9

Collectivities

We discussed in the last chapter what deep mediatization means for the self. We ask in this chapter the same question for what we will call 'collectivities'. That term is just the latest in a line of concepts used historically to describe groupings of various sorts: from 'masses' and 'crowds' to 'citizen publics' and 'communities'.[1] With digitalization, further types of collectivity-building and other, 'smaller' media-related collectivities gain importance. Even more recent is the phenomenon of collectivities created by automated calculation based on the 'digital traces' that individuals leave online. While our descriptive concepts change, one fundamental point remains: media are conceived as an essential means for bringing complex collectivities into being, and as a consequence changes in media transform the dynamics of collectivities. We therefore need a more detailed analysis of the various forms of collectivities and the contexts in which they are typically formed.

We define as a collectivity *any figuration of individuals that share a certain meaningful belonging that provides a basis for action- and orientation-in-common*. The form of such meaningful belonging can differ. It can be a feeling of a 'common we', as with traditional face-to-face communities (Knoblauch, 2008). It can be based on a 'shared organized situational action', as in the case of smart mobs (Rheingold, 2003). Or it can be based on processes of datafication like the collectivities of 'numeric inclusion' (Passoth et al., 2014). And also when we consider questions surrounding community, a change of perspective might be helpful to grasp community not as a given entity but as an ongoing process of community-making: that is, in Weber's term, 'communitization' (*Vergemeinschaftung*).[2] Across all these specific cases, the key characteristic of collectivities remains their *meaningful* character for the actors involved – and media play an important role in supporting the construction of such meaning. This understanding of collectivity is much more specific than the concept of 'collectives' used in recent writing about assemblages (Falb, 2015, pp. 273–342; Latour, 2013, pp. 296–325; and see Chapter 4), which has recently been adopted in media and communication

research (Stäheli, 2012). Referring back to Tarde (2000 [1899], p. 35), we find there an emphasis on the 'repetition' that results in the emergence of 'collectives' (Latour, 2007, p. 14). Such collectives are assemblages of humans and non-humans that have a certain form of joint agency.[3] These reflections allow us to think about the close media-relatedness of our collectivities (Schüttpelz, 2013, pp. 3–18), but it is unhelpful to confuse any linkage of human actors and media whatsoever with a collectivity. That fails to demarcate those groupings that are more than just an assemblage, because they involve the construction of meaningful 'boundaries' through communication.[4]

How can we understand the ways in which collectivities are transformed in an era of deep mediatization? What are their characteristics and particular features? First, we will explain the fundamental processes of collectivity-building within groups, and then explore collectivities purely based on imagination and datafication.

9.1 Groups, Collectivities and Deep Mediatization

While older forms of 'community' entail stability, coherence and embeddedness, tied to shared experience or common history, social relations based on 'network sociality' less 'narrational' than 'informational', involving primarily 'an exchange of data and on catching up' (Wittel, 2008, p. 157). For many writers, network sociality is associated with the *loss* of community, and is enabled by 'communication technology, transport technology and technologies to manage relationships' (Wittel, 2008, p. 177).[5] Similarly analyses are offered of 'networked individualism' (Castells, 2001, p. 131; Wellman et al., 2003, p. 3), which involves translocal mediated communications not constructed any more by reference to a single place.[6]

Accounts like these are however problematic since they reduce these transformations to a switch within a simplified binary ('network' versus 'community' (Postill, 2011, p. 102). They also reduce media-related changes to a single line of transformation. But we can hardly locate any *one* single way in which collectivities are being transformed: various forms of collectivities diverge from each other while others have their boundaries blurred. It is also inadequate to describe these collectivities simply as 'networks': rather, they build complex figurations with a certain constellation of actors, and it is the latter *constellation* that we can describe as a network. However, collectivities remain phenomena constructed through processes of meaning; they have a meaningful boundary even if they are locally

situational, like smart mobs. On the contrary, the variety of collectivities has expanded through the use of media technologies.

It is useful nonetheless to distinguish analytically between two basic kinds of collectivity because media and their infrastructures play different roles in these figurations. There are collectivities for which media are *constitutive* in the sense that those collectivities cannot exist without media, for example online groups. These collectivities constituted by media emerged with mediatization, and we therefore call them 'media-based collectivities'. And then there are collectivities (for example, families) for which media are not constitutive but are increasingly *constructed through and moulded by* media-related communications: we call these 'mediatized collectivities'.

Media-Based Collectivities

Media can constitute collectivities in two ways. First, they can offer *by their content* a frame of relevance for constructing such collectivities. Second, they can offer the *space of communication* in which these collectivities get constructed, regardless of the actual content that meet their specific frames of relevance. In the first case, media are constitutive in the sense of constructing the meaningful boundaries of these collectivities. In the second case, media are constitutive in the sense of supporting the communications practices through which these collectivities always get constructed. Each type has its specific dynamics that requires a more detailed analysis, but both need the label 'media-based collectivity'.

The clearest examples of media-based collectivities are those that gather around particular media content (Friemel, 2012). An example for this, often discussed in media and communications research, is 'audiences', especially for exceptional media events (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Hepp and Couldry, 2010; Scannell, 2002): people who follow television sports games, ceremonies, extraordinary popular shows or comparable 'events' that are communicated as a source of collective identification. Later we will discuss in more detail to what extent processes of constructing 'imagined collectivities' (of the nation or of other kinds) are at work here. The point we want to make is that, even if these people do not necessarily feel themselves to be part of a community, they may still build a more loosely connected collectivity as the spectators of a particular media spectacle (Kellner, 2010, p. 76).

