions of freedom within the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships. The re-orientation of the self that I discussed in the previous chapter is closely interrelated with the visibilization of the self, because both are expressions of the heightened need for mediated reactions and esteem. Indeed, Honneth emphasizes how the political public sphere relies on the realization of social freedom within the two other spheres of his framework: "After all, the more social freedom has been realized in personal relationships and on the market, the more equal, free and self-confident the involvement of citizens in public will-formation will be (Honneth, 2014, p. 332). Thus, as we saw in the previous chapter, the discussion of what happens when processes of recognition are detached from the institutional spheres of social freedom becomes the focal point. Regarding affirmational struggles for recognition, I pointed out that mediated recognition finds its limit with the irreducibility of touch and time (Peters, 1999, p. 269), which are the ground pillars of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, *time* also plays a crucial role when it comes to transformational struggles within the public sphere, although less in terms of presence and more in terms of patience. In the words of Davies (2021):

> The quest for recognition is more exacting and slower than that for reputation, and appreciating this distinction is a first step to seeing beyond the cultural limits of the platform, towards the broader political and economic obstacles that currently stand in the way of full and equal participation.
>
> (p. 99)

Mutual recognition characterizes the normative ideal of the institutional sphere of the political public sphere, while the ideas of the reputation economy characterize the commercialized spaces of social media platforms. Thus, the social freedom realized by both personal relationships *and* participation in democratic will-formation are influenced by the demands – from the reputation

economy – for individuals to be present, visible, flexible and productive in and via media. Therefore, the question of how to work against these pressures is very much a question of how to secure our institutions of social freedom; of how to secure the conditions for a good life in times of deep mediatization. I will address this question in the following chapter.

7 The Good Life in a Mediatized World: Social Freedom as a Foundation for Privacy and Agency

> Only because we have already entered into everyday obligations and have already developed social attachments or find ourselves in particular communities do we need the legal and moral freedom to detach from the associated demands or to examine them reflexively.
>
> (Honneth, 2014, p. 123)

In Chapters 5 and 6, the question of how processes of deep mediatization limit and enhance social freedom has been the underlying motor of the analysis. In this chapter, I bring this question to the forefront. Although not explicitly framed by Honneth's (2014) idea of social freedom, it is this question which is present – in different guises – at the end of the academic works on deep mediatization that I have used to situate this dissertation at the cross section of recognition theory and media and communication research. As we saw in Chapter 2, Couldry and Hepp (2017) outline "unresolved normative questions" of deep mediatization in the conclusion of *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. In doing so, they draw on Honneth (2008) – among others – to question the legitimacy of the emerging social orders in today's world which, they argue, revolve around "a deep tension between convenience and autonomy, between force and mutual recognition, that we do not yet know how to resolve" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 223). In fact, Couldry and Hepp consider the identification of this tension to be one of the main contributions of their book, and they conclude by stating: "What collective resources are needed to address [this tension] satisfactorily will be the work of a whole generation to discover" (2017, p. 224).

Couldry and Mejias (2019) pick up this work – i.e., of discovering "collective resources" – in the final chapter of *The Costs of Connection*, where they discuss the potentials and strategies for "decolonizing data". *The Costs of Connection* generally evolves the aforementioned identification of the legitimacy problems of emerging social orders into to a fiercer critique of data colonialism and its "drive to capitalize human life itself in all aspects and build through this a new social and economic order that installs capitalist management as the privileged mode for governing every aspect of life" (Couldry and Mejias, 2019, p. 189). Thus, the collective resources that Couldry and Mejias discuss include ideas of media literacy, (privacy) regulation and legislation as well as new forms of civic activism (e.g., hacktivism) (pp. 192-196), but they also present their own "decolonial

vision for data" (pp. 196-211) which I will return to below. First, however, I will mention one last – but perhaps the most obvious – example of how the overall question I address here has been discussed in a similar vein in the mediatization literature.

In *Deep Mediatization*, Andreas Hepp (2020, Chapter 7) dedicates the last chapter to a discussion of "deep mediatization and the good life". Utilizing the German notion of *Gestaltung*, which implies forming things in positive manner (giving them a "gestalt"), Hepp asks "what deep mediatization would look like if it was to promote a good life for as many people as possible?" (p. 177). Like Honneth (2014), Hepp understands the good life (i.e., the "point" of justice) as individual autonomy, and, following Rössler (2017), he even emphasizes that "autonomy is a social phenomenon as a person experiences themselves as autonomous *in* social relationships" (Hepp, 2020, p. 188, emphasis in original). Hepp's understanding is more or less identical to Honneth's notion of social freedom and Mackenzie's idea of relational autonomy (see Chapter 3), and it is this idea that he places at the center of his discussion of the good life: "The *Gestaltung* of deep mediatization should mean organizing digital media and their infrastructures so that they foster figurations that support the greatest possible sense of personal autonomy" (p. 188). Like Couldry and Mejias (2019), Hepp also identifies collective resources to promote this Gestaltung: political regulation, practices of cooperative responsibility, different forms of activism and platform cooperativism.

