Disentangling Anonymity and Privacy

Theoretical reflections in the light of the conceptual history of both terms

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1   Introduction: The new relevance of anonymity

Anonymity and privacy are subjects that are intensely debated in the public. Both have become important matters of political activity and legislation since a loss of both is experienced in particular due to digital information technologies in the context of the Internet and their capacity for processing and storing data. This loss of anonymity and privacy is perceived as a serious threat to values essential for democracy and social life in Western societies, i.e. individual freedom, not least in respect to informational self-determination, the limitation of state power to public matters and for it to refrain from interfering with private affair, and the protection of personal integrity. These debates are conducted in a rather intense manner with a wide array of arguments and different positions in respect to the need for legal regulations and technological solutions for protecting anonymity and privacy, which however address only one side of the issue. In fact, jurisdiction in many countries has a preference for identifiability, and no right to anonymity in public spaces (Kerr et al. 2009: 438–440). Another big issue are people's daily practices of doing privacy and anonymity and the values and habits

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embedded in these practices which are contested as well in the light of the new conditions given by digital information technologies. Formerly established privacy and anonymity practices have turned to tame tigers in times of the Internet and its ubiquitous presence. Yet both in public debates and accordingly in scholarly analyses, which are also on the rise in the face of the contestation of privacy or anonymity (for example Bachmann/ Knecht/ Wittel 2017; Rössler/ Mokrosinska 2015), we observer a rather imprecise and sometimes synonymous use of both concepts. Depending on disciplinary relevancies and analytical points of departure, either privacy is established as the more comprehensive concept and understood as an umbrella term that subsumes anonymity (Helm 2017, Rössler 2003) or the other way around (Ponesse 2014; Matthews 2010). The changing use and the under-specification of both concepts in many scholarly texts is rather unsatisfying for further research in this field since it is problematic to refer to research findings that follow inconsistent notions of anonymity and privacy, including the relation of both concepts. For sorting out the diverse facets and aspects addressed by the concepts of anonymity and privacy, and for coming to a more specific understanding of both terms, we suggest approaching the relevant conceptual history in social theory. Even though both terms were developed conceptually as part of the social theory of 'modernity'[2], they have been outlined in different debates and times, thus gaining relevance at particular periods of sociological thinking. While anonymity as a feature of modern culture was debated in its consequences for the mental life and the social integration in mass societies in modernity very much in the tradition of Georg Simmel (1991; 2002 [1903]) and Alfred Schütz (Schütz 1944, 1967 [1932]), privacy as a concept is tied closely to the political public, respectively the condition of public spheres in (mass) democratic societies, elaborated mainly in the tradition of Jürgen Habermas (1984 [1981]; 1987[1981]; 1991[1962]), and in the critique on the shortcomings of his perspective (Fraser 1990; Benhabib 1996). In the following, these will form our point of departure.

2 On the conceptual history of anonymity

The notion of anonymity as a feature of modernity emerged in the thinking of early sociology that reflects the particular conditions of modern life, mostly visible in the metropoles and their dynamic development at the turn to the 20th century. In the observations by Georg Simmel, a pioneer in sociology and the sociology of urban life, new forms of sociation become apparent. They were induced by the emerging money economy which facilitated the pluralization of life styles and increased the options for making individual choices. The individualization and social differentiation that accompanied these changes happened at the risk of increased loneliness and alienation in a network of anonymous contacts. Axel Honneth (2004:465) observes that "(t)his particular development, too, Simmel at first thought could be described only from the viewpoint of an observer; he did not have in mind a process of increasing loneliness, of isolation felt or suffered, but rather the objective fact of a stronger and stronger concentration on one's own interests alone, independently of other people." Individualization is described by Simmel as increasing autonomy and a qualitative change towards the articulation of an authentic personality (ibid.). At other times, both contemporary and later sociologists have joined Simmel in this diagnosis of modern life in urban contexts (Wirth 1938; Park 1915; Hannerz

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[2] Modernity is put in quotation marks here to highlight that it is contested as concept and criticized for its ideological bias, in particular when contrasted to tradition. Beyond this debate, in our contribution modernity is referred to as a matter of early sociology reflecting the social changes and a term description for these sociological writings on rationalization, industrialization, nationalization and life in mass societies as drivers of social change.

1980). On the one hand anonymity spreads, but on the other hand the freedom for individualization emerges due to the dis-embedding from local communities with strong social bonds. This increases the possibilities for the creation of an identity that is unique. Today, identity work has become a central life task for each individual in Western societies and thus a relevant concept in today's sociological thinking (Goffman 1967 [1963]; Bauman 1996).

Anonymity in the tradition of Simmel's understanding is of a double-faced nature. It is a source of individualization and identity work but may come along with alienation and isolation of the individual and thus cause psychological problems at the same time. Contemporary cultural critical positions emphasized the later aspect. Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, contemporaries of Georg Simmel, highlighted the dark side of anonymity in the ongoing processes of rationalization and technologization which were debated among artists, writers, and distinguished intellectuals of this time. Benjamin and Kracauer raised questions of authenticity and originality, of individuals vanishing in an ornament of the masses, as Siegfried Kracauer described the cultural formation of the emerging mass societies, most visible in the prominent revue dance theaters and groups such as the "Tiller Girls" in the 1920ies (Kracauer 1963 [1920-31]), which may be characterized by uniformity, facelessness, loss of individuality, and subsumed under the idea of people estranged and seduced by the emerging money market, enabling a consumer economy. It may have been this cultural criticism in the thinking of the early sociology of modernity which has remained dominant in the perception of anonymity as a feature of modern life to this day. While Simmel remained rather neutral, there have been several dystopian readings of anonymity which can be perceived as standing in the tradition of the points of reference and ideas generators of critical theory, Walter Benjamin (1963 [1936]; Ferris 2004) and Siegfried Kracauer (1995 [1963]; Vidler 1991). Hannah Arendt (1973; Arendt/ Jaspers 1955; Horkheimer/ Adorno 1981 [1944]) critically reflected on the emerging mass societies as a structure of opportunity for individuals to become part of a fascist mob. Zygmunt Bauman, often referred to in the academic discourse on anonymity, hardly ever refers to anonymity in his research literature but uses it as a synonym for privacy in a more recent news article on drones (Bauman 2011). His scholarly interests are the limitations for identity set by the social conditions and the particular circumstances of life in modern and postmodern societies. It is thus an indirect contribution that Bauman makes to the discussion on anonymity and privacy when he outlines the identity of the characteristic social figures of these two societal formations (Bauman 1995; 1996). Rather than of anonymity, Bauman speaks of autonomy as a condition of public engagement (Bauman ibid.; 1990). Considering this emphasis and the fact that he centers his theoretical reflections on identity, which is not the same as identifiability, Bauman's reflections are most relevant for the conceptual work on the term privacy.