With reference to certain forms of media content, we can also witness the emergence of more stable collectivities for which 'fan communities' or

'fan cultures' are a prominent example (Fiske, 1989, pp. 146–151; Jenkins, 1992; Winter, 2010). Media are important here in a double sense: first, they define the relevance-frames for such figurations; second, they are important as means for keeping these collectivities together. With digital media the possible influence of these collectivities increased as new 'politics of participation' became possible 'not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favourite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new models of cultural production (participatory culture)' (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 246). The digitalization of photography and the rise of platforms for the easy sharing of images (those created digitally, and digitized archival images) have enabled new collectivities to focus on sharing memories in new ways (MacDonald, 2015; van Dijck, 2007): as one participant in Richard MacDonald's study put it, 'I've shown [my photos online] because it might jog someone's memory' (quoted in Macdonald, 2015, p. 28). While we have to be careful not to romanticize these collective cultures (Carpentier, 2011; Cordeiro et al., 2013; Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013), it is evident that digitization has expanded their scale, scope and regularity. Importantly, some media-based collectivities may now operate translocally, joining together Taiwanese fans of, for example, Japanese and other foreign television programmes, usually watched live through various unofficial online means (Tse, 2014). But we have to be aware that using the word 'community' to describe them is not necessarily helpful. Quite early on there was a discussion about how far 'interpretive communities' (Grossberg, 1988; Lindlof, 1988; Radway, 1984) necessarily constitute groups of people who know each other and have a self-understanding as a group, or whether they might actually be much more loosely attached collectivities. Such a discussion regains relevance as the 'new digital environment increased the speed of fan communication, resulting in [. . .] 'just in time fandom' (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 141), partly experienced through digital platforms and 'second screens' in parallel to other forms of media use. The figurations of these fan collectivities become more diverse and ever more deeply related to media technologies. Therefore, instead of understanding each and every fan culture necessarily as *a single* community, we might do better to understand it as a complex figuration of figurations that links up different local groups in a range of interdependent activities.

Other media-based collectivities include various sorts of 'online groups', and again it is an open question how far they are communities. The owners of digital platforms especially have a tendency to call themselves 'communities' and understand by this rather a kind of forum function

(Deterding, 2008; Yuan, 2013). However, we should be careful not to mix such 'technological definitions of "community"' (Baym, 2015, p. 83) with sociological ones. Basically, online groups are figurations that are built with reference to a certain platform and the topic of communication there. But it is an empirical question *whether* and *how far* these collectivities make progress towards becoming a community (Weber's question about 'communitization'). Contemporary digital platforms offer possibilities for creating a *variety* of different online groups on one platform, each of them based on various topics of interest, and various software add possibilities for online group-building; for example, multi-user online games where game-related collectivities like 'guilds' play against each other and whose construction is supported by the game software in various ways (Williams et al., 2006). The 'guilds' may be built, for example, by text- or video-chat in parallel to the game played: such game-related collectivities may derive from or result in offline relationships, or remain solely online (Domahidi et al., 2014). The *degree* of community involved depends on the individual case and its meaning.

Media-based collectivities can also be local and situated; for example, 'flash' or 'smart mobs'. A 'flash mob' can be defined as a large group of people who gather by the support of digital media in some predetermined location, perform some brief action, and then quickly disperse (McFedries, 2003, p. 56). The term 'smart mob' (Rheingold, 2003, p. xii) originally having a more specific political focus, although the distinction has become blurred (Houston et al., 2013, p. 237). Whatever exact term we use, such mobs are forms of collectivity that have (digital) media as a pre-condition of their existence, and are a figuration tied to particular local gatherings or situations. In this they are similar to other new forms of situational collectivities, like 'mobile clubbing' (groups of people who go from bar to bar while connected by mobile media (Kaulingfreks and Warren, 2010, p. 211), or 'mobile gaming' (Frith, 2013, p. 251), or 'urban swarms' of protesters (Brejzek, 2010, p. 110). Whatever their duration, these figurations, in their close relations to media, are typical of an era of deep mediatization.

Mediatized Collectivities

Even collectivities whose existence and formation are *independent* of media can form what we can call 'mediatized collectivities': families, peer groups, migrant groups or groups of excluded people nowadays are collectivities whose forms of meaningful belonging are, in part, *constructed through* the use of media. Here we find what Nancy Baym calls 'networked

collectivism': 'groups of people now network throughout the internet and related mobile media, and in-person communication, creating a shared but distributed group identity' (Baym, 2015, p. 101).

When it comes to families, the appropriation of media – especially of television – was and still is important for maintaining them as a collectivity (Hirsch, 1992; Morley, 1986; Peil and Röser, 2014). However, the crucial point here is that keeping up family life became a cross-media endeavour (Hasebrink, 2014). When family photos are shared on online platforms and through that a family memory is constituted (Lohmeier and Pentzold, 2014; Pentzold et al., 2016, p. 2), or when family relationships are articulated by digital media use (Cardoso et al., 2012, pp. 49–70), it is the whole media ensemble that is involved. Such a mediatization of the family enables new forms of the figuration of the family, especially families that are spread across long distances and at the same time keep up a close relation to their family members (Greschke, 2012; Madianou and Miller, 2012, pp. 128–135): their ensemble of *different* media (mobile phones, internet-based visual telephony, email, texting, digital platforms) makes it possible to keep up family roles like that of 'mothering' across long distances. But media change the 'feel', 'texture' and 'meaning' of a family's relationships: the relationships between parents and children, for example, if constructed by video conferences, telephone calls and mobile phone surveillance, remain more distanced than one constructed mainly in face-to-face interaction (Madianou and Miller, 2012, pp. 103–123).