To begin with, these normative discussions and suggestions indicate the theoretical relevance of Axel Honneth's recognition-theoretical conception of freedom for mediatization research (and vice versa), which is the premise of this dissertation. In this chapter, I want to further explicate how this cross-pollination provides the analytical means to distinguish between different models of freedom in times of deep mediatization, as these models are manifested in legislation, policies and proposals for the good life. As I have already argued in Chapter 3, the emphasis in many academic and political debates on privacy and agency can be interpreted as a proxy for discussions models of legal freedom (private autonomy) and moral freedom (moral autonomy), respectively. However, the recognition-theoretical framework suggests that these systems of action are only possibilities of freedom, and that a theory of justice as social analysis (media analysis) can turn attention towards the conditions for the *realization* of freedom (social freedom/relational autonomy); something which I have tried

to do in the Chapters 5 and 6. Now, stepping explicitly into the normative discussions within mediatization research about the good life, I want to utilize the distinction between possibilities of freedom and the realization of freedom to analytically distinguish between – and elaborate on – mediatization research's specific suggestions for collective resources which can promote individual autonomy and social justice.

Thus, in the following section, I want to illustrate how the idea of legal freedom has been manifested in EU regulations relating to media and technology, such as the *General Data Protection Regulation* and the *Digital Services Act*. In Section 7.2, I argue that while the idea of moral freedom is also present in the outlined legislation, it first and foremost finds its media-related expression in various proposals to promote media literary. Finally, in Section 7.3, I illustrate how the idea of social freedom or relational autonomy – which both precedes and provides the basis for legal and moral freedom – are manifested in suggestions for collective ownership and public control of media and technology (infrastructures), such as platform cooperativism and the idea of a public service internet.

7.1 Legal freedom in times of deep mediatization

From his analytical starting point, which can be seen as the nation-states of the Global North and Western Europe in particular, Honneth (2014) interprets the ideal relationship between the public sphere and the legislative function of the democratic constitutional state in the following way:

> In a truly functioning public that lives up to its own normative demands, either in the form of permanent research (Durkheim/Dewey) or discussion (Habermas), a constantly revisable consensus develops which can, if need be, come about by compromise; its directives are then transformed into binding resolutions made by the political authorities in charge.
>
> (pp. 304-305)

Honneth emphasizes how this is an idealistic conceptual model of self-legislation and reminds us that all three of the authors mentioned in this quote were quite skeptical of the actual state of affairs at different points in time. Therefore, he also discusses historical "misdevelopments" of this quintessential function of the state, as well as the challenges to the ideal model presented by the

establishment of the European Union as a new transnational political authority, but, for the purpose of the present discussion of legal freedom, the main point is that this model involves the idea that "the network of political authorities (…) help communicating individuals implement their 'experimentally' or 'deliberatively' derived ideas of the morally and practically appropriate solution to social problems in reality" (Honneth, 2014, p. 306). Quite simply, legislation and regulation are ideally manifested solutions to social problems, and therefore particular laws can, in turn, be seen as representations of particular problems facing specific social domains and practices.

If we turn our attention to the social problems of contemporary mediatization processes, many years of social struggle and public debate have led to the implementation of different laws across the world in recent decades. Within the EU, two regulations have been adopted by the political authorities in the form of the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) and the *Digital Services Act Package* (the *Digital Services Act* (DSA) and the *Digital Markets Act* (DMA). The DSA and the DMA came into force in November 2022, but have yet to be fully applied. The DMA mostly revolves around the protection of companies in relation to competition conditions, while the DSA focuses on the harms to individuals and societies arising from the practices on, and by, media platforms.[10] In the following, I will focus on the latter. The GDPR, which entered into force in 2016 and became applicable from 2018, has been a model for many similar laws across the world, and both Couldry and Mejias (2019, p. 180) as well as Hepp (2020, p. 190) emphasize that it is an important challenge to data colonialism and surveillance capitalism; thus, it figures among the above-mentioned collective resources discussed in the mediatization literature. Regarding these collective resources, we can apply Honneth's distinction between different models of freedom and discuss these new regulations as manifestations of legal freedom. But what is the content of this manifestation?