Yet another stance on anonymity as a modern phenomenon was taken by German sociologist Alfred Schütz even though, like for most of the sociological scholars at that time, the term anonymity itself does not play a big role in his writings. Schütz was interested in anonymity as a sociological problem rather than in making it a subject of socio-cultural critique. With his sociological studies, he wanted to inquire how people in an increasingly anonymous and complex world find orientation and integration in particular social contexts and the life world in general (Schütz 1967 [1932]). As the American philosopher and Alfred Schütz student Maurice Natanson (1986: 25) observes, "For Schütz, typification is the medium through which man in daily life find his way through the anonymous structure of everyday world". Anonymity in Schütz's thinking refers primarily to the typified structures of the social world which allow individuals to navigate the world without knowing each other in their individuality.

It is a generalized knowledge about others and their position in that social world that people apply in daily action and that is sufficient for the practical purposes of everyday life (Schütz 1946). According to Schütz, fellow men are known in varying degrees of anonymity, which means that even though one remains anonymous, more or less detailed knowledge about an ideal type exists and thus stereotypical knowledge guides the interaction with contemporaries people do not know personally (Schütz 1944). It is thus not so much a critical stance on anonymity but an analytical contribution to the understanding of how people cope with it successfully in everyday life that Schütz makes with his theoretical approach. Schütz's perspective on anonymity as a feature of modern life and thus a sociological problem in respect to sociation thus provides starting points for operationalizing research on anonymity as a condition in modernity and people's practices of coping with it.

Anonymity emerged by and by in this modern version of society and sociological thinking as a condition of living for the individual in a mass society in which a person is vanishing in its individuality by becoming a generalized other, a stereo-typical/ideal-typical example for a particular group within a differentiating, complex society, more and more obscure to the single individual. Anonymity thus has neither emerged by design nor has it been implemented; it became visible as a principle only gradually in sociological analysis and was reflected in its consequences for individual development as well as in its cultural dimensions.

The thinking of the early sociologists as masterminds of the concept of anonymity as an element of modern life and a social category has not played a considerable role in current scholarly debates, even though these sources could provide substantial ideas for sorting out and systematizing the findings and reflections. Cultural critical readings of anonymity as a feature of modern life seem to be predominant in the period after the Second World War. These critical viewpoints may have provoked or at least inspired juxtaposing positions that today emphasize the social productivity of anonymity like those taken by Helen Nissenbaum (1999) and Julie Ponesse (2013; 2014), even though these do not refer to the conceptual history of the term in the sociology of modernity. In light of these more current studies on anonymity it becomes obvious that the sociology of modernity paid little attention to the practices of doing anonymity as an element in the repertoire of the set of possible strategies of 'modern man'. Anonymity was analyzed in its critical and empowering aspects for people. Moreover, in social life it turned out to be a helpful principle in many realms: It made sense to people across society to engage in anonymity as a practice, to use, create and install it as a technique of governing, of creating mass audiences and categorizing people according to their consumer behavior or to oppose the governing of people, to turn the principles of governance against the official governing instances or utilize them for their own purposes. The counter-practices of anonymizing are something that acknowledges the social productivity of anonymity by taking up the principles for resisting governance, for subversion and counteractions, as for example the group Anonymous (Coleman 2014) does. However, the productivity that anonymity gained for the purposes of generating masses, mass audiences and categorizing mass consumers, thus for broadly disseminating products and services, should also not be neglected. This critically debated tendency was highlighted beyond this particular issue as a means of democratization (Maase 1997) and of giving people access to products, services and ideas that were not available to them for economic reasons but were objects of desire as means for developing a particular, individually chosen life style (Giddens 1991) and allowed social participation in even more differentiated societies. This position highlights the fact that the idea of alienation caused by consumption in a mass society is contested and countered by ideas of the "good

life", which can also be lived under conditions of a mass society, and is described for example by German sociologist Hartmut Rosa as an orientation / in harmony with the life world even though large scale anonymous societies harbor a large potential for alienation (Rosa 2016).

Considering the intellectual history of anonymity in sociology of modernity and deducing from it for a definition of anonymity, the opposite of anonymity is identity or identifiability. Anonymity is a total experience. Either it is given or it is gone. As soon as the option of identification is realized, the starting point for the inquiry of the various facets of the individual's life is possible. This demarcates a turning point in terms of both social analysis and social practice. The attention then turns to the various dimensions of an individual identity and to the moral question of what constitutes legitimate issues for inquiry and observation, or to put it differently: this leads us to the degrees of what is known about a person and by what means this knowledge was generated, and thus to the concept of privacy. What is private and public and what does this distinction mean for social life, its organization and the individual in a social context?

3   On the conceptual history of privacy

Privacy is also a concept that emerged in the context of the scholarly reflection of modernity but it became relevant in the broader perception of sociological thinking only later. It became an increasingly relevant issue in the aftermath of Habermas' problematization of the state of public spheres in liberal societies, in particular the relation of state and economy to the civil society in the context of democracy and democratic societies. Privacy counters public affairs in this debate about the conditions of communication that may build the grounds for a functioning democracy. However, the main concerns pertain to the public sphere and the structural changes it has undergone in the second half of the 20th century (Habermas 1991 [1962]; Habermas et al. 1974 [1964]). He analyzes the state of the public sphere against the blue print of the bourgeois society of the 19th century which formed an ideal type of the public sphere in his view. "The line between state and society, fundamental in our context, divided the public sphere from the private realm. The public sphere was coextensive with public authority, and we consider the court part of it. Included in the private realm was the authentic 'public sphere', for it was a public sphere constituted by the people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised civil society in a narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (Intimsphäre) sphere of privacy. The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society." (Habermas 1991 [1962]: 30f, underlined in the original). While private life is the sphere of solidarity and social reproduction, the sphere where togetherness, the orientation towards mutual understanding and solidarity prevail, the public is the arena of political debate, rational discourse and the preparation of political decisions. Moreover, both private life and public life are distinct from state and economy, "the system" as Habermas calls the two of them, which are both oriented towards the functional purposes power and profit.