Similarly with peer groups. While nothing new, peer groups, especially of young people, are nowadays moulded to a significant degree through their use of media, not least because mediated popular culture provides them with a relevant point of reference. Indeed, an increasing portion of young peer-groups' communication *as a group* takes place via media: mobile phones, digital platforms, chat apps (Buckingham and Kehily, 2014). Members of peer groups feel under pressure to appropriate media and to fulfil the rules of communication specific to them (Hepp et al., 2014, pp. 175–198). Group membership becomes *defined by* access to particular media ensembles so that failure to use certain media may result in group-exclusion. Put differently, in the age of deep mediatization, membership of a peer group is *enacted through* appropriating its media ensemble.

Further evidence for the mediatization of collectivities comes from migrant groups. Nowadays the very act of migrating is already highly intertwined with media: the 'image' of the place to which one is migrating as well as the possible migration network is built up via the internet *before* the act of migration (see Braune, 2013). Migration itself is organized

by digital platforms and smartphones, which together allow detailed navigation, ongoing information, as well as documentation of the migration process. The relevance these media have is closely related to the 'information precarity' (Wall et al., 2015, p. 2) of refugees in large camps: without technological and social access to relevant information, with irrelevant, sometimes dangerous, information prevalent, unable to control the circulation of their own images, and under continuous risk of surveillance by state authorities. The 'connected migrant' (Diminescu, 2008, p. 568) is involved in various mediatized collectivities during his or her journey, building mediatized groups of support along the way, and maintaining at the same time contact with family, friends and others at the place of origin. Media have always enabled migrants to maintain links to their wider migrant group through various, mainly 'smaller media' (Dayan, 1999, p. 22). But with digitalization these possibilities significantly increase (Leurs, 2015, pp. 103–242).

Deep mediatization may also transform the experience of intensely marginalized groups. One striking example is homeless people. For a long time, media have been relevant as sources of entertainment and opportunities for communitization in shelter homes and elsewhere (Fiske, 1993, pp. 3–5). With the spread of digital media, homeless people in media-saturated societies become regular users of digital technology, especially of smartphones (see for the USA, Pollio et al., 2013). Beside organizational matters, they use these technologies to maintain contact with friends and families and for collectivity building (Woelfer and Hendry, 2012, pp. 2828–2831). Their media use goes beyond self-representation as with homeless persons' newspapers (Koch and Warneken, 2014). It is much more about keeping contact with and remaining part of ongoing collectivities while still living on the street.[7]

Some Emerging Principles

It is obvious that the specificities and possible transformations of the collectivities discussed so far cannot be related solely to media. Other processes are driving forces too: individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Burzan, 2011), globalization (Tomlinson, 1999; Slater, 2013; Waisbord, 2013a), commercialization (Lash and Lury, 2007; Lupton, 2013). But having these further meta-processes of change in mind and comparing 'media-based' and 'mediatized collectivities', it becomes evident that collectivity-building does not dissolve into a single form of individualized network. Collectivities remain a meaningful unit of human life in times of

deep mediatization, but through mediatization become transformed in a range of ways. Three points are striking.

1. *Media contents become important resources for defining collectivities* when media contents become the 'topic' around which those collectivities are constructed. This is especially evident in media-based collectivities such as fan cultures that are predominantly defined by a shared enthusiasm for a certain media content (a series, a genre, etc.). But it applies, too, to mediatized collectivities – families, peer groups – that appropriate various kinds of media in constructing their moralities, rules, boundaries and joint experiences. While such content a decade ago was typically communicated by mass media (print, film, radio, television), and access to it was more limited, today a huge variety of symbolic resources is accessible via online distribution. Therefore, the spectrum of *possible* collectivities has increased fundamentally.

2. *Media are means for constructing collectivities*, especially for online groups that constitutively rely on their online space of communication, but also for those peer groups and families that become related to the use of media like smartphones. Actor-constellations may be sustained across long distances and collectivity experienced synchronically at a distance, even under circumstances of intense mobility, whether of individuals or the whole collectivity. New textures of collectivity emerge through a variety of media ensembles as well as very different opportunities for constructing collectivities. Together a collectivity's specific features and the communicative capacities of its media ensemble define its possibilities of transformation.

3. *Media trigger dynamics in collectivities*. It is less the single medium that matters here than the whole media ensemble,[8] the dynamics of which can however vary hugely: having access to certain media may become fundamental for becoming a member of this collectivity, or media may affect the communication that takes place within collectivities (online groups, for example, are well known for their practices of 'flaming', rooted in the lack of co-presence between their members). Even in mediatized collectivities, the degree to which members are 'always on' has consequences for the quality of their communications.