First of all, it is a common feature of these regulations that they are a result of a so-called risk-based approach to legislation (Efroni, 2021; Gellert, 2020). In the words of legal scholar Zohar Efroni (2021), a risk-based approach towards media and technology regulation seems to represent "a consensus that the rapid digitization of nearly every aspect of modern life brings with it, alongside

[10] In the UK, similar regulation in the form of the so-called Online Safety Bill is going through the legislative process, but it has not been passed.

enormous benefits, also considerable risks" (sec. 2). As Efroni remarks, this type of regulation – and specifically the Digital Services Act, which he analyzes – can thus be placed within the theoretical discourse of the "risk society", which was conceptualized by scholars such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. From this perspective, the GDPR is also risk-based. However, its law text is not framed explicitly as a response to risks posed by media and technology-related developments, but rather as a *better* protection of already existing rights, and especially Article 8 (protection of personal data) of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (the "Charter"). The protection of existing fundamental rights is also central to the DMA and, in particular the DSA, but these regulations revolve specifically around the idea of protecting against new risks in times of deep mediatization. For instance, the very first preamble of the DSA states:

> Information society services and especially intermediary services have become an important part of the Union's economy and the daily life of Union citizens (…) However, the digital transformation and increased use of those services has also resulted in new risks and challenges for individual recipients of the relevant service, companies and society as a whole.

Although the DSA mention the protection of privacy a few times (e.g., in relation to the responsibility of online platforms to protect minors, which is a key objective of the regulation) as well as the protection of personal data in certain provisions, it is worth noticing how the disrespect for users' privacy and property rights – which Magalhães and Yu (2022, p. 558) see as the central way social media platforms undermine legal freedom – is most directly addressed by the GDPR.[11] Thus, if the protection of privacy and personal data is predominantly delegated to a piece of regulation that is not framed explicitly as a response to media-related developments, what are the perceived and explicit media-related risks that are addressed by the DSA? In Article 34 of the regulation, four so-called "systemic risks" are defined, which a category of very large online platforms and very large online search engines are required to assess and mitigate:

> (a) the dissemination of illegal content through their services;
>
> (b) any actual or foreseeable negative effects for the exercise of fundamental rights, in particular the fundamental rights to human dignity enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter, to respect for private and family

[11] Even though the word "privacy" is not mentioned at all in the law text. In contrast, the phrase "personal data" is mentioned several hundred times.

life enshrined in Article 7 of the Charter, to the protection of personal data enshrined in Article 8 of the Charter, to freedom of expression and information, including the freedom and pluralism of the media, enshrined in Article 11 of the Charter, to non-discrimination enshrined in Article 21 of the Charter, to respect for the rights of the child enshrined in Article 24 of the Charter and to a high-level of consumer protection enshrined in Article 38 of the Charter;

(c) any actual or foreseeable negative effects on civic discourse and electoral processes, and public security;

(d) any actual or foreseeable negative effects in relation to gender-based violence, the protection of public health and minors and serious negative consequences to the person's physical and mental well-being.

The continuous assessments of these systemic risks are not required by other categories of smaller online platforms, hosting services and intermediary services, which, nevertheless, are given a range of other obligations that they share with the very large platforms and search engines. However, the definition of these risks describes the broad scope of the digital harms the regulation attempts to mitigate, and, in addition to the GDPR's focus on the protection of personal information, the DSA thus extends the protection of subjective rights that today's tech giants threaten with their practices. But even if some of these identified risks point somewhat in the direction of institutional conditions for freedom by mentioning, among other things, civic discourse and electoral processes, the focal point in this context – and for this regulation in general – is the sharing of illegal or harmful *content* and its impact on *the individual*. Therefore, while the legal frameworks represent a crucial part of, and one of the conditions for, individual freedom in a deeply mediatized world, we are reminded that, from a recognition-theoretical perspective, the ideas of negative freedom and, to some extent, moral freedom (which these legal frameworks embody) are not sufficient for establishing a theory of justice or the good life.