On the other side of the functional reason of the state and the economy, that is, in private life, social reproduction, i.e. childcare, socialization, education, everyday life and togetherness in the community is organized. Here, the orientation towards understanding prevails and is essential for the socialization

of people both into independent individuals in the community as well as into responsible members of civic society who are actively engaged in the public sphere. Therefore, the private realm needs to be sheltered from the invasive, functional instrumentalization of the system to maintain the capacity for social reproduction and its nature of community orientation. Privacy thus is the place of self-determination that is an individual right in liberal societies. It is a sphere that is interrelated with the public but distinct from it, and moreover a realm that needs to be kept free from instrumentalization or exploitation by the state and the economy (Kellner 2014). „The right to privacy" is seen as an essential civic right in liberal societies. Samuel W. Warren and Louis D. Brandeins (1984 [1890]) define privacy in their comparison to public affairs as „the right to be let alone", as a general right to the protection of the inviolate personality[3]. This circumstance highlights an aspect relevant to the conceptual work on both terms – anonymity as well as privacy. The private person is always a person who is known; he or she is acting in the public sphere as a member of civil society; only a person known by name to others can be an actor in the public and bring them forward against the state. Even if publicly exposed, each person has a right to privacy and intimacy (Habermas 1991[1962]; Kellner 2014). Anonymity hardly features in Habermas' reflections on the conditions of the public sphere. It is reserved for the description of the "anonymous forces" from outside the public sphere, the anonymous laws functioning in accord with the economic rationalities and laws of the market and the anonymous forces in the (modern) institutions outside of the family home (eg. Habermas 1991 [1962]: 46; 79; 156). This use of the term anonymity is much in line with the understanding which the early sociologists of modernity developed in the tradition of Georg Simmel as a quality of social life emerging from the money economy and modern rationality as sketched above.

From the critique of the idea of the public sphere and the corresponding private realm, as outlined by Habermas, we know that historically, what is subject to the private and what to the public realm cannot be taken for granted but is a matter of negotiation. It is a matter of political debate which issues should brought into the public realm and which issues should be kept private. Feminist thinking has highlighted the gender bias of the bourgeois ideal type of the public sphere (Benhabib 1992; d'Entrèves/ Benhabib 1996; Fraser 1990). Moreover, the conventions of what is private or public have changed over time. Often, feminist debate and transgression have brought the formerly private onto the public agenda (and back again); so called family issues, birth control, abortion, rape and violation of women in marriages are among those issues that have come to be perceived as subjects of the public and the political. In consequence, they have become matters of political action, of legislation, and thus affairs of the state authority to protect women's individual rights, and of jurisdiction if they are violated. In the private realm, autonomy is negotiated and established. Regarding the above-mentioned issues, the double-sided character of privacy becomes visible. On the one side, in the case of rape and violation in marriages, the problematization of private life in the public was an act by women in order to claim autonomy from their partners and spouses and thereby obtain protection from them. On the other side, the legally sanctioned matter of abortion was made a private matter

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[3] This argument is a US-related comprehension and is particularly evident in the judgment on abortion in 1973 where the court declined the "right of privacy," whether it be founded in the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution's concept of personal liberty and restrictions upon state action, is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. (Roe vs. Wade 1973, No.70-18, 410 U.S. 113) The right to an abortion is here recognized as a fundamental right which includes the guarantee of personal privacy.

and a question of conscience for the individual woman (in legal frameworks) and thus taken back to the private realm and away from the control by the state. The connection of autonomy and privacy is obvious here, as well as the ideal of an autonomous individual, leading a self-determined life that is grounded in liberalism. The role of privacy, as the examples demonstrate, is not static but oscillates in social practice. Keeping things private is not always a guarantee for autonomy. The juxtaposing principle, making issues public, may be more efficient. Moreover, the self-determination of one individual restricts the self-determination of another; autonomies are not random but mostly a zero sum game; one is extended at the expense of the other.[4]

We can draw a clear difference between both terms when we consider their different epistemological traditions in social theory on the one hand and in political theory on the other hand, the different realms the concepts refer to, as well as the opposition, the antonyms, of both terms: anonymous vs. identifiable, private vs. public. For analytical, scientific purposes this distinction is rather helpful, even though people may mix and entangle both concepts in everyday life and even though both concepts are relational and entangled in social practice. Moreover, there are cross roads of anonymity and privacy that may invite the intermingling of the concepts:

a) Both concepts play a role in 20th century sociological thinking, but privacy has been conceptually more elaborated in the context of research on the public sphere of democracies after the Second World War.

b) For both terms, anonymity and privacy, the critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School has made relevant contributions to their conceptual history, but never brought them into a systematic relation.

c) Alienation can be seen as a metaphor that is used to signify the problematic outcome of anonymity resp. the loss of privacy. Alienation is described in the relevant literature as the socio-psychological outcome that may emerge from too much anonymity and of the colonization of the private realms with their function of reproduction of the life world (social life) by the system (in the sense of Habermas: state and economy).

d) Alienation as a concept may be another starting point to further explore the conceptual histories of anonymity and privacy as relational but different ideas.

e) Another important concept in this respect may be the "masses", which refers to the scale of social interaction and exchange and matters for anonymity as well as for privacy. Moreover, it signifies the condition under which anonymity and privacy become problematic entities for the individual.