Elaborating the original ideas of Hubert Knoblauch (2008), we can call a shift from 'collectivities of *pure* co-presence' to 'collectivities of *multimodal* communication'. By this we mean that, before the spread of today's communications media, human collectivities involved co-presence, in which everyone knew each other, practices typically were shared, and core knowledges were distinctive of the whole collectivity. This is the

conception of community found in classic writings about communities (Tönnies, 2001 [1935]). But, with mediatization's successive waves of mechanization, electrification and digitalization, further kinds of collectivities gained relevance that we can call 'collectivities of multi-modal communication'. Based on and shaped by a diverse media ensemble, less rooted in direct experience but in shared processes of mediated communication, these 'collectivities of multi-modal communication' become communities when they build up a 'common we' as well as long-term structures. However, an important characteristic of deep mediatization is the *variable intensity* of such collectivities, and the role that choices *between* media modalities (media options within the media manifold) play in the formation of distinctive collectivities (what makes them 'multi-modal'). Far from a general switch-over to purely 'personal' networks, in an age of deep mediatization we see a more *differentiated range* of collectivities, in part because even older collectivities of co-presence have now become mediatized.

9.2 The Political Project of Imagined Collectivities

So far we have discussed collectivities whose members are in interaction with each other. But we also need to consider collectivities that are constructed through certain ways of *representing* that collectivity. Thereby, a number (smaller or larger) of people who are not in personal contact with each other are nonetheless addressed simultaneously. Historically we can relate imagined collectivities to religious communities, and later the nation as an 'imagined community', constructed by print media and electronic mass media like radio and television. The actors who constructed these collectivities were typically powerful: churches, political state institutions and their representatives. However, with deep mediatization, the 'imagining' of collectivity has became an increasingly contested field.

Imagined Political Communities

Originally, the nation as an 'imagined community' involved the idea of national public media as crucial to the construction of this imagined community. In his enlightening analysis, Benedict Anderson emphasized 'the novel and the newspaper' as 'the technical means for "re-presenting" the kind of imagined community that is the nation' (Anderson, 1983, p. 25). In such a perspective the 'development of print-as-commodity' is the key to understanding the construction of a communicative space that offers the

possibilities to imagine a 'national consciousness' (Anderson, 1983, p. 37). Electronic media later supplemented this process – mainly radio and television – which gave 'print allies unavailable a century ago' (Anderson, 1983, p. 135). In this way, processes of communication that allowed the construction of the nation were intensified.

However, it would be a mistake to understand this mediated representation of the nation as an *explicit* discourse about the nation as a political unit. Rather, it is a 'banal nationalism': a habitual representation of the nation as a point of identification in a 'mundane way' (Billig, 1995, p. 6). This process of construction works through how, in media, a 'homeland' is articulated as a 'here' and the group of the people living in this homeland as a 'national we'. Contests and conflicts with other people become a competition of 'nations', and even the weather is something that is automatically related to a national territory. This 'constant flagging' of the nation ensures that, 'whatever else is forgotten in a world of information overload, we do not forget our homelands' (Billig, 1995, p. 127). And even today this process of constructing the world as a world of nations continues, for example in online platforms that are not necessarily bound to a national territory (Hepp et al., 2016, pp. 112–121; Skey, 2014). For various kinds of political actors – politicians, parties, governments, and journalists – the imagined community of the nation remains the point of reference for constructing social order. This keeps the imaginary of the nation as a 'quasi-natural' unit of living and identification: 'It is a form of life in which "we" are constantly invited to relax, at home, within the homeland's borders' (Billig, 1995, p. 127).

With globalization in general and globalization of the media in particular, however, such social imaginaries became weaker (Hepp, 2015, pp. 10–34; Taylor, 2004). *Besides* the 'project' of constructing the nation as a collectivity, other kinds of 'projects' of imagining collectivity became more widespread. One prominent example for this is the 'community of Europeans' that can be understood in parallel to the nation as a 'community of communication' (Risse, 2010, p. 157): it is imagined through collective processes of communication. Here, the underlying communicative space is a *transnational* and *multi-lingual* public sphere that emerges from the increasing discussion of European issues across borders as well as an increasing monitoring of European political affairs in Brussels (Koopmans and Statham, 2010, pp. 63–96; Risse, 2015, pp. 144–153; Wessler et al., 2008, pp. 40–54). While on the level of everyday experience this kind of imagined collectivity has not the 'natural' character of the nation, we can see under way an ongoing construction of a 'banal', however contested, Europeanness (Hepp et al., 2016, pp. 217–231).

Alternative Ways of Imagining Collectivity

But such alternative territorially related communities are only one way of imagining collectivity. With deep mediatization we have a variety of other publics and imagined collectivities that partly conflict with each other and partly connect to each other (Baym and boyd, 2012, p. 321). This starts with 'personal publics' (Schmidt, 2013, p. 121) or 'private spheres' (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 161) grouped around certain individuals, and ends with the 'networked publics' (Benkler, 2006, p. 11; boyd, 2008, p. 61) of digital platforms that are characterized by a particular communicative architecture which enables these spheres of communication (Loosen and Schmidt, 2012, p. 6). Around some topics, situational 'issue publics' (Lippmann, 1993 [1925]; Marres, 2007) emerge across various digital media, including the mobile phone itself (see Wasserman, 2011, on mobile phones and political participation in Africa). What we can notice here is a massive differentiation and multiplication of the different spaces of political communication, shaped in particular by underlying inequalities of socio-economic resources. This makes essential a 'context-centered model' of media's role in the formation of collectivities (Wasserman, 2011, p. 150). We do not even know therefore the full variety of imagined collectivities that such publics support, but we know they expand far beyond the confines or reference points of national states or confederations.