While these European laws about media platforms and technology certainly aim to clarify and protect our subjective rights and might even help strengthen our capacities for self-governance, the social conditions for realizing freedom – i.e., the institutions of mutual recognition where "subjects can grasp each other as the other of their own selves" (Honneth, 2014, p. 44) – cannot be established via these laws. This means that they cannot be the "end point" or, conversely, the only basis for the discussion of the good life in times of deep mediatization. In fact, Honneth (2014) argues that "nothing has been more fatal to the formulation of a concept of justice than the recent tendency to dissolve all social relations into legal relationships, in order to make it all the easier to regulate these relationships through formal rules" (pp. 66-67). In relation to the use of media and

technology, we have already seen how Magalhães and Yu (2022) point out how this tendency is widespread among companies and the wider population, and that it "resonates with the strongly pro-forma, legalistic view of subjective rights that platforms usually articulate in their written policies" (p. 560). Thus, to reiterate my argument from Chapter 3, the starting point for a discussion of deep mediatization and the good life must be a normative evaluation of the conditions for the social institutions that realize social freedom in the light of media-related transformations.

I have attempted to contribute to this evaluation with the previous analysis (Chapters 5 and 6), focusing on the processes of the re-orientation of the self and the visibilization of the self, and if we compare these analyses with the present brief outline of media-related legal frameworks in the EU, it is possible to distinguish between the risks towards subjective rights that the legal regulations place in the foreground and the risks towards the social institutions of interpersonal relationships and democratic will-formation, which are experienced by my interlocutors: the risks of the "I" vis-à-vis the risks of the "we". Based on this distinction, I will tentatively suggest that the important prevalent focus on legal regulation of tech capitalism must be supplemented with collective efforts to secure and (re)build institutions of mutual recognition (which, of course, also include legal instruments to some degree). I will return to such potential collective efforts in Section 7.3, but in the following I will first address how the possibility of moral freedom can be identified as a collective resource within the mediatization literature.

7.2 Moral freedom in times of deep mediatization

If we recall Honneth's description that moral freedom grants individuals "the opportunity to reject certain demands on the basis of justifiable reasons" (Honneth, 2014, p. 123), we can ask how this freedom might relate to media (practices). In Chapter 3, I argued that the opportunity to reject normative orders or demands – to be self-governing or self-legislative – can be interpreted via the notion of agency within media and communication research. For instance, I referred to Ytre-Arne and Das' (2020, p. 7) definition of communicative agency as the "capabilities to effect power potentials through interpretative engagements in everyday processes of communication, in relation to structures that take part in the same communicative processes". However, as we also saw in Chapter 3, audience agency is considered to be threatened by certain processes of deep

mediatization, especially datafication which results in the opacity and manipulation of users' aims that characterize social media platforms (Magalhães and Yu, 2022). In the previous section, I indicated how the European regulative frameworks address the potential risks of opacity and manipulation by placing certain requirements of transparency on companies that provide media services and platforms. However, from a media use perspective, these perceived risks, as well as media and technology developments more broadly, often lead to proposals for (better or critical) *media literacy* (as well as digital literacy, data literacy and a range of overlapping or similar notions). The discussion of media literacy (used here as a common denominator) moves across various research areas within media and communication research and beyond (for overviews, see Frau-Meigs et al., 2017; Potter, 2013; Wuyckens et al., 2022). Moreover, in an EU context, the specific notion of media and information literacy (MIL) has become "a pronounced part of European education policy in all members states" (Drotner et al., 2017, p. 269).

This common notion is relevant for the present discussion, as Drotner et al. (2017) discuss the rise of media and information literacy in European policies in relation to both the mediatization literature as well as the increasing global influence of neo-liberalism on (educational) policymaking (see also Drotner, 2011). Drotner et al. (2017) argue that the understanding of media and information literacy is currently characterized by a double bind: "on the one hand, an opportunity for collective critical citizenship, on the other hand, a tool for increased neo-liberalism, individualism and marketization" (p. 269). With this double bind, they point out how the influence of mediatization processes on socialization – and its associated involvement in almost all social domains in today's world – leads to "an all-encompassing concept of a media literate citizen" in different policies across Europe, but also to a fundamental struggle around what it *means* to be media literate: "mediatization processes are closely linked to neo-liberal discourses focusing on individual skills, whereas citizenship notions tend to focus on social or joint practices related to autonomous action and possibly societal changes" (Drotner et al., 2017, p. 272).