The different conceptual histories of anonymity and privacy are obvious and relevant sources for outlining them as concepts for social analyses. Since the subject of our studies[5] is anonymity, we

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[4] As stated for the scholarly work on anonymity, we also observe a lack of debates of the conceptual history of the term in current studies in research on privacy, which mostly take privacy as a defendable liberal ideal that guarantees a self-determined, autonomous life for each individual. Even though rare, some authors refer to the conceptual history as, for example, Ochs/ Lamla (2017).

[5] The research project „Reconfiguring anonymity: Reciprocity, identifiability and accountability in transformation" (funded project of the VolkswagenStiftung) will hopefully help to engage in these discussions. http://reconfiguring-anonymity.net (Access Date: 27.10.2017).

concentrate on the elaboration of this concept especially as a large community of researchers is already intensely engaged in the study of privacy (Nissenbaum 2010; Rössler 2005 [2001]; Helm 2017; Seubert/Helm 2017; Ochs 2017).

4   Specifying the concept: the nature of anonymity in social relations

The previous chapter on the conceptual history of anonymity ended with the statement that a clear sense or concept eludes us and that the antonym of anonymity is identifiability. This can be the starting point to revealing the various dimensions and layers of identity, which is then a matter of becoming public and thus a question of referring to the realm of privacy. In this chapter we want to reflect on the nature of anonymity as elaborated in its conceptual history. This means taking the idea of a binary character of anonymity either as given or absent, without shades in between, as a structuring element and figure of thought for sorting out relevant features of the concept of anonymity and how this relates to privacy as its relative or descendant that emerges once anonymity is lost.

Anonymity implies the risk of being uncovered or reachable, which has been given ever since anonymity became an element of social life. In any mass in modern societies the risk of identification remained. We do not need automated face recognition, digital tracking and machine-readable identity cards for dissolving anonymity – a former neighbor coincidentally joining the scene is already enough to lose anonymity in a mass. Once identified by a name, a number linked with another unique identifier (i.e. user ID, license plate number, social security number) or a unique pattern (i.e. daily routes, "likes" and user consumer behavior), all layers, facets and (hidden) dimensions of identity can potentially be uncovered. Anonymity is one or zero; it is there or it is gone, no shades in-between, no partial anonymity. When anonymity is gone and the various facets of a person may become visible to others, social observation in everyday life eventually changes to issues of privacy and publicness as epistemological starting points do in research. Once an individual is identified, the concept of anonymity is epistemologically not relevant anymore; the subject – and with it the subject matter – has changed its face which makes him now an issue of questions on privacy and publicness, with all related theoretical implications, conventions and negotiations of what is private and what is public. According to this understanding, there cannot be an incomplete anonymity or layers of anonymity as some authors suggest (eg. Wallace 1999: 25). Speaking of incompleteness and layers indicates that anonymity is already dissolved, that the person is identified and only aspects of his or her identity are unknown, which then is the key issue of privacy and publicness. According to this understanding, anonymity is not a particular case of privacy nor the other way round. The relation of both concepts is exclusionary. When anonymity is gone, privacy issues become a matter and anonymity is no longer helpful as a category of analysis. However, we will see later that privacy issues matter when it comes to practices of anonymization.

4.1 Anonymity as relational

According to the research literature, anonymity is intended as a relational concept and has a social embeddedness. American sociologist Gary Marx (1999) points this out in his overview of anonymity in which he provides a list with different forms of identification traits. An important component of Marx's definition is the distinction between unknownness and anonymity. The latter needs a certain audience, the public or at least one person for whom one is anonymous. Katherine Wallace's (1999; 2008) definition also refers to this point and furthermore relates to Helen Nissenbaum's understanding of

anonymity: a hermit, who has no contact to anyone, would not be anonymous, but isolated or unknown. In contrast to Marx, Wallace extends the relational concept of anonymity towards social embeddedness, "as non-coordinatability of traits. Anonymity is a kind of relation between an anonymous person and others, where the former is known only through a trait or traits which are not coordinatable with other traits such as to enable identification of the person as a whole. (…) Anonymity then is not merely social unknownness, but rather, is a form of inaccessibility to others to whom one is related or with whom one shares a social environment" (1999:23; 25; eg. Nissenbaum 1999). If someone knows personal information about a credit card holder without any reference to the person who owns the card, the person has not lost anonymity. Only when the information can be linked, for example through other associates or a hack of the databases of the service provider, this individual's anonymity is dissolved. The linkability of traits or the dissociation of a person's properties from the person themselves is the main factor for either dissolving or constructing anonymity. The social character of anonymity emerges from these two processes, both create a social relation. While the linking of traits makes the person identifiable and thus potentially searchable in the various dimensions of identity, the second process refers to the dissolution of the individual in an impersonal mass. These two processes of transformation from identification to anonymity and back again are binary (anonymity is gone), they highlight the relational nature of anonymity and make it accessible to social research. In these binary processes of dissolving and constructing anonymity, social relations are created, shaped, and exploited. Social research can observe here who the actors are, their strategies and practices, the moral motivations and ethical implications, and the policies of doing or undoing anonymity. Much about the significant can be learned also by studying what the significant identifier is and how it works, the name, a code, particular information such as an identity card or a social security number. What a significant identifier is varies from context to context, across action fields of doing and undoing anonymity, etc.; in one country the social security number may be the most common identifier, relevant in many areas of life, in another country an identity card may be obligatory and the most important means of identification.

Studying anonymity as a feature in today's social life means focussing on the processes of creating and undoing anonymity as a practice that creates social relations in particular ways. It means observing when, why and by whom anonymity is created or undone and how social relations are shaped at these turning points from anonymity to identifiability and back again. Rather than anonymity as a social condition, the social productivity of anonymity emerges in performative actions of doing and undoing anonymity.