To explore this more closely it is helpful to consider the case of online blogging. What is called the 'blogosphere' (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1409) is an online space of bloggers who are more or less closely interrelated. Typically, these relations become visualized as networks of technical (Bruns, 2007; Reese et al., 2007) or semantic links of (mutual) personal references (Tække, 2005; Vicari, 2015). The main question here is what kinds of collectivities are built by these bloggers. Partly, they are understood as a kind of 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1999), being preoccupied with a certain topic, referring more or less to each other, and so building up an arena of discourse.[9] However, we need again to ask how far the term 'community' is helpful, or whether this collectivity is defined simply by the shared interest of the involved bloggers. The situation becomes even more complicated if we consider the bloggers' readers. The 'intense affective unification' (Stage, 2013, p. 216) of blogging on a certain topic can result in 'online crowds' with their own dynamics: members of this collectivity come together on certain online sites, imagining themselves as a kind of collectivity of political interest and expressing their political position in affective ways.[10] With such 'online crowding' we are witnessing the unification

and relative synchronization of publics in relation to certain political issues through shared affective practices (Stage, 2013, p. 216) and through a structure of feeling (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 116, drawing on Williams, 1958).

The multiplication of possible publics also multiplies the possibilities for constructing types of imagined collectivities. The most prominent examples of this are social movements. While social movements have a long-term history of imagining collectivity – the most prominent example for this is the international socialist movement – so-called 'new' social movements' (Porta, 2013; Rucht and Neidhart, 2002) like the environmental or alter-mondialization movement are characterized by their *global* imaginations of collectivity that move beyond any national or supra-national political units. With the support of media, these movements aim at transformations on a global scale (Klein, 2000), offering new imaginations of collectivity based around shared 'project identities' (Castells, 1997, p. 421) and offering 'networks of hope' (Castells, 2012). However, there are good arguments to be cautious about such claims. Social movements certainly have better resources for collectivity building today than before digitalization: a prominent recent example for this was the 'occupy movement'.[11] Yet, at the same time, the internet also offers political elites many opportunities to intensify and diversify the ways in which they sustain themselves in positions of power (Chadwick, 2006, p. 202). Therefore, the transformative potential of new political collectivities might be far more limited than their own imaginaries suggest. However, with digitalization the actual character of social movements changes. There emerges a tension between more loosely connected, individualized forms of political action on the one hand, and new ways of actually constructing political collectivity on the other. While the two seem contradictory at first glance, a second look shows that both are an expression of the changing figurations of social movements and their imaginations of collectivity.

In an important book W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg describe this shift in social movements as being from a 'logic of collective action' to a 'logic of connective action' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 27). With digital media platforms, they argue, we can distinguish three kinds of social movement figurations: first, there is 'collective action' which takes place in figurations of 'organizationally brokered networks', characterized by a strong organizational coordination of action. Media technologies are used to manage participation and coordinate the organizational goals as well as the communication of other aims. Second, there is 'connective action' realized by organizationally enabled networks with a looser coordination of action: media technologies support communicative

practices that enable more personalized forms of action. And third, there is 'connective action' that is supported by crowd-enabled networks with little or no formal organizational coordination. Here, we have a large-scale personal access to multi-layered media technologies and communication centred on emergent personal action. While this threefold distinction is certainly idealized, it addresses the diverse consequences of digital media for the structure of social movements today: digital platforms support *both* hierarchically organized social movements *and* a highly individualized political engagement that is more 'me-centric' (Langlois et al., 2009, p. 418; see also Fenton and Barassi, 2011, p. 180).

But we have to be very careful not to confuse this possible shift with a disappearance of imaginations of collectivity. Even much looser figurations remain dedicated to the construction of imagined (political) collectivities. In a careful analysis, Anastasia Kavada (2015) demonstrated this for the Occupy movement, which involved protests without formal organization, supported by a very open figuration of activists linked by protest and media-based communications practices. In such an open figuration 'social media followers formed an outer ring while the inner ring included activists who were participating regularly in the physical occupations' (Kavada, 2015, p. 879). Through the use of digital media platforms, it became possible to construct two kinds of collectivities: first, the collectivity of the group protesting in the streets and parks, and second, a collectivity that followed the events (a kind of imagined collectivity of supporters). Occupy became a movement with transnational impact in part because it offered *symbolic* resources for imagining oneself as part of such a wider collectivity, and in so doing supported its own spread beyond the figurations of local protests. Such more open structures of organizing protest do not result in a default to 'me-centric protest' but rather in a more varied imaginary of 'protest collectivity' (see Kavada, 2015, p. 883). All can find a place within this collectivity of those who define themselves as part of the '99 percent' movement against global capitalism.

Collectivities for Media Change

Social movements are now aware how important media technologies are for social processes in general and for collectivity building in particular. As a result, they consider media and media infrastructures themselves increasingly as an *object of* political engagement. Roots of this can be found in the 'alternative' and 'radical' media movements of the 1970s (Atton, 2002; Downing, 1984; Rodriguez, 2001) that aimed to achieve

'alternative' forms of public spheres (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p. 94, 127). With reference to network infrastructure and digital media, important examples are the 'hacker movement' and the 'open source movement'. The hacker movement's political aim was to make the implications of the increasing omnipresence of computers and datafication publicly known and thereby politically negotiable (Levy, 1984). The focus of the 'open source movement' was first to foster a certain form of non-proprietary software development; later it became a political movement intertwined with a general political engagement in 'open access' to information: the 'open data movement' (Baack, 2015). A remarkable hybrid example is the Chaos Computer Club, one of the world's largest and Europe's oldest hacker organizations (Kubitschko, 2015). More recent examples include the technologically driven 'repair movement', combining hackers' competences with an engagement for sustainability and a zero growth economy (Kannengießer, forthcoming). Collectivities like these not only *use* media and their infrastructure to support their engagement for particular political aims; they consider media and their infrastructure *as themselves an issue* of political engagement.