It is this interpretation of media literacy – i.e., as a basis for "civic agency" (Drotner et al., p. 272) – that connects the notion of media literacy with the concept of moral freedom. As I have shown in Chapter 3, Honneth conceptualizes moral freedom as a possible *retreat* from the ethical lifeworld

which allows us to gain a reflexive distance to assess normative demands. This is different, however, from the legal freedom to retreat to our sphere of privacy. This is because moral freedom involves the assumed *reconnection* with the public; that is, with citizen practices in a broad sense. In Honneth's words: "[Legal freedom] merely entitles us to change our lives without being disturbed by others, while [moral freedom] entitles us to exercise influence on the public interpretation or moral norms" (Honneth, 2014, p. 113). Thus, when Drotner et al. observe that a neo-liberal understanding of media and information literacy (e.g., as individual skills for employability) "seems to lead to a competence-based model for citizenship, with the risk of turning it into an individual rather than collective construct" (2017, p. 273), they also indirectly underline the importance of social practices and institutions of mutual recognition for social freedom, which I discuss further in the next section.

The tension of the double bind that Drotner et al. describe in relation to the understanding of media literacy in educational policymaking is also present in Couldry and Mejias' (2019) discussion of media literacy as an example of current "tactics" to confront data colonialism. This is something which they are sympathetic towards, but they ultimately regard them as partial and insufficient actions:

> There is an emerging industry dedicated to advising us how to better deal with social quantification technologies: Take breaks (unplug)! Talk to your kids about it! Change your privacy settings! We do not deny that media literacy may have some benefits in the immediate term, but we should not pretend that media literacy is a means to resist data colonialism; at most it enables us to live more at ease with it, thus normalizing it for the longer term. Worse, like all notions of literacy, media literacy relies on the virtuous "disposition" of the subject, which misses how the new order works to dismantle the autonomy of the subject.
>
> (p. 194)

Here, much like Drotner et al., (2017), Couldry and Mejias indicate how this kind of interpretation of media literacy – i.e., one with a starting point of what we can identify as methodological individualism (Mackenzie, 2019) – misses how individual autonomy is socially realized. Notably, Couldry and Mejias (2019, pp. 194-195) group media literacy with other "important area[s] of agency" that include civic activism (they mention hacktivism), as well as regulation and legislation (they mention the GDPR, which I have discussed above as legal freedom). That these tactics – in my

terminology – only represent possibilities of freedom can also be recognized in Couldry and Mejias' (2019) argument that these isolated acts of resistance must be integrated in a broader vision for resisting data colonialism:

> What if we approached them not merely as individualistic acts or as technical fixes but as part of a collaborative attempt to build a different social world than the one data colonialism promises us? Acquiring media literacy might then include citizens learning to help one another become less reliant on systems whose negative effects we all know (…) Legislating for a better data environment might involve going beyond attempts to "tame" data companies and affirming positive principles on the basis of which future social uses of data could be organized for collective benefit and not corporate privilege.
>
> (pp. 206-207)

With apologies to Couldry and Mejias, I will argue that this vision for a good life in a deeply mediatized world, which they call "a decolonial vision for data", can also be articulated in recognition-theoretical terms as a vision for social freedom. Indeed, the quote above – envisioning a collaborative attempt to build a different social world – bears a striking similarity to the very idea of communication that John Durham Peters (1999) identified in Hegel's philosophy of recognition. For Hegel, Peters writes, communication is "the founding of a world" (p. 112). It is "a political and historical problem of establishing conditions under which the mutual recognition of self-conscious individuals is possible. The issue is to reconcile subjects with the embodied relation to the world, with themselves, and with each other" (Peters, 1999, p. 112). Thus, building a different social world in times of deep mediazation involves efforts to communicatively establish conditions for mutual recognition; that is, social freedom. In the next and final section of this chapter, I turn to the suggested collective resources in mediatization research that revolve around the establishment of such conditions.

7.3 Social freedom in times of deep mediatization: The founding of a world

To localize the collective resources that can help establish the conditions for social freedom, an obvious starting point is to return to Magalhães and Yu's (2022) Honneth-inspired analysis of social media platforms, because they end their analysis with an explicit attempt to address how social media could be structured to foster social freedom. They first point to the distinction between

possibilities of freedom (legal and moral freedoms) and the realization of freedom (social freedom) – which has also been the leitmotif throughout this chapter – to underline the fact that:

> *even if* platforms truly changed their visibility regime to abolish acts of surveillance, managed to develop a scalable system to counter mis-/disinformation, and made their operation fully transparent for users, policymakers, and researchers – measures that would be considered radical today – they would still be *not just*.
>
> (p. 569, emphasis in original)