4.2 Anonymity as being a type

From German sociologist Alfred Schütz (1967 [1932]) we learn that typification and stereotyping are social practices for coping with anonymity in large scale societies. By using stereotypes in everyday life, the individual finds orientation and reduction of complexity in situations with others whom they have never met before and who are not known to them in the sense of not being identifiable for them. Stereotyping others according to observable parameters such as age, gender, skin colour, language, clothes, etc. gives some meaningful classification of a person's background and helps with decisions of how to interact with her or him. Such typifications can be made on the basis of general knowledge (experience and expectations) about the world with its social and political circumstances; the more knowledge is available the better types are built, in the sense of their viability for the generalized

Other. Typification is thus relational to the knowledge of the person who is building them, as well as to the worldviews, standpoints, situations and concerns that are guiding the classifications which need to be made for building types. Such types are thus only partially individual decisions but refer to collective repertoires and worldviews of the social; they are in this respect stereotypical because they reproduce these worldviews without reflecting them. Typification in everyday life is thus understood as a continuous and differentiated process as the basis for situational interpretations and in consequence as a basis for the production of subjective and collective agency and ability to act. Stereotypes thus allow immediate decisions on how to communicate and engage with others in situations of anonymity. Even though criticized, it is this discriminating character which makes stereotypes helpful in everyday encounters in a mass society. On a larger scale, a scale of the collective, the mass provides for individual protection. Anonymity helps to create such a structure of collectivity, of being one in a mass, and is able to eliminate categories such as social status and symbols which create distinction in everyday life (e.g. in anonymous groups; see Frois 2009). The types thus formed are to be understood as purely mental constructs or schemata and are therefore designated by Schütz (1967) as "constructive types" or "ideal types". Max Weber (1922:190ff) also creates the ideal-real-type and emphasizes that the ideal type is a kind of yardstick or an ideal boundary concept on which the real actions are to be measured in order to be able to capture reality analytically. In this sense, being a type is thus a situation and a form of anonymity, of being a member of an anonymous mass and of not being a person with a particular identity in all its facets of individuality, but of being reduced to and characterized by only a few signifying features. These features are applied by someone else in order to classify an individual, they do not necessarily match the self-understanding of this person, and they may not relate at all to the individual's own perception, standpoints or worldviews. This can have euphemising or pejorative effects for the view on the anonymous other.

Typification goes beyond social life; it has also become an important method for scientific approaches to it. Social sciences and studies do not only study stereotypes at stake in social situations, they have also come to classify and build ideal types, so called social figures that represent typical orientations, identities and life styles in particular social contexts and historical situations. A prominent example is Zygmunt Bauman's description of postmodern morality that is represented by four ideal-types of postmodern life: the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player. These figures are not likely to exist in person – in fact, their features are intertwining and interpenetrating (Baumann 1996: 33). Another socially and politically effective example of typification are the Sinus Milieus (Sinus 2002). These are grounded in scientific methodology with a theoretical background in Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory and are empirically based typifications of life styles in current diversified societies. They sell as a registered trademark in particular services for the marketing of products and have also become relevant for academic research. In his book "Event society", German sociologist Gerhard Schulze also develops different experience pattern within five milieus that are characterized not so much by group or class patterns but are more about leisure activities and chosen lifestyle (Schulze 1992). Similar to the Sinus milieus, attempts are being made to link macro-sociological categories with the individual trend towards self-realization. The scientific building of types is an operation that reverses the everyday mode of typification. While the latter is a form of action in an anonymous situation, and a mode of coping with limited and diffuse knowledge about the other, the scientific approach builds its classifications on dense knowledge about people's orientations, practices and habits. While interaction with an unknown other may be the starting point for learning more about her or him, the scientific

approach is interested in finding structures that are helpful for understanding and regulating social life in large-scale societies. The variety and differentiation of identities is recognized but not of particular interest, since in both the modern as well as the post-modern state, efficiency in governing and marketing emerges from the capability to address the masses. Thinking in types and building types thus has become relevant in many realms of life, in particular those that are subject to the government and the market. Being a type and being monitored in all facets of private life for a perfect typification by these entities does not feel very comfortable – for good reason, as critical theory has highlighted (Habermas 1991 [1962]). However, these modes of creating anonymous masses may also become a means of democratisation when they facilitate the broad participation of people in formerly exclusive goods, welfare and power. The study by Kaspar Maase (1997) on the rise of popular culture and the mass consumption of music, film, and art tells a story of access for the masses to cultural articulations and of new opportunities for self-expression that were not possible before. Such stories could be told for health care, for retirement annuity and many other forms of governing and marketing that are built on anonymizing classifications and building of types (Maase 1997).

It is the presence and the relevance of these anonymizing classifications in many realms of social life which makes the collection of individual information so attractive for almost everybody, and the loss of anonymity so political since it is the starting point for a total loss of privacy. With the spread of digital information technologies and their inherent potentials for becoming identifiable, this turned out to be a problem in all areas of everyday life.

4.3 Anonymity as binary

The binary nature of anonymity, given or dissolved, predestinates its affinity to the digital realm and explains the precariousness of anonymity in times of digitized information technologies. Due to its binary nature, the loss of anonymity is a situation that does not remain without consequences in the digital realm. In the moment when anonymity is gone, privacy is lost as well or, as Dutch sociologist De Zeeuw (2017) puts it: anonymity is the only protection of private issues. Being identified means being traceable, and in the digital realm, being traceable means being traced for different purposes and thus losing privacy layer by layer. He thus suggests understanding anonymity as an instrument against the loss of privacy: "It seems to me that when anonymity is spoken of as instrumental or conducive to ensuring citizens' privacy, it is typically framed as an informatic condition or statistical measure of non-identifiability and non-traceability of digital communications or personal data. It is in this capacity that anonymity is thought to safeguard communication of a personal and private nature against intrusion by external parties operating 'off-stage' (e.g. the NSA or even your local Wi-Fi fraudster)" (Zeeuw 2017: 261).