This focus of certain movement collectivities on contesting *media* is a general characteristic of an era of deep mediatization: in such an era, media, and ways of reflecting on media, become part of the stuff out of which the social world is built and so, for example, larger collectivities come together *as such*. Prominent recent examples are the 'media-related pioneer communities' (Hepp, 2016) like the 'quantified self movement' (Boesel, 2013; Lupton, 2015; Nafus and Sherman, 2014) or the 'makers movement' (Anderson, 2012; Hyysalo et al., 2014; Toombs et al., 2014).[12] While they call themselves 'movements', these collectivities are instead hybrids between social movements and think tanks. Like social movements, pioneer communities have informal networks, a collective identity, and a shared aim for action. More particularly, they come very close to 'technology-oriented and product-oriented movements' (Hess, 2005, p. 516), like the open-source movement (Tepe and Hepp, 2008). However, pioneer communities are generally not involved in conflict-driven relations with identifiable opponents as social movements are: indeed, they are more open to forms of entrepreneurship and policymaking, lending them an affinity with think tanks (McGann and Sabatini, 2011; Shaw et al., 2014; Stone et al., 1998). Pioneer communities here share with think tanks an ability to produce ideas, and an effort to influence both public and policymakers.

The imaginaries that characterize *all* these collectivities are oriented

to media technologies. The 'quantified self movement' imagines better forms of healthcare through collective self-measurement and the accumulation of personal and collective data. The 'makers movement' imagines that new technologies will allow decentralized forms of production and new collectivities of value creation that will supplant traditional forms of (industrial) production. Such pioneer communities spread their imaginaries transculturally.[13]

We could continue our analysis and discuss many further examples, whether religious collectivities[14] or transnational political violence, which have become more and more based on building collectivity through media.[15] But again the point we want to make is a more general one: that we are experiencing *a shift in how collectivities are imagined for political ends*. While the imagining of collectivity through media was for a long time predominantly related to imagining the nation, we are nowadays confronted with much more diverse and conflicting processes of imagination that can no longer easily be integrated into the container of well-integrated 'national projects'. Looking back, the project of imagining the nation depended on a close fit with the waves of mechanization and electrification and with the nationally based media infrastructure on which they were based, whether we turn to France, the USA, or colonial Nigeria (Flichy, 1995; Larkin, 2008; Starr, 2005). The high point of the communicative construction of the nation was in the second half of the twentieth century. With deep mediatization, and its more diversely configured media infrastructures, political projects for imagining collectivities become themselves more diverse, even contradictory.

Two points are striking. First, the communicative spaces of constructing these imagined collectivities are increasingly detached from territorial borders. This does not mean that the project of imagining national communities has come to an end. But such imaginations are increasingly confronted with mediatized 'old' and 'new' imaginations of collectivity: *supranational* imaginaries jostle for prominence with national imaginaries, while social movements offer new imaginations of transnational and transcultural political belonging, and new types of media-oriented collectivity emerge. A characteristic of deep mediatization is the existence *in parallel* of these conflicting imaginations of collectivity and the unresolvable diversity of political values and political projects that results.

Second, the close relation between our imaginaries of collective life and media becomes taken-for-granted. First steps in such a direction are the various social movements that focus on media and their infrastructures as a political issue. Maybe more characteristic for deep mediatization are the

media-related pioneer communities which call themselves 'movements' but are more closely tied to existing power centres. Their imaginings of collectivity involve ideas of living better together, through and by media technologies: those imaginings are effected not just by circulating media, but by a much broader range of practices focused on media that constitute what Hilde Stephansen calls the 'social foundations' of publics (Stephansen, 2016). In our terminology, media-related practices enable new types of publicly significant figurations to be formed. With deep mediatization these imaginings become concrete political projects, based in the material infrastructure of media and communciations.

9.3 Collectivity without Communitization

There is one further characteristic of contemporary collectivity that must be discussed. By this we mean collectivities whose construction involves various forms of mediated communication and datafication, but without *communitization*. Such 'collectivities without communitization' are frequently driven by corporate interests, and relate in particular to 'digital work': that is, kinds of labour that are undertaken in the sphere of digital media, often without the individuals involved understanding this *as* work. Such collectivities take various forms.

'Working' for Brands and the Data Economy

We can trace this development back to the idea of 'brand communities'. At first sight these are very close to the features of fan cultures, being collectivities built around certain (media) products or even (think of Apple) the producing companies themselves. However, it is worth looking more closely at this phenomenon. In their original sense brand communities were specialized, non-geographically bound communities, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). They were 'largely imagined communities' (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 419) insofar as their horizon was not just the artefact of a certain kind of product (a computer or a car) but the brand that this artefact represents. The fundamental point about brand communities is that they cannot be 'made' by companies but are rooted in the everyday practices of those who use these brands (Pfadenhauer, 2010, p. 363). Nowadays, such collectivities go beyond the companies' own strategies of marketing and encompass the mediated communication of the members of the community. Such brand communities are not 'sub' or 'fan

cultures' because their members see themselves not as something 'special' or 'marginal' but as general consumers with an interest for a certain kind of *accepted* brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 414); even so, as with fan communities, the community-building itself takes place by interaction either at physical meetings or online (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006, pp. 46f.).