These examples, which are in fact present to some extent in the proposed European regulations I have examined, would only respect – and in turn foster – legal and moral freedoms. But in order to enable social freedom, platforms would have to be turned into institutions of recognition or at least constitute important elements of these institutions. Here, Magalhães and Yu notice the role social media platforms could (ideally) play within the political public sphere if they lived up to "their promise of being an authentic community-building space of interaction" (p. 569). According to Magalhães and Yu, this would involve an important first step of letting users decide – potentially through social media – "what social media platforms ought to be and how these spaces ought to produce and govern visibilities" (p. 569). However, as they also emphasize, "no current corporate social media are designed to enable this sort of radical democratic experiment" (p. 569). They rely on the implicit argument in Honneth's normative reconstruction of the spheres of social freedom – that apparently small and separate events can have immense influence over time – to identify current initiatives that can be followed:

> In the case of social media platforms, some of the most promising ideas are being entertained by scholars and activists who directly confront the ownership and governance of these spaces – consider, for instance, platform cooperatives in Brazil (Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma, 2021) and public service platforms in Europe (Fuchs and Unterberger, 2021).
>
> (p. 570, references in original)

This question of ownership and governance in general – and the ideas of cooperatives and public service platforms in particular – can also be identified in other analyses of the intersection between processes of deep mediatization and questions of individual autonomy. For instance, in his discussion of deep mediatization and the good life, Hepp (2020, p. 189) presents a thought

experiment about how platforms such as Facebook or Twitter would have been regulated and organized had they been invented in the 1960s and 70s in Europe, instead of in the 2000s in the US. He argues that most Europeans would not have organized such platforms – with their massive network and data collection practices, and the infrastructural role they play in public discourse and social life – as private corporate companies:

> It is highly probable that in the 1960s and the 1970s 'public service platforms' would have been chosen as an organizational model, based on the long tradition of public service broadcasting in Europe (Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). Public service platforms should be independent from the state but remain in public hands and, therefore, would not serve private economic interests. The history is different, but this thought experiment makes clear what is possible.
>
> (p. 189, reference in original)

For Hepp, this distinction between public and private interests should be the overarching guideline for expanding the regulation of digital media and their infrastructures, and there should be a move beyond the current focus on the protection of individual rights in order to enable other forms of organization of deep mediatization to emerge. In line with Magalhães and Yu's suggestion, Hepp argues for a principle of *cooperative responsibility* (Helberger et al., 2018) which includes a process of how users and public institutions should be involved in platform regulation. As mentioned before, Hepp emphasizes that this proposal goes beyond the adoption of laws regulating individual rights to a focus on "social processes to establish a shared understanding of what platforms people want in regard to their dominant public values" (Hepp, 2020, p. 190). In fact, Hepp considers current forms of activism – such as initiatives like Algorithm Watch and The Markup – as providing indirect inputs into how to we might organize the regulation of tech companies on the basis of public values. But, at the same time, he argues that such forms of organizing already exists on a different level as *platform cooperativism* (for an overview, see Scholz & Schneider, 2017). Platform cooperativism, according to Hepp, revolves around the core idea of "ownership of online platforms by the people who produce the content and services they rely on or by the users themselves" (Hepp, 2020, p. 192). In this way, Hepp covers the two central initiatives of public service platforms and cooperatives that Magalhães and Yu briefly mention as initiatives to realize social freedom in the context of deep

mediatization. Moreover, he clarifies – albeit in a simple way – the connection between such initiatives which, in turn, points to their common relation to social freedom:

> If we relate the idea of platform coops with the idea of regulating platforms with a cooperative responsibility, the main connection between the two is to bring digital media closer to the figurations of the people who produce and use their content. An increase in autonomy is the result when collectives own the platforms through which they offer their products and services, as well as the data that their products generate.
>
> (p. 193)

In this way, a broad idea of collective ownership of media emerges as one of the absolute decisive conditions for social freedom; that is, individual autonomy realized in social institutions of mutual recognition. This idea is broad because it both incorporates the direct forms of ownership that relate to platform cooperativism, and the more indirect forms of ownership that relate to public service platforms which are established via legislation but must be independent from the state and private corporations. In Magalhães' and Yu's (2022) quote about the two initiatives that can help foster social freedom, they refer to *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto* (Fuchs & Unterberger, 2021a). This publication – which not only contains the manifesto to which the title refers, but also chapters summarizing the research projects, public discussion and collaboration that eventually led to the manifesto – provides an elaborate, utopian vision for the future of the internet, democracy, and the public sphere that aligns with Honneth's (2014) model of social freedom. The manifesto starts from the premise that the internet is broken, and that the survival of public service media is in danger in a landscape where the tech giants and their commercial platforms "have harmed citizens, users, everyday life and society (…) [and] acquired unparalleled economic, political and cultural power" (Fuchs & Unterberger, 2021b, p. 10). Thus, it is formulated as "a call to save and advance democratic communications by renewing Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet" (p. 9). Again, advancing democratic communications is founding a world where mutual recognition and cooperation is possible. The utopian idea of rebuilding the internet via establishing "the legal, economic and organizational foundations" (p. 8) that would allow public service media to become so-called *public service internet platforms* is, I would argue, very much a matter of understanding the *relations* between the different forms of collective resources for a good life in

deeply mediatized world – and especially the relations between the ideas of freedom that underly these resources. This is particularly relevant since the manifesto states that:

> While the contemporary Internet is dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet is dominated by democracy**. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by surveillance, the Public Service Internet is privacy friendly and transparent. While the contemporary Internet misinforms and separates the public, the Public Service Internet engages, informs and supports the public. Although the contemporary Internet is driven by and drives the profit principle, the Public Service Internet puts social needs first.
>
> (p. 13, bold in original)

The idea that social freedom provides the foundation for legal and moral freedom on an abstract level is paralleled in this quote; that is, in the idea that a public service internet is the foundation for privacy and transparency as well as for the conditions of engagement, information and support that grounds agency. The profit principle, which is mentioned here and which I have addressed from the perspective of the re-orientation and visibilization of the self, therefore contrasts with an (organization of the) internet that puts social needs first. Putting social needs first was also the message I got from my interlocutors. Indeed, putting social needs first is – to borrow the subtitle of *Freedoms Right* one last time – the social foundation of democratic life.

8 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have addressed the question of how deep mediatization constitutes and changes, and limits or enhances, processes of and struggles for social recognition. Thus, it places itself within a growing research area at the crossroads between recognition theory, and media and communication research (for an overview, see Driessens & Nærland, 2022). More specifically, I have drawn on two main resources from each of these fields. The social and political philosophical discussion of recognition, in particular Axel Honneth's (2014) development of a theory of justice as social analysis in *Freedoms Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, formed the basis for the conceptual framework. Mediatization research (especially Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2020), which is situated within the field of media and communication research, has been the context for the discussions taken up in this dissertation.

The basic premise of this dissertation has been that the latest wave(s) of mediatization, in the form of digitalization and datafication (i.e., deep mediatization), have transformed the communicative and social processes that characterize recognition (and disrespect) (see Chapter 2). Through an ethnographically based case study, I collaborated with a small group of young Danish media users to examine their experiences of, and reflections on, recognition processes and struggles in everyday life, with a focus on the role their media use and media practices play in them. This study was then the starting point for a discussion of "deep mediatization and the good life" (Hepp, 2020, Chapter 7) or, as formulated in the research question, how deep mediatization limits or enhances recognition processes and struggles. This discussion has been approached from Honneth's (2014) recognition-theoretical perspective that equates the idea of the good life with social justice which, according to Honneth, is generally characterized by freedom – or more specifically, individual autonomy: "That which is 'just' is that which protects, fosters or realizes the autonomy of all members of society" (p. 18).

From this theoretical perspective, I have built a conceptual framework in Chapter 3 to carry out analyses of both media-related processes and practices (see Chapters 5 and 6), as well as the normative discussions around media and freedom that are unfolding in both academic and political contexts in today's world (see Chapter 7). This framework is primarily based on Honneth's (2014)

analysis of different models of freedom, but also includes other theoretical resources from recognition theory, and media and communication research, and it has been created in parallel interaction with my ethnographic fieldwork. This framework explains Honneth's distinction between legal, moral and social freedom, and links these concepts together with Catriona Mackenzie's (2019) conceptualization of relational autonomy and Douglas Giles' (2020) concepts of affirmational and transformational recognition struggles. Thus, I have argued that the self-definitions and self-inventions that an individual builds in their legally guaranteed sphere of privacy (Honneth, 2014) or space of the self (Couldry and Mejias) are realized as social freedom/relational autonomy (i.e., practices and relations of social cooperation and mutual recognition). This happens in what Honneth (2014) calls the institutional sphere of interpersonal relationships (friends, families and intimate relations), and does so via everyday affirmational recognition struggles to "fit in, belong and be accepted" (Giles, 2020, p. 212). In the same way, I have argued that our opportunity to influence the interpretation of moral norms in society – which is guaranteed by our moral freedom to "reject certain demands on the basis of justifiable reasons" (Honneth, 2014, p. 123) – is realized as social freedom in the institutional sphere of the political public sphere (Honneth, 2014) via transformational struggles for recognition, in order to "rectify perceived injustices and restore healthy recognition relations" (Giles, 2020, p. 211). With this framework, I have also tried to outline how the philosophical discussions of freedom can be related to media and communication research through the concepts of privacy and agency, which can be seen as proxies for legal freedom and moral freedom respectively.