It is indeed the current digital information condition that is inevitably entangled with identifiability. The functioning of digital information technology depends on it. For a correct delivery of information packages via the Internet and all other digital networks, from one computer to another, from one digital mailbox to another, from a sender to a receiver, both need to be unambiguously identifiable. Data packages delivered through digital networks need to be identifiable as well, traceable on their way from start to arrival. Being identifiable is thus part of the nature of digital communication which opens the field for all stakeholders particularly interested in information about people, such as commerce, banks, public authorities, secret services, and others. Once identified, particular infrastructures are built around the Internet for making people identifiable and for dissolving privacy

layer by layer by collecting and selling their data. Legal scholar Lawrence Lessig (2006: 45; 56-7; 197-9) and computer scientist Hannes Federrath (2001) have highlighted that anonymity in digital information networks is a design decision that has not been made so far and quite often is even restricted by national legislation (Kerr et al. 2009). Both legal scholars and information scientists have also reconstructed the multiple mechanisms of tracking in digital information infrastructures that have become an inevitable concomitant effect of individual digital communication through an alliance of providers of Internet platforms and services, information technology companies and business people – and a technology driven, rather unregulated emerging field of innovation (Lessig 2006: 33-34; 45ff, Federrath 2001). The technological pragmatics of digital information networks and their socio-cultural embedding in political and economic interests thus are in contradiction with anonymity which is challenged the moment the digital realm is entered by a person. The binary nature of both the social phenomenon of anonymity and of digital technology is the foundation of this mutual incompatibility. Moreover, positions taken by leading actors of IT innovation such as Ken Anderson and Paul Dourish (2006) document the standpoints of technology designers towards the social realm and the relevant privacy issues. They argue that data protection concepts are based on a concept of the rational individual actor while the plea is made for taking privacy and security as fundamental social and cultural phenomena: "Privacy is not simply a way that information is managed but how social relations are managed" (2006: 327). Thus, they transport the social practices of privacy into the realm of the non-, ir- or even anti-rational without considering their own IT oriented and "rational" labelled logic as a particular standpoint or as only one among others.

In the current situation, the intention of remaining anonymous thus can hardly be maintained. It demands particular efforts against traceability as we can learn from projects such as the browser Tor[6] with its particular options for accessing the so called "deep web", the Internet webpages not findable with common web browsers and hidden from the digital public if not known by other channels. Another example is "Pretty good privacy"[7], a software program which encrypts data.[8] However, anonymity should not be taken for granted here either since secret services, police authorities and probably further stakeholders aim to uncover (illegal) activities. Identification may thus also happen here, and privacy should always be considered as endangered.

The binary nature of anonymity, given or gone, explains its incompatibility with digital information technology, which is binary as well in its mode of operation and demands a hundred percent identifiability. The pragmatics of the technology contradict anonymity as an element of social life. Moreover, socio-technical infrastructures entangled with the Internet reinforce the technological pragmatics of identifiability and traceability. Technological logics and social logics of anonymity and also privacy contradict each other.

5   Anonymity in practice – doing and undoing anonymity

Anonymity is a feature of modern life; it was observed as something new emerging with mobility, life in big cities and the formation of a money economy in large-scale societies (Simmel 1991). Over time,

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[6] https://www.torproject.org/projects/torbrowser.html.en, Access date: 24.09.2017

[7] https://www.symantec.com/products/encryption; Access date: 30.09.2017

[8] To encrypt is to exercise power in order to control (hide) information exchanges between parties and is the process of converting electronic data into cipher text, a form that can be read only be authorized parties

anonymity thus has become part of all social contexts and had to be embedded in everyday life no matter if rural or urban. Anonymity has become a normality in one way or another. The current relevance of anonymity is widely dominated by issues that emerge from undoing anonymity, largely in the context of digital information technology but also in other contexts. Beyond technological changes it is an issue in social realms related to questions of identity, including family and inheritance, e.g. national identity, confidential or anonymous birth, egg and sperm donation, child adoption, and an avoidance of stigmatization, e.g. because of diseases such as AIDS and alcoholism, because of one's sexual orientation and many more. In this debate, anonymity is discussed as endangered and the loss is experienced as a problem; it is widely driven by the desire to maintain anonymity to a larger extent than what is to be expected from current trends. There is a positive bias towards anonymity, which in our observations might be motivated by a confusion with privacy at times, but at any rate drives the debate and often also scholarly research on anonymity. In the previous parts of this text we elaborated through the lens of a conceptual history of anonymity that the crucial moments for the social relevance of anonymity emerge from doing and undoing it. In consequence, our interest is not a clear statement about the social gains or losses, the positive and negative effects of anonymity in current societies, but rather a conceptual approach to anonymity within the framework of social and cultural theory.[9]

As a first perspective on anonymity we outlined the nature of anonymity through the lens of its conceptual history. In the next section, we provide a description of the state of being anonymous described as relational, as being a type and as binary. It describes the social relations which are emerging from this state. For a more comprehensive understanding, the understanding of the transitions between the two states of being anonymous or being identified is necessary. This transition, from anonymity to identifiability and back again, refers to the practices of how people gain or lose anonymity, or how they themselves actively switch between these states. The following chapter will inquire into the doing and undoing of anonymity. In line with practice theory we understand actors and practices as performers in a socio-technical world. Switching or being switched from anonymity to identifiability and back again is something that is constantly happening in particular ways and throughout people's entire lives.

5.1 Circulating: from anonymity to identifiability and back again

Making an anonymous person identifiable is a precondition to linking her or him to information about the person or relevant to the person and thus to private matters concerning that individual. By and by a more comprehensive picture emerges. The intention of tracking is to add more and more facets to the identified (person), sometimes with the intention of giving prognoses of future behavior but also for other purposes. Techniques of identification have become multifaceted because of the intention to collect information and thus draw a picture of a person in a manner that is as comprehensive and complex as possible. It is this comprehensiveness that then allows the application of various principles of anonymizing (the action of anonymization) to the collection of consistent information (data) which is available on a long-term basis and thus making the data productive from an economical and also a social perspective. There is an interest in different types of data: basic information on email and browser use, psychological data on preferences and feeling, and data on private life at home (Seubert 2012). Moreover medical data, biometrical data, and data on consumer behavior are collected.

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[9] Such a conceptual approach also seems to be relevant for empirical approaches to regimes of anonymity because they provide a theoretical framework for research and analysis.

Anonymity is relational to social realms and thus identifying people for tracking and uncovering their private lives is also relational. It is following interests of different stakeholders. The linkability of information to a person and the dissolution from the personal or individual aspects to more formal and abstract categories that go beyond the individual particularities are a mode of stereotyping and of anonymizing the individual as an element of a larger mass.