Building up brand *communities* became, paradoxically, a top-down strategy of marketing, which resulted in 'brand collectivities' with a far lower level of communitization. The possibilities of digital platforms stimulated companies to experiment with 'online groups' of consumers in order to foster relationships between and to them (Andersen, 2005, pp. 41f.; Arnone et al., 2010, p. 97). The parallel relationship that consumers have to a common brand creates already a figuration, albeit one characterized by an intense asymmetry. The hope of corporations is often to support the development of more reliable consumer relationships (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014, pp. 333–336), but, when they do so, something different takes place: the construction of a visible and therefore meaningful collectivity of 'followers' who do not necessarily perceive this figuration as involving 'community'. There is a big difference between those who just 'like' the web pages of certain brands on digital platforms, and the brand-related groups on these platforms founded by the users themselves (Zaglia, 2013, p. 221). The first group shares only a positive view of a brand, but is *represented* as a collectivity through data accumulation. In the second case there is an interaction from the bottom up between people who not only share an interest for this brand and its products, but also develop a joint discourse about it, and potentially a relation to each other (Habibi et al., 2014). Only the latter is close to the original idea of 'brand communities'.

With deep mediatization and the expansion of mediated interdependence that it brings, this first kind of brand collectivity becomes more widespread, especially in the corporate sector. But companies increasingly want to encourage forms of collective practice that create value in more tangible ways: online 'collectivities of work' which involve people outside formal employment or organizational membership, in the interactive production of data-flows and activity-streams from which commercial value can be extracted. Let's leave aside the intense debate about the status of this sort of labour or 'playbor' (Mejias, 2013),[16] and focus on the *underlying* sociological question: what *sort of* collectivities does such 'work' construct on a massive scale? Take the case of so-called 'brand volunteering' (Cova et al., 2015, p. 16). It is performed by a complex set of figurations: the figurations of local brand communities ('clubs' with an interest for a certain brand) become linked to the figurations of online platforms and marketing

campaigns to build up a certain collectivity of work. One study researched brand volunteering around a car company: anything like community only emerged at the local brand groups or during face-to-face events (Cova et al., 2015). 'Brand volunteering' is marked by many tensions; mistrust by the supporters for the overall strategy of the company; feelings of being exploited. Nevertheless, the *interest in* the brand which motivates some members of brand communities to become 'brand volunteers' requires that the figuration built around the brand, and the broader context in which this 'invitation to work' occurs, is strong enough at least to encourage people to devote their scarce time to 'collective' projects oriented towards a reference-point that is abstract, a *representation* of a value.

For other 'collectivities of work' not even this is the case. They are built around online platforms to which individuals contribute 'work' as a collectivity of 'online workers' with little or no possibility of direct interaction with each other (they are not in this sense a 'community'): for example, platforms which integrate individual contributions (rating platforms for people, restaurants, locations etc.) or platforms that link services that individuals offer (accommodation, rides etc.). In both cases these platforms are typically marketed as 'cost saving' and 'democratizing', but they are just as plausibly seen as forms of unpaid exploitation. The basic idea of rating platforms is that a company offers an online infrastructure to evaluate certain services. The unpaid work individuals do is to contribute their assessment to a public forum, with the assumed bonus that other users are paying attention to reviewers' opinions. Such platforms then function as 'a reflexive feedback loop' (Zukin et al., 2015, p. 3), both reflecting popular sentiments about specific services and helping to form those sentiments. From this perspective the actors and roles in this figuration are clearly defined by the supposed 'benefit' for all involved. The providers of this platform *financially* benefit by selling the information produced by this platform: the review-writers supposedly benefit by having the opportunity to express their opinion, and the readers, presumably, think they benefit by getting the latest information.

There is no communitization in this collectivity of (unpaid) work, whose outputs are sold by the platform operators. On the contrary, it can be argued that such collectivities of work have the side-effect of undermining community. See for example Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson's (2015) research on a rating platform for restaurants and clubbing locations that undermined existing community structures through the way it reinforced symbolic and other forms of privilege embedded in the practices of its 'workers'. Far from being communitization, the side effects of this

'collectivity of work' may work to undermine actual processes of community building elsewhere. Similar dynamics operate in platforms that link together services that individuals offer (accommodation, car rides etc.). Such brokerage platforms are part of a 'sharing economy' (Zervas et al., 2014, p. 5). The model of such platforms is to offer a convenient interface that matches supply and demand in trusted ways (see Rosen et al., 2011).[17] Such platforms have had far-reaching success in such varied areas as accommodation, car rides or jobs (Guttentag, 2015; Irani, 2015; Yannopoulou, 2013; Zervas et al., 2014).[18] We can understand the collectivities structured around these platforms as 'collectivities of work' insofar as their members offer their hospitality, transport service or data labour for financial gain. But again such figurations are structured primarily around corporate platforms in order to make profit, with disturbing side-effects: for example, patterns of race segregation on accommodation platforms, including differential rates of remuneration driven by the automated collection of ethnicity data generated from the pictures users post of themselves (see Edelman and Luca, 2014). We do not deny that, in some civil society platforms based on 'sharing economy' – including those close to social movements such as OpenStreetMaps (Lin, 2011) – the work is much less individualized and based on social movements and local groups with specific interests in such alternative platforms. Our point however concerns the general trend, which is dominated by the commercially successful platforms that follow a different kind of dynamic.