Based on this framework, I have investigated and discussed how affirmational and transformational recognition struggles play out in the lives of my young interlocutors. In Chapter 5, I have tried to describe how their affirmational recognition struggles are characterized by a re-orientation of the self (Hepp, 2020) – a concept that describes how individuals, in their identity construction and search for recognition in times of deep mediatization, orient themselves "away" from traditional social institutions (e.g., kinship relations) and towards everyday interveillance practices (Jansson, 2015) of monitoring themselves (and others) in and via media practices. I have expanded and added nuance to the concept of a re-orientation of the self by conceptualizing two overlapping processes, which I have called a *decoupling of the space of the self* and a *replacement of the space of the self*.

The former refers to the social practices where individuals decouple or detach their attention, (physical) presence, or even social attachment from close interpersonal relationships to seek mediated recognition from others. In continuation, the replacement of the space of the self refers to social practices where individuals do not orient themselves away from close relations as such but, instead, move the space of the self online in order to seek affirmational recognition from close relations via mediated communication and self-expressions (in the case of my young interlocutors, this mostly concerns the social institution of friendship). Thus, on the one hand, the re-orientation of the self involves a changed socialization process where the internet and digital media offers a liberating potential to find spaces – as well as practical and symbolic resources – for self-narration, self-representation and self- maintenance (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 156-157), something which is evident in the lives of my interlocutors. On the other hand, the feelings of missing families and friends, time for oneself, face-to-face contact or certain forms of recognition relations (such as love relations) – which my interlocutors also associate with their everyday decoupling and replacement processes – can be juxtaposed with Honneth's (2014) description of neoliberal trends in the labor market which, he argues, risk eroding the social freedom of interpersonal relationships. I point out that the demands on the individual from the labor market and certain media practices are similar in that they prevent people from taking up those role obligations (i.e., mutual recognition and cooperation) within close interpersonal relationships that realize social freedom and relational autonomy. Thus, with reference to John Durham Peters (1999), I argue that the mediated recognition we seek via the re-orientation of the self is also an orientation away from the forms of mutual recognition characterized by the "irreducibility of touch and time" (p. 269), which we can only experience in each other's physical presence. Because "we can share our mortal time and touch only with some and not all" (p. 271), I suggest that this also indicates how mediated recognition cannot fully establish the social freedom that is realized by "being there" (p. 270) in interpersonal relationships.

In Chapter 6, I discussed the transformational recognition struggles of my interlocutor Maarika. I have argued that her struggle to influence the interpretation of moral norms in society – via her presence and participation as a hijabi football freestyler – in the spaces and debates of the internet is characterized by the dialectical possibility *and* demand of a visibilization of the self. This is a

concept I have borrowed from Ana Tomažič (2020), and which I also expand on and add nuance to by conceptualizing two overlapping processes that I have called *from accessibility to notability* and *from will-formation to brand formation*. The former refers to a development in the conditions for engaging in transformational recognition struggles. Where struggles for recognition have historically involved struggles for accessibility to the practices and institutions of the political public sphere, especially in and via media representation, the internet has brought more – and somehow easier – entrances to (semi)public spaces and thus increased the new public voices (Couldry, 2010). But since the most used of these internet spaces are controlled by social media platforms and their regimes of recognition and visibility, struggles for recognition now (also) involve a competition to achieve notability – i.e., to ensure (constant growth in) reactions, reach and followers, which puts a lot of pressure on influencers like Maarika, for example. Moreover, the process from will-formation to brand-formation indicates how transformational struggles for recognition have also moved from the normative idea of deliberative public debate to that of rivalry within economies of reputation (Davies, 2021). Thus, in Maarika's attempt to influence the public interpretation of moral norms via social media platforms, she is not only forced to struggle for notability, but also to dedicate a considerable amount of time to manage and protect her reputation.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I argued that my analytical framework can also be used to differentiate between, as well as to analyze, different suggestions of how we might secure the conditions for the good life in times of deep mediatization. Correspondingly, I illustrated how the emphasis of legal freedom on subjective rights is manifested (in relation to media and technology) in regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation and the Digital Services Act within the EU, just as I described how suggestions for better media literacy are based on ideas of moral freedom. Following Honneth's (2014) recognition-theoretical analysis of freedom, I pointed out that these suggestions only represent possibilities of freedom, and that the ideas for realizing (social) freedom can be found in arguments for platform cooperativism and the public service internet.

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