Anonymizing on the basis of information demands big data and is organized as a sequence of a) uncovering anonymity by identification, b) dissolving privacy by collecting data that can be connected to the identified, c) re-anonymizing the collected information by applying stereotypical principles, thus making a person anonymous again as a member of a mass (e.g. a high risk heart disease patient), and d) reconnecting this to the person and thus both making it a privacy issue again and creating knowledge about the person that the person does not have him- or herself. Social productivity thus emerges in an interplay of first dissolving anonymity and then privacy, followed by an anonymization for generating new perspectives on a person under a particular paradigm of analysis by applying statistical methods (calculating). In this way, particular knowledge is generated and then reconnected to the person. This means that the focus is not on having less personal information out in the public sphere but rather on the possibility that the personal information which is out in the public sphere cannot be linked to particular individuals.

From this perspective, the current social productivity in the digital realm emerges from anonymization at large, working with big data, not from anonymity itself. It also depends on the interplay of dissolving anonymity and privacy. The "fractured picture" (Ponesse 2014: 316) of an identity is necessary in our daily life. We show friends, families, superiors and colleagues different layers of our identity or "faces" and disregard others, but the society and the concepts of "card systems" or technologies rely on the fact that the identity underlying them is consistent and complete. This creates an imperative of continuity of our identity and our personality. Differences between the digital information "avatar" as a representation in the digital realm of a person and the un-mediated everyday life individual arise. Therefore, anonymization on the basis of big data is a different and new perspective on actual lives that can be taken by those who collect data.

Digital information technology eases the doing and undoing processes of anonymity tremendously. In spite of the binary nature of anonymity, the problem of privacy matters because traceability, quality and amount of collected information are relevant starting points for making people elements in abstract masses. They come in when anonymity is created by applying typifications and making people elements of a mass, reduced to particular features of their identity, stereotyped through a particular (often economic or governmental) lens, and signifying the relevant characteristics from their point of view. Stakeholders who are mostly interested in such processes of anonymization based on private information are insurances, marketing companies, businesses, and also administrations. Regimes of anonymity respectively the empirical analyses of such regimes will ask questions in respect to identifiability and non-identifiability, for example: What makes people identifiable? What strategies of identification are applied? To whom do people have to prove who they are, and who authorizes the identity? How do the particular forms of identification refer to personal identity? What norms and regulations are implemented for and against identification, and why do people avoid being identified? What are the effects of anonymizing practices? Which anonymous spaces are valued and which are challenged? Moreover, the study of regimes of anonymity considers the practices of anonymization as

a typification and as a creation out of particular groups, stereotyped elements in a mass of ideal-types, independent from the wholeness of their identity and life worlds. Points of interest are the stakeholders who are capable of applying such anonymizations according to their definition of relevant features and elements which are also of interest as the relevant items for sorting out and ordering the social world. The motivations of the stakeholders and the consequences for the people who are singled out from the mass of ideal-types also matter empirically for research and practically for people.

5.2 Becoming anonymous: moving, deceiving, concealing, hiding, ….

Even in large-scale societies, anonymity is a state that is not simply given but has to be actively achieved through particular actions. People are always known somewhere: where they have grown up, where they went to school, where their relatives and relevant others live. Action is necessary to become anonymous. Sometimes anonymity is an unintended side-effect, emerging from actions motivated by other purposes, such as from migration to a foreign country or a big city for finding work or a new home due to poverty, catastrophes etc. There, people might find themselves as strangers in mass societies, unknown to their neighbors and consociates. Moving into a skyscraper with a large number of standardized apartment flats might have this effect as well. It is a relational anonymity which people experience when they are part of a mass, although they are still identifiable through their identity cards or passports as persons coming from another place or country. However, when even the official documents do not refer to their identity but are faked with the intention to hide, an additional relation in doing anonymity matters. Becoming anonymous may be an active strategy. Writing under a pseudonym[10] is well known in history; working under an artist name is also widely spread; user names and avatars are common practices of achieving anonymity on the Internet.[11] Becoming anonymous thus has many faces which should be distinguished in respect to the motivation a) either as actively achieved or b) as achieved unintendedly as a side-effect of other common actions in current societies and of particular social conditions. Even as a side-effect, the consequences of anonymity are not necessarily problematic but may have deliberative moments for the individual, as Simmel pointed out already. A more detailed empirical analysis is necessary – again – for understanding the circumstances of alienation or empowerment emerging from social conditions as anonymity is one.

Motivations to achieve this social condition of anonymity vary widely and again may be distinguished into two different modes, i.e. with 'good' or 'bad' intentions. In this sense, the current research literature on anonymity distinguishes deception and concealment: the notion of deception as one form of anonymizing, through for example the practice of trolling, seems to have a negative connotation and presumption, and the ways of hiddenness which are involved in anonymity relations might be

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[10] The use of a pseudonym is one part of anonymization. The pseudonym allows tracking data back to its origins, or as Pfitzmann and Hansen put it in their position paper: "a pseudonym is an identifier of a subject other than one of the subject's real names" (Pfitzmann/ Hansen 2010: 21). For further differentiated term work, see (Pfitzmann/Hansen 2010; Pfitzmann/Köhntopp 2001). It is an important mode in the health sector with patient-related data and the electronic commerce sector. It allows the preservation of privacy and confidentiality but is closely linked to legal issues such as law enforcement (Froomkin 1999)

[11] However, not every avatar, not every pseudonym which is taken, has an intention of doing anonymity. The purposes for choosing particular forms of representation may also be motivated by other reasons, such as particular interest in communication, as an analysis of the avatar as a communication figure on the Internet indicates (Koch/ Ritzi 2010).