Other platforms produce a 'crowd' of low-skilled digital labourers who perform vast numbers of minor data tasks and are paid small amounts of money for this 'microwork' (Irani 2015, p. 721). Such platforms organize digital workers to fit the needs of datafication. Service requesters post a 'task' that then can be performed by the 'microworkers', in accordance with the requirements of the programming or digital industries. On this model 'humans (are) made into modular, protocol-defined computational services' (Irani, 2015, p. 731), working on a large scale and in a fully monitorable way. Here, we start to see how the vast data infrastructure on which deep mediatization is based generates *its own costs* in terms of hidden forms of exploitative labour. Meanwhile, those forms of labour are themselves only possible on the basis of new types of figurations: collectivities *without* community. Through these forms of labour, individuals literally become *part of* the datafication process: 'humans-as-a-service' (Irani, 2015, p. 724).

Collectivities Through Numbers

There is a second way in which today's data infrastructure generates new types of collectivity: 'numeric inclusion' (Passoth et al., 2014, p. 282). There is nothing new about quantifying media audiences (Ang, 1991) or national populations (Porter, 1995). But with datafication, precise measurement at one data-point can be calibrated, almost in real time, to information stored (or simultaneously gathered) in myriad other databases to produce instant categorization and 'appropriate' action. Based on the digital traces we all leave online, groupings of people who share certain characteristics are continuously produced to support the advertising industry's aim of reaching individuals with customised advertising (Couldry and Turow, 2014; Turow, 2011). This accumulation of data is subsequently communicated back to the individuals: by online shops that produce lists of the other goods people making the same purchase bought; by online radio stations that produce charts, access statistics and rankings with reference to certain tastes of their users; by news pages that offer further information based on the previous reading choices of other users etc. Processes of 'numeric inclusion' therefore work to construct collectivities that 'would not be possible without the measurement and activity assessments delegated to algorithms and statistical programs' (Passoth et al., 2014, p. 282). What is constructed here is an *accumulation* of individuals who are treated as sharing characteristics within networked processes of 'big data' processing.

'Numeric inclusion', however, when embedded back into daily practice, stimulates the construction for instrumental purposes of a meaningful horizon – mainly of taste, interest and orientation[19] – within which individuals *may* come to position themselves as members of a certain collectivity:[20] those categorized as liking the same band, or the same type of book, or any other categorized feature. But such collectivities based on 'numeric inclusion' are generated without (or with very limited) communitization: indeed, there is no reference-point whatsoever for any affective relation to the collectivity's other members, who remain hidden from each other, except via the *assumption* that they too were categorized the same way. Nevertheless, these collectivities are potentially influential: they represent large numbers of persons who have been constructed for important purposes as *part of the same category,* and who may orient their actions accordingly. To that extent, these collectivities too are an incipient contribution to an emerging social order.

Remaking Our Collectivities

At this stage it is an open question how much such collectivities formed by 'numeric inclusion' – that is, by datafication – might have in common with the media-based and mediatized local collectivities discussed at the beginning of this chapter. They would seem to be at opposite ends of the expanded spectrum of mediated collectivity in an age of deep mediatization. Are there practices emerging that might link up these different types of collectivity, and so transform the nature of communitization still further?

One important such practice is the embedding into everyday life of robotics, or rather 'social robotics': the 'placement of robots in human social spaces' (Sandry, 2015, p. 335). At present, the most widespread forms of these 'social robots' are not physical artefacts but 'assistant apps' that can be associated with our smartphones (Barile and Sugiyama, 2015, p. 407; Turkle, 2015, p. 339). Such apps are presented to us as quasi-human interaction partners with whom (through voice-recognition software) we can communicate using our natural voice. In reality, however, such 'assistants' are interfaces to large computer networks that process the questions we might ask and give 'answers' by reference to their comparability to an available dataset of questions and answers, combined with the data we have inputted. Through such a relationship we become a living, interactive member of a collectivity without community.

We can easily imagine face-to-face communities of people in such 'relationships' who come together to compare their experience of them. This may be only one of many entry-points for social robotics into the domain of social interaction: there has been much discussion of care-giving robots, or the robot puppets in dementia care,[21] but just as relevant are 'smart' living environments and 'smart' self-driving cars and trains. Already, key aspects of smartphones and smart watches train us to communicate with systems of this sort.

There is of course no simple global story of how such new technologically mediated ways of constructing collectivity are everywhere transforming 'the world', 'our world' or 'anyone's world': such stories remain *rhetorics* which mask hugely uneven processes that, in turn, are deeply implicated in underlying inequalities of socio-economic resource, which indeed they help deepen.[22] Such rhetorics, even if already normalized in pioneer communities and the like, rely on very particular notions of 'centre' and 'periphery' that reduce most sites of everyday life across the globe to 'sites *of replication* of a future invented prior and elsewhere',

as a recent analysis of IT practices in Peru notes (Chan, 2013, p. x, added emphasis).

Our aim in registering some of the practices entangled with such rhetorics has absolutely *not* been to reproduce those rhetorics. But it would be equally dangerous not to acknowledge such pressures towards transformation, since they amount to nothing less than an attempt to transform our models of the social, a deeply motivated adjustment in the very basis of collectivity. As Sherry Turkle (2015, p. 338, added emphasis) puts it: 'even before we make the robots, *we remake ourselves as people* ready to be their companions'. If this is so, we have no choice but, in important ways, to remake our collectivities and potentially our socialities too. But what are the wider costs? What are the consequences for the possibility of social order? These are the questions to which we turn in the book's last two chapters.