better grounded in the word "concealment" (see Ponesse 2014: 314f.). The example of a whistle blower who uncovers illegal or immoral actions demonstrates that things are often ambiguous rather than clearly 'good' or 'bad'. Such a distinction into 'good' or 'bad' motivations for doing anonymity is dependent on moral arguments and thus on a qualification through an ethical and guideline-setting framework such as law, human rights, or theories (political, social, …). Even if not made explicit, it is always a moral order which informs the analyses of positive and negative dimensions of anonymity and which provides the guidelines for judging the quality of anonymity. The current positions and debates on the social productivity of anonymity are not reflected in respect to the moral orders but would need a qualification of the underlying ethics, even when moral claims are made for example in calls for a greater attention "to and protection of anonymity as a necessary component of protecting valued human rights such as liberty, dignity, an privacy" (Kerr et al. 2009: 440). The justifications and their embeddedness in moral orders that are at stake in the diverse argumentations are crucial for understanding anonymity as a social condition and as a social practice, and thus constitute an important approach for a self-reflexive social and cultural analysis. Here, Zygmunt Bauman again may be an important reference with his analyses of postmodern life strategies (not, as one might expect, the system and the structures) that forge moral attitudes. All four intertwining and interpenetrating life strategies that Bauman has identified "favour and promote a distance between the individual and the Other and cast the Other primarily as the object of aesthetic, not moral, evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility. In the effect, they cast individual autonomy in opposition to moral (as well as all the other) responsibilities and remove huge areas of human interaction, even the most intimate among them, from moral judgement" (Bauman 1996: 33). According to Bauman's diagnosis, as part of the moral disablement of the individual, a political disablement of postmodern men and women also arises from these life strategies.

This diagnosis again highlights problems and questions which emerge in the relationship between privacy and anonymity. When it comes to practices of achieving anonymity, they are often intended to maintain privacy by avoiding traceability (Zeeuw 2017). Not wanting to be traced and thus uncovering private issues is grounded in various reasons that go beyond research on anonymity, but rather belong to the realm of privacy and thus the problem of what should be a public matter and what is within the scope of private life and identity work. The public realm demands the participation of citizens, of people who are known and who are taking moral responsibility for the common good. Only few authors emphasize the relevance of anonymity and at the same also highlight the negative consequences emerging from it when it comes to public communication and public matters (Brodnig 2013). Moreover, we should consider that in some cases, neither anonymity nor privacy are actually at stake but rather social problems of discrimination, stigmatization, responsibility and accountability.

6 Conclusion: reflecting the potentials of the concept of anonymity for social and cultural analysis

The conceptual history of the terms anonymity and privacy provides important insights for a definition and a distinction of both terms. They emerged in different realms of social theory and are, in different ways, subject of further reflection. While privacy is a rather intensely debated concept in the context of the political publics of democracies in mass societies, the idea of anonymity is not yet conceptually elaborated but has gained attention only more recently.

This new relevance of anonymity and the scholarly discourse on it emerges with digital information technology and its potential for undoing anonymity. Furthermore, the relevance of anonymity is grounded in its Janus-faced nature, which emerges not from the intentions but rather from the practices themselves. It constitutes both a shelter from the loss of privacy to the data hungry kraken of the state and the market as well as a refuge in which it is possible to build depersonalized types – and thereby aggregate masses of collected data. Both prevailing practices of 'doing anonymity' may have to be performed with 'good' and 'bad' intentions, and the evaluation of these practices depends on moral orders and ethical judgements. Before the background of the conceptual history of anonymity, its conceptual relevance as an analytical approach in social and cultural studies can be specified more precisely now in distinction to privacy. While anonymity opposes identifiability, is either given or gone, privacy opposes public, and it is a matter of convention or negotiation which subjects are suitable for one or the other. This contribution thus suggests that the analytical potential of anonymity as a concept emerges from this clear distinction from privacy. Neither is a sub-category of the other, even though they are related. When anonymity is gone, privacy issues become a matter and anonymity is no longer helpful as a category of analysis.

The nature of anonymity is characterised by at least three components: its relational character, its potential for reducing individuals with a multifaceted identity to a type, and its binary character of either given or gone. The relational character of anonymity defines to whom and under which conditions anonymity is given. It considers the fact that anonymity is never total but that it emerges from social contexts in large scale societies. The second component emerges from the practices of typification along with the doing and undoing of anonymity. In the understanding of social theory, building types and using stereotypes in the interaction with the unknown other is a mode of orientation in mass societies. Being a member of the masses is thus the most common condition of anonymity. Making oneself or other people a member of a mass is a widespread practice not only applied in the sciences that typify and build ideal types but even more where governing and marketing intentions are at stake. The observations on the nature of anonymity indicate that there are further relations of anonymity and privacy at stake because these anonymizing practices gain viability through the density of information about a person that later on is reduced to key items. As a third relevant feature of anonymity, its binary nature helps to understand its affinity to digital technology and the relevance the terms have gained more recently. Potential fields of engagement for anonymity studies in current societies are a) in particular principles and realms of mass formation, especially in realms relevant to governing and marketing, and thereby approaching these practices critically in respect to the social implications, and b) the social realms where a loss of anonymity is perceived as a threat and identifiability demarcates a significant change for the social practices as well as contested moral orders in these realms.

From an epistemological point of view, the social productivity and destructivity of anonymity is best to be studied where it is negotiated, and explicit or implicit justifications and moral claims are made. It can be studied only with regard to the social realms in which anonymity is situated and performed in consideration of the interdependency of this realm with others. There can be no general moral claim for anonymity as a social achievement that goes beyond its relational character and its embeddedness in life in (modern or post-modern) large-scale societies with negotiated moral orders and their justifications. The variety of what people do with anonymity is widespread and its groundedness in life strategies may cause as many problems for democratic participation in society as it offers solutions.

For now, it has to be stated that the concept of anonymity as a feature and a practice of modern and postmodern life remains vague in its outline. While this contribution makes an attempt at further theorizing anonymity by studying its conceptual history in social theory, there is still much conceptual work to be done. In order to conceptualize anonymity as a feature and a practice emerging with mass societies, research needs to dig deeper into the contributions of early sociology and their reflections on alienation, life in mass societies and the interrelation of anonymity and privacy in respect to the political public in democratic societies. It might turn out in these inquiries that the struggle for and research on privacy is indeed the more crucial realm in social research of current societies. At present, privacy constitutes the term which is more often debated and is indeed embedded in the larger problem of what kind of a political public we need in times of culturally and socially more and more fragmented societies. However, social and cultural analysis should not mix up the epistemological range of both concepts if the analytical sharpness of each concept is to be maintained.

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